

Migrating out of Poverty

RESEARCH PROGRAMME CONSORTIUM

VOICES OF MIGRANTS AND THOSE CLOSEST TO THEM

Ten everyday stories of extraordinary people living with the effects of migration



Introduction

As the movement of people – and its benefits and challenges - is ever more in the public eye, migration is a topic which is increasingly at the forefront of the minds of policy makers and those implementing social policy. In all countries around the world we are confronted with newspaper splashes, advocacy campaigns, and political manoeuvring related to migration. Moving for work, and to fulfil aspirations of a better life, is an age-old strategy about which we are gathering ever more robust evidence. But what is often missing from this mass communication are the voices of migrants themselves and those closest to them.

Through our work in the Migrating out of Poverty Research Programme Consortium we have had the honour of interviewing and surveying thousands of people affected by migration. Our researchers across Africa and Asia have borne witness to stories of struggle, compassion, contingency, love, catastrophe, resilience, drudgery, and success. These elements are all part of the ongoing experience of people on the move.

To highlight some of the narratives that we have heard we have put together this compilation of migration case studies from Bangladesh, Ghana, and Indonesia. They include the stories of people whose migration has brought them resources and power, and whose migration has involved continued stress and hustling to improve their material and social realities. They also include stories of the family members who juggle the complex emotional and financial situations linked with migration.

These stories are anonymised to respect confidentiality of, and the ethical assurances that we make to, the people we do research with. Where appropriate we have re-ordered and edited the narrative given to our researchers to make it easier for outsiders to follow. The case studies are presented with explanatory text which sets the scene for the story and teases out some of the main points that are made.

We cannot hope to do justice to the complexity and depth of the migrant experience through these short excerpts. However, what these stories do is highlight the histories of a snapshot of the people we have worked with in their own words. We hope that these case studies provide insight into the everyday stories of the extraordinary people who live with the effects of endeavours to migrate out of poverty and who should not be reduced to numbers on a spreadsheet or crude stereotypes. From the weaving together of individual

voices there are some harmonies through which we can trace patterns. We hope the stories of the people featured in this booklet can inform policy and practice in a variety of settings.

- Money and migration. In many of the stories we hear about the economic drivers of migration, complete with detailed calculations of the costs and benefits of migratory experiences within different households. But money is only one of many reasons why people leave home. We also hear from those who have moved to be with the one they love, to better themselves through education and experiential learning, and to pass on benefits to the following generation and their children's children.
- Financial management. These stories bring to the fore the complex calculations that households make to manage migration. In many cases the organisation of multiple migrating household members over time is akin to the management of investment portfolios where decision makers are following the ups and downs of international labour markets. Immediate wages are not the only factor taken into consideration, families are also monitoring the working conditions and possibilities for promotion within different occupations in different countries.
- Precarity and vulnerability. The stories highlight how lack of formal recognition or enforcement of legislation within the labour market render migrants exposed to exploitative bosses, non-payment, and workplace abuse. Even where domestic law safeguards worker's rights, for example to a day off a week, some migrants feel unable to raise their voices about their entitlements. For some migrants, this unregulated market enables them to move between employers to find jobs that are better paying or otherwise more suitable.
- The importance of trust. In the absence of the formal protection of the state trust becomes an important commodity in migrant's lives, particularly where labour arrangements are agreed verbally. Mutual faith and mutual respect gain prominence in work agreements. We hear of the importance of trust in the relationship between migrants and those who formally, or informally, broker their travel. Trust within households and families is also a theme – particularly when it comes to the good management of remittances sent home to build a foundation for the future.



Picture credit: Asian Development Bank

- The importance of family. In every story the family features prominently, often as the reason to migrate - regardless of whether the migrant works for his or her parents or children - and sometimes to end conflict. Migration is often linked to increasing individualism and it is true that migrants establish and consolidate their social status through working and earning abroad. But the stories reveal that it is not only the migrant's status that changes but also that of the closest family members who manage remittances or benefit from education and resources to set up micro businesses.
 - Power and politics. In some of the stories we gain an insight into migrants' analysis of the systemic and structural power relations that they are operating within. They offer insights into the financial and political drivers of migration and how these act upon the individual to maintain vulnerability. However, we also learn how some migrants are challenging these imbalances to create a more supportive and protective system for those who follow after and how these systems can be navigated.
 - Gender and migration. Migration decision making is gendered beyond the sex of the person who travels. The stories teach us about the complex and dynamic decision making within households.
- In some cases, older family members and male heads of households make decisions on behalf of migrants with little discussion. Sometimes these are decisions shared between spouses. Often migrants' improved financial position enables them to exert power and control over other family members in new ways. But sometimes this power is vested in the female family members who are left behind as they take on new roles as managers of remittances. Women on the move are taking on new roles abroad, shaping understandings of gender appropriate work. However, this empowerment is not always 'passed on' intergenerationally or maintained over time.
- New communication technologies. Voice recorded messages and cell phones are facilitating conversations and negotiations between migrants and their families in new ways. Simultaneously, particularly in Ghana, the ability to remit earnings home through mobile money transfer is changing the way that finances are shared and managed.



Women in the market place
Picture credit: David Stanley

Issaka, district coordinator at an international non-governmental organisation in Accra, Ghana

Issaka was 34 years old when he moved to Accra in search of new professional challenges two years prior to this interview. His wife and three children remained in the Northern Region. His journey was motivated by occupational aspirations and he had already secured a new challenging job before moving.

“I didn’t just migrate because of poverty, though I was comparing what I was earning and what I would be earning here. But it wasn’t because of money; I wanted to go to school and I wanted avenues to leave my former profession of being a teacher. I took professional advice from my director and colleagues but I didn’t consult any family member. I told my wife after I took the final decision. She isn’t well-educated, and doesn’t have the exposure in terms of travelling to experience how life is at different places, so the advice she would have given wouldn’t contribute much to my decision. Nevertheless, I finally

consulted her and she supported the idea because she thought that, changing job and environment would contribute to our economic status.

Nobody actually discouraged me. My family is large and me excelling means that they will be able to call on me in times of difficulty. Someone will call and say that he or she wants this amount of money to do this or to pay school fees and buy pamphlets and handouts. What can you do? It happens. Sometimes I’ll sit down and look at what’s happening back at home; my uncles are really impoverished and in need of support. For instance, one of my uncles was deported from Saudi Arabia and when he came back, he had nothing, so once in a while I send something to him to help. I also support other brothers and relatives. So, my coming to Accra is contributing positively to the family upkeep back at home.

I don’t send things home apart from money which is usually through mobile money. To buy things and send them home, I don’t do that unless I am going, then I buy clothing for my kids. I visit maybe thrice in a year to see how my family is doing when schools are on break.

My people are rural people so we only communicate through mobile phones. I call my wife frequently just to find out how they are doing and to know of any challenges that they may be facing that needs an urgent response. My father is late so I communicate frequently with my mother but I communicate more with my wife than my mother. Sometimes my mother checks on me. I don't speak often with anybody else. I'm not a fan of making calls but I do receive calls from friends and relatives.

I send about 700 Cedi [US\$153] a month but sometimes it's more. It depends on the issues that are at stake and the people that I consider in need of money in that month. For my family, the money could be for food, school fees, health care and other things that they need. On many occasions, I've sent money to my wife and told her to use this amount for food stuff, this amount for electricity bills, and this amount for the children's school fees but sometimes she has misappropriated the money and it has degenerated into misunderstandings and conflict. I've learned from my previous mistakes, so now I send her money for a particular thing and when she's done that, I'll send another amount for another thing she's supposed to do. When I send money to my uncle, I cannot determine what the money should be used for but I would think that the money is used for food for his family. And other brothers and sister who request money from me, usually request help to make them stay comfortably in school.

My wife isn't aware of when I send money to others, just like they aren't aware when I send to her. It wouldn't make sense. I mean, consulting my wife before giving money to my mother, from our perspective it doesn't make sense. In our culture, the man is the head of the family, so you make decisions and only consult your wife. There are some family issues, if you are fond of consulting your wife, they bring family conflict and misunderstanding. For instance, I may see an issue to be very urgent within the family but my wife may not see it that way.

So sometimes you have to use your own discretion and take certain decisions and remit certain resources to some people that brought you up in the family. Although, it's good that you consult your wife about certain decisions because she'll make fewer demands when she's in the know. But in most cases, it doesn't work. She may not be happy that you are giving to your mother or uncle because she may want her demands to be met first. But this isn't right. I only make sure that I remit to all of them, that I'm not disadvantaging my wife because of my extended family and that I don't disadvantage them

because I want to over-pamper my wife. I will make sure that the basic necessities of life are provided and my family is comfortable and I will be able to reach out to my other family members to also make ends meet.

If a family member asks for my help to come to Accra I will, first of all, look at his or her educational level, the jobs that he or she could possibly get here, and the possible options back home. If the options back home outweigh the options here, I discourage coming to Accra. But if I realised that all was lost at home and there was a possibility of doing something in Accra, then I would encourage my relative and I would even consider providing temporary accommodation so he or she could come and see how opportunities might avail themselves."

Issaka's story shows that migration from rural areas is not driven solely by poverty and need but also by aspirations for occupational and social upward mobility. For migrants, like Issaka, the desire for different ways of living and for pursuing intellectual or other inclinations is just as an important incentive to embark on a migratory journey. But even if the decision to move elsewhere appears wholly individualistic, it is clear that the well-being of the family has a prominent role in migrants' morality.

In the context of Northern Ghana, the family is often extended but separated into several layers of sub-units with their own distinct budgets and resources. Issaka's deliberations on how he redistributed his earnings within the family reflect these separate spheres, the potential conflicts and the withholding of information to avoid jealousies, opposition, and arguments. Through this process Issaka asserted his social position in the family, preserving his prerogative to control resources vis-à-vis his wife and consolidating his place in the male hierarchy vis-à-vis his uncles.

The consolidation of social position extends beyond the immediate family, especially in the responses to requests for help to seek opportunities in Accra. Although Issaka only moved once he had secured another job, he knew well that many internal migrants moved first and found work afterwards. The difference lies in the migrant's skill level and, sometimes, in the destination.

Next, Hamidu describes the process of facilitating jobs for Ghanaians seeking work in the United Arab Emirates.



Taxi ride through Dubai
Picture credit: Steven Straiton

Hamidu, Chief Executive Officer of a recruitment agency in Accra, Ghana

Hamidu migrated as a young man to seek education and opportunities and had lived many years in Dubai. He helped many a family member finding work in Dubai before creating a recruitment agency. At the time of the interview he had recently returned to Ghana and was involved in a government initiative to regularise agencies recruiting for global labour markets.

“I left almost 36 years ago, because I felt Ghana was too difficult and I needed to go elsewhere to realise my dream. I didn’t want to pass through the desert area to go to Libya as it was very risky. I planned to take Libyan Air to Libya from Nigeria but didn’t have enough money so I was forced to stay in Nigeria. I struggled to get my O-Level and then I worked as a teacher for nine years before I got money to continue my trip. At that point I went to Dubai where I got my Diploma, First Degree and then Masters. I was able to work in very reputable organisations for almost twenty years. The rich experience I got through my work and the contacts at top level have enabled me to help my own brothers and sisters, sons and daughters to come in a very civil and peaceful manner to achieve their dreams.

I established my recruitment agency back in 2011 to help Ghanaian youth achieve what they want by following

the right channel to getting employment in the United Arab Emirates (UAE), or the Gulf in general. We recruit security guards because I think that area is under a good regulatory body that can take care of my people over there. Security guard work is run by the Ministry of Interior, and the police headquarters in Abu Dhabi runs and regulates private security companies. As I feel I put my people in safe hands, this is where I operate most. We recruit Ghanaians who have at least secondary education so that they can write and speak English proficiently. They must also have worked at least two years in the army, police, or private security service. They are usually in the age bracket from 22 to 40 years and 5-10% are females, as the UAE needs females to work as security guards in hospitals, universities, gardens and parks due to gender segregation. Our female compatriots are doing very well in this sector.

The other area that I operate in is the transport sector. We take on heavy duty truck drivers and also light duty drivers like taxi drivers. For taxi drivers, they want people who can express themselves very well in English because the country is a big tourist destination where drivers are bound to be dealing with the tourists. So even though it’s an Arab country, English is a very popular language. The truck drivers, trailer drivers or heavy duty drivers are also required to speak and write English fairly well because they use sophisticated trucks. Mostly they work

in seaports and the instructions are on screens. In the case of the drivers they do not want somebody who is too old but they can employ someone who is up to 50 or 52 years. My major clients prefer the age bracket 22 to 40 years.

When it comes to areas like construction, I deal in the categories that are the top ranks of that sector such as civil engineers, surveyors. So far, I've just supplied a few. We also supply other areas with artisans like welders etc. The number is growing. Just yesterday I got a contract from Dubai. They want 100 welders. The conditions are good, about \$500 basic salary, three square meals a day and other benefits. I work with government construction companies and private companies employing more than 2000 workers, because they take good care of their workers. They make sure they have international standards to protect their reputation. I try to avoid small companies run by individuals because that's where we have abuses and you get people complaining of underpayment, of not being paid for two to three months or of being forced to work under the scorching sun. The workers at the bottom of that sector are uneducated and don't know how to fight for their rights. Some contractors are unscrupulous and trample upon their rights. But when the person goes to report to the appropriate body or channel, the law takes its course and their rights are protected.

I avoid the domestic services sector because that sector has no regulatory body in the whole of the Gulf region and we have a lot of problems there. When you take somebody's daughter or son to the house where they will be working, you don't know whatever abuse that person may face. It will be invisible to outsiders and you are unlikely to have the evidence to prove that the person is suffering abuses. So, I make sure I never ever deal in such an area to avoid any problem or stigmatising my company. We've never recruited a domestic worker up till now.

We should be recruiting for the local markets in Ghana too but I am yet to start active work in the local market because I just relocated last December. About a month ago, the parliament select committee on social welfare invited the labour department and the private recruitment agencies to appear before it. The honourable minister was shocked to know that we didn't have any umbrella group or union. So, there and then, we decided to come together and we planted a seed of an umbrella group, which will be known as GHAPEA - Ghana Association of Private Employment Agencies. It is part of the government's effort to streamline the sector's activities. Only licensed agencies can become members and for now only the foreign recruitment agencies have come together because they were the focus

of the government. In recent times, there has been a worry that a lot of Ghanaians are being misled into other countries abroad where they go and suffer for nothing. So, in order to arrest the situation I think very soon, we would start cleaning that area from some of these miscreants who are tarnishing the image of the business.

Hamidu framed the recruitment business as a deeply moral enterprise, an extension of the kin-based and social networks known to help newly arrived migrants insert themselves in the local economy at the destination. In highlighting the difference between risky, irregular migration and the kind of migration he offered, he reiterated the well-known discourse that separates legal and irregular migration pathways. Choosing a legal pathway, he suggested, would enable Ghanaian youth to achieve what they had set out to achieve, implicitly arguing that they rarely did if using irregular pathways.

He was concerned about limiting the risk of abuse for the workers he placed with an employer and therefore worked in sectors which he perceived as well-regulated and with large companies with formal employment practices. His description of the recruitment business was rich in detail concerning which types of workers' employers in the UAE preferred, and silent about the fees migrant workers paid for the facilitation of legal pathways.

He was also quiet about possible costs of remaining well-connected with employers recruiting workers and with the authorities in the UAE.

Sadiya tells us more about the recruitment fees that migrant workers pay in the next section, in her case from Bangladesh to Southeast Asia and the Middle East.

Wedding
Picture credit: Ridwanul Kabir



PHOTO BY MIKE LUSMORE DUCKRABBIT

Sadiya, paddy trader and former migrant in Tangail District, Bangladesh

Sadiya is the second wife in a polygynous marriage and, at 41 years, de facto head of the household after her 65 year old husband had a stroke. She had one child, a daughter, and then travelled overseas to work with her husband's acceptance, ending up spending most of her life abroad.

“Women like me usually don't go abroad because they think that people will do bad things to them, but it's just a false assumption. I get more respect from people now. Before I was just an ordinary woman who didn't know how to talk. Now I can do everything! I share my experiences with other women in training sessions in an NGO in Kalihati and I teach them what to do and what not to do.

I went abroad for the first time in 1991 when my daughter was four years. At that time Khaleda Zia (the then Prime Minister) permitted women to go abroad. Before going, my husband told me that this was our internal family matter, he gave me permission to go. My neighbour was a dalal (middleman), so I contacted him. He said that I could go abroad but I would need training for two days in Dhaka but I didn't have to pay for it. They arranged everything. In total I spent 28,000 Taka [US\$347] to get the visa. It was cheap then. I had some money and I took some money from Grameen bank. Normally they don't give to go abroad but they gave me a loan by observing my behaviour. I went to Malaysia to work in the garment industry. I stayed with around 350 girls from Bangladesh, at the time I was paid around 8000 Bangladeshi Taka [US\$99] per month. I was there

around four and half years without returning for a visit. I returned home because my mother was ill.

I stayed for about a year then I went abroad again in 1997, this time to Saudi Arabia. I went there to perform Hajj and spent 20,000 Taka [US\$248]. This was money I'd saved from my work in Malaysia. I stayed for seven and half years and my husband allowed me to stay abroad this long period because we had a child and had to think about our future. In Saudi I worked as a cleaner and earned 350 Saudi Real per month, equivalent to 5000 Taka [US\$62].

In 2011 I left for Malaysia again, this time with my husband. It cost us 105,000 Taka [US\$1300]. We both worked as cleaners and earned around 8,000 Taka [US\$99] a month. We stayed for three years and only returned last year.

I've spent half my life abroad so that our children can lead their future life happily. I was in contact with my family through voice recorded letter. In this way, I talked with my children too. My husband's first wife looked after the family. My husband was a driver by profession. He used his income to run the family and I sent my earnings to my father. Once the loan was repaid my father and brothers bought some land. Before we just had 1-2 decimals, now we have 24. Some properties are in my name, some are in my husband's other wife's name. After coming back, I built our house.

My daughter married in 2003 when she was 15 years old. I was willing to pay for her study but people didn't support it. Seeing her beauty, they started to force me to marry her off. Also, my daughter didn't want to continue her study. Otherwise I would have forced her to study more. My sister has completed her higher secondary school.

When my daughter married, I bore all the costs. I had just returned from Saudi. The dowry was three voris of gold and 22,000 Taka [US\$273] cash and I also paid the cost of the food at the wedding function. I didn't want my daughter to marry a man who was likely to go abroad a few months after the wedding. She married a mason. Three years ago, I helped him to go to Saudi to work in construction. I spent 40,000 Taka [US\$496] and he arranged the rest.

I also sponsored the sons of the elder wife. I sent them to Dubai two and a half years ago, paying 70,000 Taka [US\$867] towards the costs and borrowing the rest of the money. Later I repaid the loans and my sons have repaid

me. They earn 12,000 Taka [US\$149] per month. I want to go to work in Saudi Arabia again. I will go alone. But I haven't yet started contacting people, I only will when my daughter's husband returns.

Sadiya's story is interesting because she was one of the few women who migrated from her community to benefit from overseas employment, apparently without contesting her husband's sense of authority and responsibility as the provider for the household. The migratory experience had given her authority as a seasoned pioneer but also as the contributor of assets to the family. Even if they had not moved out of poverty but still had to tightly manage their expenses and debts through overseas migration, Sadyia had improved the family's long-term security by purchasing land and facilitating the next generation's migration. In spite of her pioneering role as a female migrant, she reverted to framing migration as a male phenomenon and only sent the male youths abroad.

Another interesting aspect of Sadiya's story is her account of the fees paid to broker migration to the different destinations and the salaries earned. Over the twenty years her story spans, the costs had almost doubled. The total cost of her first migration in 1991 was equivalent of 3.5 month's pay, whereas for her co-wife's sons in 2012 it was equivalent of 5.8 month's pay. This was at a time when airfares generally became cheaper worldwide.

While Sadiya did not say much about the working conditions and hierarchies between employers and workers abroad, another pioneer in migration, Nayef, illustrated how the established hierarchies in the Bangladeshi labour market retain poor migrants in a subordinate position.



Rice paddy in Bangladesh
Picture credit: Mike Lusmore Duckrabbit

Nayef, brick mason from Chapainawabganj District, Bangladesh

Nayef was one of the first construction workers from his district to migrate to Dhaka in 1989. Being the eldest child in a large landless family he had started learning the trade in his early teens and had then ventured into paddy trade and contract farming before migrating as a newly-wed man. He and his wife later had two daughters.

“I went to Dhaka for personal reasons. I married a wife of my own choice and my family was not accepting my wife. I thought if I can establish myself in Dhaka, I will take my wife there. I had a distant uncle who was close to my age working in Dhaka as a mason but he refused to help me find a job. He said that since we were farmers, it wouldn’t be respectable for us to do a construction job. He also said that I’d quarrelled and left home so if he got me work my father would be mad at him and that I should go back. But I had no option to go back. There was another man from our district, of Chapai, who was sharing accommodation with my uncle, so I asked him to get me a construction job and he agreed.

He introduced me and a friend I’d travelled with to a contractor who employed us. Although I was introduced, I discussed about work with the contractor myself. He first employed me as helper and I was given a daily wage 35 Taka [US\$43]. He saw that I had good knowledge of masonry and I could do everything. Pleased with

my performance, he promoted me from helper to full mason after three months, then I started receiving 65 Taka [US\$81] as a daily wage. I received what was the market rate then, neither more nor less. I worked with him for three years straight. I had enough basic knowledge of masonry from my earlier experience of construction sector. I further developed my skills as I resumed construction work in Dhaka. I have accumulated knowledge of all kinds of mason work including design. Now, I get a daily wage of 450 Taka [US\$6] as a master mason. If it is design work then I get even more, 500 Taka [US\$6] per day.

In construction work, we usually get the daily allowance up front while the accumulated daily wage is given at the end of the month or contract period. It often happened that I was promised a bigger amount, say 500 Taka as daily wage. But when the wage was due, this or that excuse was made to pay less, say 450 Taka. The contractor would say that the quality of work wasn’t up to the mark. Or, they would pay the wage partially and keep the rest due, telling you to collect the rest in a week. When you returned a week later, you’d be asked to come two weeks later. After being harassed like that a number of times, you gave up. Instead of running after that money without any success, I could earn if I started a new work somewhere else. If you were lucky, you’d find good employers who forced the contractors to pay your dues.

At one point, I became a foreman. Then I was employing many men from this and surrounding villages. Not only in this union, but in several neighbouring unions, scores of men entered construction work through me. Whether as master mason or foreman or contractor – I helped them find jobs or gave them jobs in construction. In construction worker recruitment, all deals are done verbally. A lot depends on mutual faith and mutual respect. It is good as long as it functions well. When it doesn't work, workers can be easily deprived.

In the construction sector, it is the rule of the powerful. The construction companies, the real estate companies – their owners are powerful people in society. They have enormous wealth, control over muscle power and big political connections. Nothing can restrain them.

Let me tell you about my sad demise as contractor. After working for many years as senior mason and foreman, I was confident enough to be a contractor. It involves many legal and financial complexities. The licensing process requires numerous documentations, fees, and informal payments. It also requires considerable investment. You have to invest minimum 1-200,000 Taka [US\$1239-2478] upfront. Of that, you make an advance of 100,000 Taka [US\$1239] to various suppliers. Another 100,000 Taka [US\$1239] would be for other related expenses. I made licenses and investments. It was a six-storied building project. But ultimately, I was swindled by the executives of the company. I incurred a total loss of 376,000 Taka [US\$4658].

I didn't dare to go to police or court. I don't understand legal complexities. Moreover, there is no point. I was working for a big company with business dealings in many countries. The owner has musclemen and political connections at his disposal. I couldn't make much noise. I finally requested an audience with the owner. I went to his office every morning and sat there through the whole day till evening. I was almost penniless then, so I would sit on an empty stomach. After waiting for a full week in the reception, I was finally given audience with the owner. I pleaded with him that I was a very poor man, I'd been working with his company for many years, and I'd be destroyed if I didn't get my dues. He wouldn't listen to any of my pleading. I returned in tears.

I've worked in Dhaka many years but in all these years I never stayed away from home during Eid. I would always go back to celebrate with my wife and children. This was the only Eid I spent alone in Dhaka. I'd employed a lot of men from my village in the building project, I owed them

money too and I couldn't go back without money. They would all harass me, ask for their dues.

Now, my household consists of only two members, me and my wife. Our two daughters are married off but they live close by. My main source of earning is construction work. As a mason, I generally earn 10,000 Taka [US\$124] a month when I have work. Besides that, I do contract farming sometimes. I've bought a cow and have been rearing it for two years now. It's supposed to start giving milk soon. Then, it'll be another earning source for my family."

Nayef's story reveals the precarity of workers in the construction sector in Bangladesh but also the career prospects and the consistency in wage-setting across the sector despite the prevalence of verbal contracts. The organisation of the sector with layers of hierarchical relationships - between workers and foremen, foremen and contractors, contractors and employers – reduces accountability and transparency. Abuse of workers' rights did not happen in the depression of agreed wages but rather in the withholding or non-payment of wage, sometimes for whimsical and invented reasons to increase the profit margin, sometimes because others higher up in the hierarchy defaulted on payments.

For Nayef and other construction workers the most effective way to counter these exploitative practices was to move up the hierarchy to become foremen and contractors themselves. But, as is clear from his narrative, this was far from a safe path to tread. In contrast to Hamidu's perception of large, formal employers adhering more to regulations and protecting their workers better in the UAE, Nayef eloquently depicted how the structure of the construction sector allowed tycoons to distance themselves from poor sub-contractors and reject their claims.

While Nayef's story is an account of thwarted dreams despite his great efforts to bring his family out of poverty, the much younger Abdul is more optimistic about what construction work can bring.



Mango farm
Picture credit: Malcolm Manners

Abdul, construction worker from Chapainawabganj District, Bangladesh

Abdul worked in the family business until its demise two years ago, then he joined his younger brother who had already migrated to Chittagong to work in construction five years earlier. He was married and had a son. He and his brother were the main earners in the family.

“I’d wanted to go earlier but couldn’t because I was working in my father’s sweet shop. It was our family business. In addition, we owned a mango garden of 12-13 katha [0.2 acres] and we had 2-4 bigha [0.2-0.4 acres] land which I farmed. But then the sweet shop was closed down after a big burglary, and we had to sell our land. After the demise of the shop, I didn’t have much option left but to join construction work in Noakhali.

When I left, I just informed my parents about my

decision. There wasn’t much opposition. I also talked to my brother-in-law who was a master mason about my intention to work. He’d taken my younger brother into construction work and he now asked me to join him in Noakhali. I bore the bus fare myself. At first I lived in the construction site where I was employed. There was no other cost involved. Then I moved with some other workers, including my brother, to a shared rented house. I have so far attained skills in masonry and tiles work. I am still not very good at design work.

I didn’t ask about my terms and conditions before migrating. I had a general idea about the wages in construction work from my brother and others employed in the sector from my area. My initial wage was 300 Taka [US\$4] per day as a helper. Then after three months, when I had basic skills as construction worker, my new wage was set at 400 Taka [US\$5] per day. I’m now receiving 500 Taka [US\$6] as daily wage. I think

what I received initially and what I'm receiving now are alright. Our terms and conditions are always verbal and they are generally respected. Most people who enter the construction sector don't come with any skill other than hard labour and commitment. Those are the skills required to secure job as construction worker.

I earn 10-12,000 Taka [US\$124-149] net each month. Besides, I'm also in seasonal business of mango supplying on a small scale. I bought a cow recently. I've loaned money from Grameen Bank and ASHA for financing the cow purchase and the mango trade. I also earn from time to time by supplying construction workers. I've facilitated construction jobs for people a few times, but such work is often done by my brother and brother-in-law. They have regular earnings from supplying workers. They get up to 50 Taka [US\$62] for each helper or unskilled worker they supply and 100 [US\$1] Taka for each mason.

I don't know about laws and regulations regarding the construction sector. All the employers care about is to make us work hard. Employers, contractors and foremen decide everything. That is why if any one of them don't pay our dues, we can't take any steps. Foremen who mediate between workers and big employers, like big construction companies, tend to strip workers of their dues. This is most frequent among those without license. Employers are too big for us to access so the foremen can give their false excuse. That's why my brother, brother-in-law and I prefer to work directly with employers. We do more individual construction projects because working for housing companies means you have to work through intermediaries or foremen who can cheat you. We tend to lose out on our wages in construction projects of large companies where there can be a number of people (contractors, foremen etc.) between employers and workers.

Construction sector jobs have enabled many people in my district to earn more and be happy. People in masonry are very happy. Such work gives a monthly net income of minimum 9,000 Taka [US\$111]. My immediate future plan is to work abroad as a construction worker. I have a relative and a friend who work as construction workers in Malaysia and Dubai respectively. My friend has promised to arrange a construction worker visa for me. He will be coming home during the upcoming Eid holidays. Hopefully, then we will finalise the plan. I can earn much more as a construction worker abroad than here. I want to ensure the future of my child. I want him to get a good education and do something better. I don't want him to be a construction worker."

For Abdul working in the construction sector represented potential success, although he did not want his son to follow in his footsteps. Having devised a strategy to work only with small employers who felt accountable to their workers, he was not oblivious to the irregularities in the sector that encouraged exploitation of workers. But working with his brother and brother-in-law, who had already moved up the ladder to become recruiters, he too anticipated upward mobility, though involving transnational migration rather than moving up the hierarchy locally.

Abdul's story is also one of being firmly embedded in the family and his pathway nuances how intergenerational relationships and sibling order shape young people's lives. As the eldest son he had to forego migratory dreams as long as his labour was needed in the family business and the various other activities that made up the family's livelihood portfolio.

A contingency changed everything, the family resources drained and the obligation Abdul bore to his family shifted from providing labour to providing money. To Abdul, the new-won freedom to migrate and to make money unlocked the possibility of taking responsibility for his own family and he was clear that he would be working for his son.

The impact of family members on young people's pathways is also a significant element in the next story told by Nida.



Bread sellers in Ghana
Picture credit: Carsten ten Brink

Nida, domestic worker in Accra, Ghana

Nida was 23 years old at the time of the interview and she had recently come to Accra from the Central Region to work in domestic service and save up money for vocational school. She had completed Junior High School living with her paternal grandmother but had also stayed for a while in her mother's place.

“When I’d completed JHS 3, I planned to do home economics, catering specifically, so I could work with that in future. That’s why I came to Accra when I was 20 years old, to work in catering for a little while so that I could get money to go back to school. But where I was we weren’t getting a lot of contracts to do work for people. Whenever we got a contract, the woman we stayed with would intentionally send us to the market so she could do the work herself. So, she wasn’t teaching us anything. We used to sell bread, we’d wake up at 4am and come back home at 9pm and sometimes we took care of her store. In less than two weeks I decided I would leave Accra and go back to my mother. The woman tried to convince me that my mother had said I should spend a month with her before coming back. But I said

no and insisted on leaving, so she gave me money for transportation back to my mother.

After a little while I moved back to my grandmother’s house. I was working with her, doing trade, until a couple of months ago when one of my aunties called to say that she’d gotten a job for me. She asked if I was willing to come to Accra to work and told me to come that week. My aunty sent money through mobile money for transportation. When I got here my mother called me to say that I should ask the woman I was going to work for a fee so I wouldn’t have the same experience as last time.

We have agreed that I will stay for two years, I have a verbal contract and I’m paid 100 Cedi [US\$22] a month. I was told that I would be sweeping in the morning, cleaning and mopping the place. My employer feeds me and also buys stuff for me. She puts my salary in my account at the end of the month. I was the one who decided that they should pay the money into my account. After some time, she’ll let me go and register for the national health insurance scheme, so in case I fall sick, the health insurance will cover my hospital bills.

At home I used to have a bit of money because I used to sell so I could support myself when my mother didn't have money, but here I don't get to handle my money so I have to depend on the woman and whatever she decides to give me. I've got money in the bank but not on me so I have to save the little she gives me to buy things for myself. She gives me money for airtime so I can call my family. I don't remit to my mother but my aunty does. And once when my employer was pleased with the things I did here, she sent them some money.

I enjoy doing this job, just that sometimes the work gets too much for me. When I get up in the morning I sweep, clean the plates and utensils, wash clothes, water flowers and cook. I get really tired from doing all this, so in between all those chores I take a nap for a few minutes and continue doing what I'm supposed to do. When I decide to take a nap, she calls me out to get something for her or to check on her child.

I work from Monday to Saturday, we go to church on Sundays. After church, I work. I work every day, I don't have days off but Saturdays and Sundays are not that tiring because I get to rest a little on both days. There is nothing I can say about the lack of days off. I'm working for her so if she gives me a day off it's fine, if she doesn't I have to go on and do my job. I know that the laws in Ghana allow every worker rest, I know I have rights. But at the time we discussed the conditions of work, it didn't come into my mind to ask for a day off. Apart from that, she'd already listed the things I was to do from Monday to Sunday so I didn't say anything. It'll be very difficult for me to ask her about things that aren't in the contract. I'm afraid she might shout at me, so I'm just going to keep my mouth shut and do the work.

I've met some other girls here who tell me about new jobs around and they invite me to work with them but I decline because I'm working here now. My family advised me about what to do and I agreed to come and do the job. I like the way the woman treats me, so I'm not thinking about leaving. Also, I can't back out of the agreement. My family was part of the decision making before I came here, so if I want to stop the job I'll have to tell them about it and only if they agree then I can stop.

My mother, uncle, grandmother and aunty who told me about the job were those who made the decision for me. There was no sit-down discussion. My aunty

told her daughter and also discussed it with my uncle. My uncle was the one who asked me about coming to work in Accra and then he told my other family members. None of them objected to my coming, the only thing they said was that I should take very good care of myself once I got here."

Nida's story illustrates the complex ways in which educational aspirations, work, and migration are intertwined. Young people's aspirations for education is an outcome of conscious policy-making linked with the Millennium Development Goals and the push for Education for All. Despite governments' pro-education policies, many children of poor families drop out of school at the level where subsidies dwindle and school fees increase considerably. Youths, like Nida, have aspirations for returning to school or for vocational training and many leave for district towns or the capital to find work remunerated with vocational training or money that can be used for education.

Nida did not relay whether she had been proactive in looking for work and had asked family members to help her find employment or whether her family had thought she should begin to work for a wage. But it was clear from her story that numerous family members felt responsible for setting her on a good path and that she cherished their involvement.

In spite of her aunt's involvement in mediating the employment, Nida was left to her own devices when negotiating the contract but still had a strong sense of obligation to remain in the job because of her family's involvement. Her description of how verbal contracts for domestic workers are agreed exposes just how difficult it is for young people to assert their rights in the labour market.

That parents steer their children's pathways is also clear from the following story told by a Bangladeshi mother.



Riya, de facto head of household in Tangail District, Bangladesh

Riya has managed the household for the past 15 years after her husband went to Saudi Arabia, where he works in an Islamic school. For women in their 40s, like Riya, men's migration is the norm. In addition to Riya's husband, her brother-in-law was a migrant and two of her own brothers were working abroad.

"My husband went abroad after we'd had two children and has only been home for a visit two times. Once after eight years and once after five years. In our house we are just me, my daughter and my son. My daughter is married and has a six year old child but I brought her to live with me to give me company.

My daughter passed her Secondary School Certificate (junior secondary school) but fortunately, she got married and could not continue her studies. The boy was introduced by one of our relatives, he liked my daughter and proposed, so I got her married. College was close to their home but he didn't let her study. She was 16 years old. Her father and uncle didn't want her to marry, I took the decision because a boy in the village used to threaten her and I wanted to save the honour and dignity of our family.

The marriage cost approximately 100,000 Taka [US\$1239] with gold ornaments. My husband bore all the expenses but I gifted them a fridge on my own wish. At first my daughter lived in Dhaka because her husband worked in an upmarket clothes shop, where his brother also worked. I didn't think he would be able to run his family working there so I sent him abroad. I contributed 160,000 Taka of a total of 270,000 Taka [US\$3456] for my son-in-law's migration, his family contributed 100,000 Taka [US\$1239]. I've told him that his wife is my responsibility, when he comes back he can buy some land in Dhaka. He has been working in a pharmacy in Kuwait for one year. He is in good situation; his company sends a car to pick him up at 6am, they also provide food and accommodation and every two years, the company sends him home for two months with round-trip fare. Fortunately, my cousin works in the Ministries. He helped us to get the job. He called my daughter's husband in and sent him abroad through a broker within one week.

My son passed his Higher Secondary Certificate and is now doing a two-year bachelor degree at a degree college. My son used to have English tuition and when he needed accounting tuition, I managed the fees by reducing other family expenditure. I also paid for my son's entry exam for college in this way. After all, his

future is the most important to me. I had no loss. I used to have boiled eggs and milk for dinner. I had chickens and ducks also. I didn't face any problem. But when he needed 50,000 Taka [US\$619] to buy a computer and 50,000 Taka [US\$619] more to have a six-month computer training course, his father sent it.

My husband is the only income-earner, I don't have land or a shop. He sends 15,000 Taka [US\$186] every month and 10,000 Taka [US\$124] for rice cultivation during the farming season. When his savings add up to 100,000 Taka [US\$1239] he sends it and tells me only to withdraw this money in an emergency. Actually, my husband can't make much more income because of his old age but it wouldn't have been possible to be solvent if he hadn't gone to abroad for work when our daughter was born.

If he comes back, then our savings will finish because it doesn't take time to spend money. If my son works here, then we will have no tension for money. Working abroad is good but I don't want to send my son abroad. He could go abroad if he didn't have job. I even made his passport once, but those in my family who are educated have said, your son is physically capable and he's also got height. You will spend 7-800,000 Taka [US\$8672-9910] to send him abroad. Why don't you try it here?

That's why I'm looking for a job here for my son. My husband also doesn't want our son to go there. He says that he's spent his whole life abroad but he won't let his son do the same. My dream for the future is that I want my son to start earning. I want my husband to come back and live together with me. That's it. I've already searched for a job for my son in Army Ordnance. My brother, who worked in Dubai for two years, paid 500,000 Taka [US\$6194] to the Ministries for a job but he didn't get any, even after four years. He has started working in a police station just now. For my son, he will do a job, I've no capital to start a business for him.

If he goes abroad or goes to Dhaka, his father can't have all information quickly but my brothers can. That's why I consult with them. But as my husband doesn't like it, I don't tell him first. He doesn't expect me to tell him everything. We agree on many things but I don't inform him about the matters to which he will not agree. After taking a decision, I try to make him understand in proper time and situation.

My husband's living abroad has increased my status in society because money is power. If someone needs up to 5,000 Taka [US\$62] in an emergency situation, I always

try to help them and they pay back according to their ease. If someone doesn't have money for medication or is admitted to hospital and need money for treatment, I try to help them. My husband doesn't know that much about this type of matter. I gathered experience with the flow of time. I've learned many things by mixing with other people. It wouldn't have been possible if my husband was here."

Riya had become a real matriarch in her husband's long absence. She felt empowered by having managed the family, engaged in the public sphere, and in charitable activities. Her shrewdness emerged in decisions involving her husband when she navigated his likes and dislikes by carefully selecting the decisions in which he needed to be involved and omitting those she thought he would reject.

Another element of the matriarchal role was that she directed her children on to life paths she thought appropriate for them. At the same time, she kept them close to her and ensured she would not be living alone.

The extent to which youths' pathways are gendered is noteworthy. Riya's daughter was just one among many girls, whose education was cut short due to marriage. While parents thought educated girls would make better mothers because they could support their children's education, they were also concerned about teenaged girls being 'spoiled' and losing their ability to attract a good husband. Educated boys had more options but the purchase of a passport for her son, the galvanisation of her social network to open the door to employment in the public sector, and his study for a Bachelor degree suggests that Riya avoided concentrating her hopes in one avenue for her son. She preferred if her son worked in Bangladesh but was also acutely aware that he needed to become the main earner in the household in the near future.

A larger number of parents who are affected by migration, as migrants or as remittances managers, are keen for their children not to migrate, as we will also see in Elok's account.



Elok, school girl in Ponorogo Regency, East Java, Indonesia

Elok is 15 years old and lives with her mother and younger brother. Her father has worked overseas since she was a toddler. Before the children were born, her parents worked in Jakarta like many of their siblings. Elok has relatives in many places inside and outside Indonesia, migration is the norm rather than the exception and she's highly aware of her father's sacrifice to enable her to study.

"I was in primary 6 when my father went to Brunei to work in the construction sector. He was in Malaysia when I was younger. He comes back home every two or three years. Last time he came back, he stayed for one or two years to renovate our house. He went overseas to look for money for our education. He doesn't want us to go overseas and follow in his footsteps. It would be a waste if we studied and ended up working overseas. It's better

to work in Indonesia where we can be close with our parents. My father wants us to work in Indonesia only. He called to tell us that while he was crying.

If my father hadn't gone overseas to work I could only have studied to complete Junior High School because the school fees are cheaper. I hope to continue education as high as possible. I want to go to university but my parents have told me that they can only afford to pay for me to complete vocational high school (SMK). My mother has said that if I can afford it myself, I can continue. Since I am studying health studies in SMK, maybe I can be a nurse, I can work in a hospital. Once I have worked for some years I will continue my university studies, to study to be a midwife or doctor. Most teenagers study up to senior high school or SMK.

My father supports me as long as I am serious with my studies. He told me that he'll come back home after I've graduated from SMK. He'll stay at home and I'll be the one to work to help the family. He'll come back in three years'

time. I pity him because he is old already but still working overseas. He's been working since he was young, so this time I'll substitute him to work. If I become successful, I'll be able to help pay for my brother's education.

My father has to send more money now than before. The admission fee to SMK was 1,805,000 Rupiah [US\$ 135] in total and the monthly expenses are 150,000 Rupiah [US\$11] in school fees and 200,000 Rupiah [US\$15] in practical fees. I also have a daily allowance of 5000 Rupiah [US\$37] to buy snacks during break. I usually use the remaining money for class fund and photocopy money. I eat breakfast at home and I even pack my lunch because the food there is expensive.

The study at SMK is difficult. There are many things to memorise and school ends late. We study the general subjects such as Science, Mathematics, Bahasa Indonesia in the morning until noon and in the afternoon from 1-4pm the nurse and doctor teach us our major courses. Usually we have a test the following week.

I don't really have time to play. On Thursdays, I have swimming practice from 1-2.30pm and Taekwondo practice from 3-5pm. On Friday, I have Scouts and also Student Council. I usually wake up at 3am, 4am if there is no test on that day, to study and do assignments until 5 am. Then I usually wash the clothes or wash the dishes. I also do the assignments at night after school, if there are many I don't sleep until midnight. If I'm tired of studying I listen to music and sing in my room. If I am still singing in the middle of the night, my Mother would tell me to stop.

I seldom go out. When I return from school and have had a shower I usually take care of the shop. Saturday I go out to print my assignments. I stay at home on Sundays and wash my uniform, clean my room and the house. I study in the afternoon because usually there are many assignments due on Monday. Since I'm a girl, I'm not allowed to go out. I usually play with my friends when I'm doing group assignments.

I'm not allowed to have a boyfriend yet. I have to achieve my goals first. Guys nowadays only think about perverted things, so my friends say. My parents say I should maybe be 21 years old or above before I marry. They want me to have a husband who has a strong faith in the religion so that he can guide me. He must be successful also in his career or, at least, be willing to work hard and able to feed the family. He must not be violent. He must be patient like my father.

Usually females get married early while the males marry much later. Girls stay at home and meet each other individually. Boys usually hang around at the martial art practice place or near the main road where there is a screen to watch soccer. Girls don't hang around if there is no activity, such as a village feast or a wedding ceremony. Female students think more about their studies than the male students. Usually men become mature in their 20s, women mature earlier. They become mature when they understand the hardship that their parents have gone through to earn money. People become mature when they're able to earn for money for themselves. They'll think about the hardship to earn the money."

Elok is an exemplary girl in the Indonesian context; hardworking, well-behaved and recognizant of her father's sacrifice to send her to vocational high school. Her account intimated that she had grown up learning that her father laboured for his children overseas. He probably did, but not only for their education, he also provided a nice home for them. Through running a shop on their premises, their mother also contributed financially to the family's well-being.

The principle of hard work runs through Elok's story. Spending many hours studying and shouldering many household chores at home, she was kept too busy to have time to go out with her friends and perhaps also too busy to do well in her studies. Her account reveals significant differences between female and male youth which she frames in terms of maturity. The difference could equally be rooted in the liberty young women and men respectively have to roam.

Jabir, who describes his migratory pathway over a decade in the next section, also worked hard for his children.

Road in Accra
Picture credit: David Stanley



Jabir, casual worker undertaking loading and unloading jobs in Accra, Ghana

Jabir has lived in Accra on and off for more than 10 years. He first came as an unmarried man learning auto mechanics, then he had a period of trading involving travels between Northern Region and Accra, before moving to Accra to find new sources of income. His wife and five children remain in the north. At the age of 39, he was working for his children's future.

“As for my coming to Accra I can't say it hasn't helped. Even though it's not so much, I thank God for the little I get. It has helped me little by little and now I've been able to make a container, a small shop with a fridge and lots of things, that my wife runs. I've also bought a piece of land so I can build a house for the children like my dad did for us. If I get a single or two-bedroom house, it's good. I've already bought two trips of sand over there and I'm praying that I can get some cement so that I continue.

You don't know when you'll die and I wouldn't want to leave my children without anything, so they have to come to town and suffer like I've been doing. I have only one son and four daughters. If I don't work hard, my daughters could end up becoming kayeye (head porters). And you notice that with that trade, the insults are many, people see their fellow ladies carrying bags and just hail insults at them. I myself will suffer on this earth to leave my children with something.

At the end of the month, I send some part of the little I earn to my wife through Mobile Money so she can manage taking care of the children. In a month, I can send 200 or 250 Cedi [US\$44-55] because some of the children attend a private school. I divided my children, one half are in private schools and the other half in public schools. With the public, you don't pay anything until they sit exams but for the private, the money consumption is a little high. There's one whose school fees are 80 Cedi [US\$18] and another whose fees are 40 Cedi [US\$9], so that makes 120 Cedi [US\$27] for a term. But I've done well. I also pay the school fees of my

siblings who are in Junior Secondary School.

When I first came to Accra, I worked hard weeding for money to make enough for my bus ticket. My mum gave me some money too. She deliberately told me it was someone's money, so I tried hard to save the little I could, just so I could send the money to her.

My elder brother was an auto-electrician in Accra and he told me to learn a trade. So, I paid 350,000 Cedi [US\$8, old currency] to learn in a fitting shop. I lived with my brother in Newtown, for about eight years or a little more. When I'd paid off my Mum's debt, I was determined to save. I saved up about 10 million Cedi [US\$219, old currency] and back then it was a lot of money. As a young man, you feel like you are the only boss in the whole world when you get some little money. That's why I left the job in the fitting shop. I just saw that with the money I had, if I did business with it, it would help me.

At the time, there were a lot of second-hand bicycles for sale at Abossey-Okai (neighbourhood in Accra) so I invested the money into that because I knew that people in my hometown would buy. I was the first person to send ladies' bikes and children's bikes to my town. The business was really good for me. I could buy 40 or 50 bicycles with 1,000 Cedi [US\$219], pay the lorry fare to send them. I didn't owe anyone and no one owed me. But with business there are financial problems, half the money I realised was used to pay off debts at home. How to continue became an issue. Things were that way until my mum died in 2006. When she died, everything became messed up because she was the one who used to tell me to do this and that. I moved to Accra right after all the funeral rites had been performed. If things had worked out for me in the North, I wouldn't have come.

Now I work as a loading boy. One of my brothers introduced me to this work because he saw that I was just hanging around when my business had run down. He told me to involve myself in any work so I could make something to at least pay my rent. As I had a wife and children, it wasn't fine to do nothing. The next morning, I came here to help with the loading little by little. In this job, there's nothing like a salary. If there's a lot of work, I can make about 100 Cedi [US\$22] or say 80 Cedi [US\$18] in a day. When there isn't much work, I only make 10 or 15 or 20 Cedi [US\$2-3-4] or, even worse, I won't make anything.

For me, my main problem is to build a house for my children. Travelling can go in two ways, either you increase or decrease. I thank God. I won't say what I get

is a lot, but it's ok. Because if I look at the friends I used to sit around with, I can say that I have gone ahead of some of them and others have also gone ahead of me. It is step by step. With the little money I make, I'm able to solve the problems I want. I haven't taken a loan neither do I owe anyone. What I get is what I put in my pocket. I thank God for what I have."

Although he was a man of limited means, Jabir was certain that migration improved the economic situation of his family, not least because he had been able to invest in the structure necessary for his wife to develop her trade and thereby increase her income. His primary goal at the time of the interview was however to secure his children's inheritance. This was not something easily done but a step-wise process of buying a plot of urban land and constructing a small basic house in cement brick with one or two bedrooms. The size of the house suggests that this was a symbolic act rather than an act that would secure the future of Jabir's five children.

He also supported his children's education and had decided to diversify their schooling by enrolling two of his children in private school and the others in the public school. He didn't specify the rationale behind this decision and although we might speculate that it had to do with finances, it is worth noting that he managed to keep the two children in the private school into secondary school where the fees began to increase.

Jabir's pathway is one of rise and demise; of learning a trade in which he was able to save up a considerable sum for someone from a poor background and then establish a business to be his own boss. This pathway is a common one in West Africa where small businesses are mushrooming. They are structured around the owner and sometimes a couple of apprentices and employees but rarely grow into large enterprises with many employees. Jabir's business collapsed after a short time, and he had to resort to a common fall-back option, returning to Accra to work.

Even though migration may allow some families to leave poverty behind, both Jabir's and the next story expose that precarity remains a big issue for the poorest families.



Zuhrah, mother of migrants in Northern Region, Ghana

Zuhrah is one of the senior wives in an extended household of ten people. She is the first wife of the household head and has two adult children, who are both working in Libya. Her daughter-in-law lives with her, as do three grandchildren. At least one of her co-wife's children is residing in Accra with his wife and child.

“My children went to Libya because things were bad, we lacked money and, as they were still energetic, they thought it wise to go so things would improve. Their intentions were to enable us to do what we hadn't been able to do so that their migration will serve the purpose of the whole family. First my daughter went, she sells clothes and was able to help her brother to join her. He's a mason. They told me that I should be patient so that they can be able to take care of the family. The suffering I used to undergo, now they give me small-small to take care of myself and the family.

Their migration is to the benefit of our family. They didn't have a plot of land, now they have bought one and even built a house though it isn't roofed yet. They went to Libya purposely for themselves because the household is an extended family so they can't use what they have for the family. They are considered different. If they don't establish their own house, they will end up losing as a result of using their earnings to cater for the livelihood of the members of the extended family. I gave birth to them and I know that if they are going to do that they are wasting their resources. If their father just dies they can't claim the house, since it is an extended family but if they build their own, it will be theirs forever.

They sent money to their father to buy a plot, mould blocks and erect the building and even gave him money to manage and to start his business. They also sent him to Mecca, bought 10 bags of cement, zinc and refurbished his room for him and they offer him and their uncle in Tamale a Ram every Eid al-Adha celebration for sacrifice. They give us money to pay their children's school fees, buy their uniforms, and other things for school.

My children always come together and send down the gift they have for the family. They give physical cash because they can't buy something and send it to us. They are just giving to me, I'm the caretaker. When they send, we use it to prepare breakfast (tea), give the children chop money for school, cook food for them, and all of these involve the use of money. If it finishes, I tell them and they will send some money, especially if I request it for a particular purpose. If Salla (the Eid celebration) is approaching, they send money for their children's dress to be sewn.

Their children aren't working so we'll have to take care of them since they can't take care of themselves. So, you have to suffer and provide and pray that one day, your children and grandchildren will also take good care of you. My children have seen the way I take care of the children in the house, so if they don't send to me things would be out of hand, since I don't steal and I don't have a business or anything doing. When they were at home, they saw the way I was taking care of their children, they saw the suffering I endured. So, when they went elsewhere and managed small, they thought it wise to send the money to me to continue my duties.

They've told me that, because Libya is a war prone country, in the current situation up there the banks aren't working so they can't send as they used to. Recently they said the charges in sending the monies now are much higher so

when their friend was coming to Ghana, they messaged him to bring us some monies and that is what we're still spending. I told them to come home and they are preparing to come even though they haven't told when exactly they will be coming. They try to get what they wanted so they can come back and establish their own business and be operating here.

Zuhrah's story singles out another element of migration that can cause great precarity. When countries of destination disintegrate into conflict and the infrastructure falls apart, migrants' savings dwindle and remittances become fewer and are sent with longer intervals. For poor families that need cash injections as soon as a larger expense crops up, migration no longer brings security. This is why Zuhrah puts so much emphasis on her suffering for the children and reiterates how well she cares for them.

Another interesting element of her story is her description of resource distribution within extended families, and especially within polygynous marriages where more children have rights to the resources left behind by the patriarch. But she also reveals a shift in the moral order of households; as the patriarchs have become increasingly incapable of catering for the needs of all household members, the next generation has taken control over much of the provision by distributing money for specific purposes to the persons usually in charge of that sphere. The base of senior men's authority is thus shrinking gradually. This transformation is not driven by migration alone but also by the grinding poverty in much of Northern Ghana, the insufficiency of the farming system to provide food and income for all, and by changing ideas of what a good life involves in terms of living standards, livelihoods and commodities.

Conclusion: How the narratives can inform advocacy, policy, and programming

- 1. Legal versus irregular migration.** Many policy makers profess a preference for regular and regulated migration. The benefits of this to the state in terms of planning and budgeting social policy in migrant destinations and ensuring that gaps in the labour market are filled are obvious. However, none of the states in the countries where we have done research have regulated internal migration, thus when referring to legal pathways for migration usually transnational migration is in focus. For many, particularly the poorest, regularised transnational migration is out of reach. For some the financial benefits of irregular migration are used to support the legal migration of family members who come after. **Policy makers should recognise the financial and other benefits of irregular migration and seek to support people working in precarity realise their human rights.**
- 2. A focus on brokers.** The stories above clearly demonstrate that brokers, whether regularised or informal, play a significant role in many migratory journeys. Informal brokers are often demonised as unscrupulous and predatory. The business models of legal brokers are not yet subject to rigorous analysis. But it is clear that legal brokerage harbours informal and irregular practices where connectedness and the ability to pay bribes gives advantage in internal labour markets as well as abroad. For migrants both types of brokers are important in facilitating their journeys. **Policy makers should solicit further research into the roles of brokers and their costs and benefits to the poorest of migrants with a view to strengthening the positive aspects of the role.**
- 3. Regulation of migrant employers.** These stories demonstrate that some migrants are well aware of the strengths and weaknesses of different occupational structures, the risk of exploitation within them, and how these risks can be mitigated. **Policy makers should use this knowledge borne of experience to support the development of policy to regulate major migrant-employed sectors.**
- 4. Support female migrants.** We have heard much about how gender norms within families and labour markets shape women's experiences of migration and its potential financial benefits. The stories demonstrate that women's migration is becoming increasingly normalised, even in societies that hitherto perceived migration as a male phenomenon. It is clear that female migrants are just as important pillars in securing the long-term well-being of families as male migrants and that their close relatives support their investment in property and business. **Policy makers should continue to create and enforce legislation which promotes equality in wages between men and women given that globally women make 23 cents for every US \$1 that men make.**
- 5. Female remittance managers acquire important skills.** If women are represented as left-behind by their migrant spouse, regardless of whether they live with the husband's relatives or in a separate household, the range of skills they develop over time is overlooked. The opportunity to manage migrant remittances can offer a route to greater decision making and power for women in migrant households. However, often this visibly empowered position is temporary and lasts only until the husband returns. **Policy makers should make use of women's managerial skills and create greater spaces outside the household for women to participate in decision making.**
- 6. The intergenerational aspects of migration.** The case studies illustrate that the impacts of migration reverberate through the generations. Children and youths in marginalised rural areas are able to stay longer in school education and sometimes to attend better schools, though gender differences curtail how much time female children and youths spend studying. Migrant earnings are also used to sponsor the next generation of migrants. Household composition, norms about marital relations and affectionate ties influence who benefits from such sponsorship. It is clear that sponsorship for education and migration is not restricted only to migrants' own children. **Policy makers should commission longer term and nuanced studies that take into account the intergenerational and gendered impacts of migration on households.**

Research projects

The case studies showcased in this booklet were gathered as part of the research process for the Migrating out of Poverty Research Programme Consortium. Migrating out of Poverty brings together partners in Bangladesh, Ghana, Singapore, South Africa, and the UK to study internal and regional migration and international development. It is funded by UKAID through the Department for International Development.

The research is organised by theme and the stories from this booklet emanate from the Counterfactuals Project (Ghana), the Migration Industries Project (Ghana and Bangladesh), and the Intra-Household Dynamics Project (Ghana, Bangladesh and Indonesia).

Counterfactuals

Existing evidence supports the view that migration and remittances increase the income of migrant households and reduce poverty. The impact on income inequality is more contested. However, such findings should be treated with caution as the poverty-reducing impact depends on the country and type of migration flow: remittances are more likely to have a poverty-reducing effect when received by poorer households. In addition, not all migrant-sending households receive remittances. Hence, migration does not always have positive and poverty-reducing impacts on household levels.

To investigate whether migration improves consumption expenditure of migrant-sending households, consumption expenditure for households with and without migrants needs to be compared. Instead of simply comparing households with and without migrants, we developed a counterfactual scenario, which artificially constructs what the consumption expenditure of a household with migrants might have been had the migrant stayed at home; this is then compared this with the observed expenditure.

We have gained considerable expertise in collecting quantitative household data on migration, with household surveys conducted in Bangladesh, Indonesia, Ethiopia, Zimbabwe and Ghana. These surveys of around 1200 households in each country provide useful profiles of migrants, allow us to compare migrant-sending households with the broader population, and draw comparisons across countries. Preliminary results suggest that on average there are net benefits to migration: households with migrants are on average better off than they would have been if their migrant member had stayed at home.

Migration Industries

Our work focuses on the networks, organisations and individuals that facilitate migration, collectively known as the migration industry, with a focus on brokerage. Brokerage is widespread, especially migration that involves poorer people who lack the resources and social networks needed to finance their migration, attain the required papers, establish credibility with employers, and access accommodation at destination and government services. In international migration, brokerage has become more widespread and more institutionalized as a response to tightening migration regulations where some of the functions of vetting and recruitment have been outsourced by governments.

The structure of the migration industry is very much embedded in class, kinship and gender relations in the different contexts and has therefore evolved differently. In Ghana, it derives from cultural norms of reciprocity and the way in which the language of kinship can be used to invoke particular sets of rights and obligations; in Bangladesh it derives from traditional patron-client relationships and notions of trust and obligation and in Indonesia too it is based on local and cultural notions of trust and legitimacy.

Brokers have often been blamed for exploitation and forcing migrants into unfree work conditions. Yet informal brokers are important in all three locations and the industry shows a good deal of flexibility in response to the agency of migrants and changes in regulations and market conditions. Migration costs can be extremely high but taking a long-term view shows that migrants and their families factor in the costs as indispensable for achieving a better future. However, risks are uninsured especially for internal migrants but sometimes even international migrants and this can result in losses.

Intra-Household Dynamics

There is common misconception that migration is a male issue. This may be due to weaknesses in data collection, spanning from failing to capture migration forms that women are more likely to engage in including shorter term, internal, and circular migration, to constructing migrants as non-gendered while privileging the male experience.

Our projects in Bangladesh, Ghana and Indonesia have shed new light on the complexities surrounding norms and practices guiding the responsibilities of different household members, dependencies and interdependencies within families, and migration.

We have analysed men's and women's situation and through relating the observed practices to the gender positions available in their local society, and to the norms sketching these positions, we have identified some of the responsibilities and freedoms migration involve for migrants and for those staying behind.

We are currently analysing the wider and more long-term outcome for the social positions of adult and young men and women prompted by migration, access to income and/or remittances and the investments these may incur. This more detailed gender analysis helps us unpack what factors motivate the migration of particular social categories and the immediate and long-term impact of migration and the shifts to which it may lead. Evidence from the three case studies has potential interest for policy targeting development, gender equality, youth, migration among others.

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Contact

For further information related to these case studies please contact Dorte Thorsen (D.Thorsen@sussex.ac.uk). Alternatively, our website houses a range of academic and other outputs which could prove useful.

<http://migratingoutofpoverty.dfid.gov.uk/>

Briefings for policy makers

[Migration, Marriage and Intra-Household Dynamics: Lessons from Bangladesh, Ghana and Indonesia](#)

[The business model of brokers in Bangladesh, Ghana, and Singapore: Lessons for policy](#)

[Poverty reducing potential of labour migration for construction work: Lessons from South Asia](#)

[Strengthening migration data for decision making: innovations in design and collection](#)

Working Papers

[Emic perspectives on brokering international migration for construction from Bangladesh to Qatar](#), WP 49, March 2017.

[Gendered dynamics of remitting and remittance use in Northern Ghana](#), WP 48, March 2017.

[Brokerage in migrant domestic work in Ghana: complex social relations and mixed outcomes](#), WP 47, January 2017.

[Translocal subjectivities within households 'in flux' in Indonesia](#), WP 46, October 2016

[Gains and Losses from Internal Migration: Evidence from Migrant-Sending Households in Ghana](#), WP 44, September 2016

[Of Local Places and Local People: Understanding Migration in Peripheral Capitalist Outposts](#), WP 43, September 2016

[Gendered Practices of Remittances in Bangladesh: A Poststructuralist Perspective](#), WP 42, September 2016

[Choosing a Life: Remittances and Youth Aspirations in Bangladeshi Villages](#), WP 40, September 2016

Quantitative data sets

The migration data research stream focuses on developing new databases on internal migration and remittances to provide a critical resource for migration researchers globally and to provide insights into internal migration and poverty. Data sets for Bangladesh, Indonesia, Ghana, Ethiopia and Zimbabwe are available here:

<http://migratingoutofpoverty.dfid.gov.uk/research/migrationdata>

Our research is ongoing until October 2019, so check our website for new documents,

<http://migratingoutofpoverty.dfid.gov.uk/publications>

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