



THE TARGETING DYNAMICS OF BRAC'S REINTEGRATION PROGRAM FOR RETURNEE MIGRANTS: A PROCESS DOCUMENTATION RESEARCH

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Executive summary

- It is the findings report of Process Documentation Research (PDR), seeking to understand the Targeting Mechanism of BRAC's migration project, entitled 'Socio-Economic Reintegration of Returnee Migrant Workers of Bangladesh.' Funded by the Royal Danish Embassy, the project aims to provide humanitarian assistance and reintegration support to 10,000 returnees from non-EU countries and create awareness among 5,95,000 people in Bangladesh about "safe migration" and "reintegration" during its course.
- Appropriate identification of people in greatest need of protection, assistance, and social benefits is the prerequisite for the success of any developmental or humanitarian intervention. However, the question remains on how to accurately and effectively identify people who deserve the most. Therefore, the PDR seeks to shed light on those practices and procedures through which BRAC attempts to search for, identify, enlist, and verify "the most vulnerable returnees" as its target group and select them as the program "beneficiaries."
- BRAC's migration program recognizes the airport and the community as the two main geo-social areas for identifying "the most vulnerable returnees." At Hazrat Shahjalal International Airport, BRAC runs an office to provide vulnerable returnees immediate humanitarian care. It also elicits information and maintains a rich data set of returnees in greatest need of aid. The organization recruits volunteers from the local populace for conducting community-based targeting.
- The PDR mainly captured the everyday practices of the community-based targeting mechanism. It resulted from month-long immersive fieldwork in four different catchment areas during a renewed rise of the Cv19 outbreak in March 2021. Much of the fieldwork revolved around the daily activities of BRAC recruited volunteers. Field researchers paid generous attentiveness to human conduct, language use of the volunteers, and their interaction and relationship with community members and returned migrant workers. Thanks to those highly experienced qualitative researchers trained in anthropology, the team could accomplish the fieldwork before enacting the government-issued lockdown measure.

- BRAC seeks to identify "the most vulnerable returnees" who are *willing* to get support from the project as its target group. The targeting criteria involves three conditions: a) financial loss, b) physical injury, and c) mental injury. The organization recruited 360 volunteers across the country, working in 40 Upazilas (sub-districts), who are supposed to identify 21000 returnees.
- There are three main reasons for the BRAC migration program to resort to volunteerism for identifying its target group. Firstly, the organization successfully used volunteers in previous migration-related projects. Secondly, the cost-effectiveness of the volunteers-led targeting mechanism, especially considering relatively lower recruiting costs and higher outcomes (effects). Thirdly, the organization believes the recruitment of volunteers from the local populace will aid in transmitting knowledge on "safe migration" and "reintegration" to the community.
- The research identifies three groups prominent among the volunteers. Many female volunteers had experiences working with BRAC's program around health, nutrition, education, etc. Students at the tertiary level comprise the second group. Both of these group members are low-income individuals. In contrast, the third group is comprised of local professionals and entrepreneurs.
- Although volunteerism offers only one thousand Taka as an honorarium, it adds to the existing sources of small earnings for many volunteers. The political economy of *chin-porichoy* (knowing someone formally or semi-formally) plays a vital role for local professionals and entrepreneurs to embark on volunteerism. They consider the networks of human communications and relationships as an outcome of working for a renowned NGO like BRAC.
- BRAC's migration program offers a two-day-long training session for the recruited volunteers. However, mentoring system can play a more effective role in instilling the ethics of volunteerism and a sense of accomplishment to the volunteers.
- Volunteers face challenging questions from community members and returnees during their work. The most common queries are: a) Why is this information about returnee migrants being collected?, b) What benefits will migrants receive if they are enlisted and the BRAC for the same reason? and, c) Will they face any adverse effects from the information collected?

- In identifying potential program “beneficiaries,” volunteers emphasize valid documents, such as the passport, visa, national ID card, etc. However, the most vulnerable returnees are often devoid of official records for various reasons. Hence, there is a possibility of exclusion of returnees from the selection process.

Methodology

Project

Some of these targeted beneficiaries will get emergency support such as Food, Accommodation, and Medical Treatment after they arrive at the airport. Besides, it will provide psychosocial counseling and economic and social support to the "beneficiaries" after completing their need assessment. Financial aid includes in-kind assistance, different soft and hard skills training, job placement, and other relevant services. Social Support involves creating links with the social safety-net program, treatment support, children's education, remigration, document preparation, etc. Under the Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) framework, the project will provide linkage and referrals by establishing connections between social protection schemes and the returnees.

Location

The project has ten working locations, covering 40 Upazilas (sub-districts).

District	Upazilas			
Dhaka	Dhamrai	Savar	Keraniganj	Nawabganj
Sylhet	Bishwanath	Dakshin surma	Balaganj	Osmaninagar
Chattogram	Patiya	Patenga	Anwara	Hathazari
Narsingdi	Belabo	Narsingdi sadar	Raipura	Shibpur
Munshiganj	Louhajanj	Munshiganj Sadar	Sirajdikhan	Sreenagar
Faridpur	Bhanga	Sadarpur	Faridpur Sadar	Madhukhali
Tangail	Ghatail	Kalihati	Madhupur	Tangail sadar
Cumilla	Chauddagram	Laksam	Cumilla adarsha sadar	Muradnagar
Sirajganj	Sirajganj sadar	Belkuchi	Kamarkhand	Ullapara
Noakhali	Begumganj	Chatkhil	Noakhali Sadar	Sonaimori

Process Documentation Research

Spot selection

Considering the migration landscape in Bangladesh, the PDR selected four different districts for the study where BRAC operated the reintegration program for the returnee migrants. As per the program's definition, we considered four variation criteria; migration-prone area, high rate of women migrants, climate migration, and urban context. Comilla was selected as it is a migration-prone area. Narshingdi was chosen for its prevalence of women migrants. Shirajgonj was chosen for climate migration reasons, and Chottogram was selected for the urban context where the program faced operational difficulties due to having a high rate of volunteer dropouts.

Field Research team and training:

Four (experienced in ethnographic research) researchers were deployed to do this focused ethnographic fieldwork in four different locations. One researcher spent three weeks in each area. Before starting the fieldwork, this researcher group went through two-day intensive training sessions. From these training sessions, they learned about the project details and different research tools and techniques, especially observation, in-depth interview (IDI), Key Informant Interview (KII), informal discussion, document analysis, and the ethical aspects of the research.

Participant observation

March 2021, at the beginning of the COVID19 second wave, field researchers did three-week-long ethnographic fieldwork and observed various implementation activities. Through this observation, they tried to understand the program implementation process (targeting) and the response of the beneficiary and the community people. Observational insights from four different locations and contexts gave a nuanced understanding of the process of targeting. Apart from observation, field researchers also collected some visual data (photographs) on the targeting phase.

In-depth Interviews (IDIs)

In-depth interviews (IDIs) were conducted with various categories of returnee migrants, mainly to explore their experience with BRAC interventions and their daily life experience as returnee migrants. From these IDIs we knew about their struggles and barriers to be reintegrated into the mainstream community.

Key Informant Interview (KIIs)

Key informant interviews were conducted with various program staff (Programme head, operational manager, programme organizer). Through these KIIs, challenges of program implementation came to light along with the underline assumptions and strategies.

Dialogue with program higher management and with the RCT team:

During the fieldwork, we noticed that there was a collective mechanism in collaboration with program management and the RCT team, especially for targeting their intended target group. To understand the collaborative aspect, we discussed it several times with both groups.

Brainstorming session

During the fieldwork, we held a regular brainstorming session with the field researchers. Followed by brainstorming sessions, field researchers developed 56 ethnographic field reports and some case studies.

Data analysis

Thematic analysis was used for analyzing the entire data. Apart from this, inter tools and respondent triangulation were carefully maintained to validate a particular finding.

The findings chapter

Who are the Volunteers?

The volunteers' selection guideline includes five criteria for potential recruitment: (i) anyone who has an interest in volunteer work, (ii) anyone male or female between 18-45 years of age (iii) must be at least an SSC pass (in some cases class 8-10) (iv) migrant returnees, interested students, members of non-political club or organizations, respected person in the society and local influential, retired personnel and cultural activists (v) anyone involves in counseling or migration, especially those who have experience of working with returnee migrants or their families.

According to this Process Documentation Research (PDR), we can identify three groups of volunteers based on their professional status. The categorization helps to look at volunteers' socio-economic backgrounds. It also aids in seeing how the volunteers work, what modalities are available to them, and their motivations and aspirations. Our three categories are the following:

1. **Former BRAC employees**

Monisha Rani Das (pseudo name), the volunteer of BRAC's migration program in Kalirbazar Union in the Comilla region, used to be a BRAC school teacher. She also worked under BRAC's nutrition program. Besides being a volunteer, Monisha works as a medical agent to send patients to a hospital in Kali Bazar. She delivers medicine to tuberculosis patients and monitors them for taking the medication regularly. Besides, she offers private tuition to children in her neighborhood. In other words, she has a diversified income base since it is difficult for her to support the family with a single income source. Her husband cannot undertake any heavy work due to respiratory illness. She constantly worries about how she will feed her family, struggling to meet the necessities for her children.

As mentioned above, Mrs. Monisha Das looks after several tuberculosis patients and ensures that they take their medicines regularly. She collects the medication for her patients from BRAC. For each person completing an entire 6-months course of treatment, BRAC pays her BDT 600. She also provides private tuition for two students and her daughter three. They have to give their lessons six days a week except for just Friday. The income of the mother and daughter is pooled to sustain the family (PDR_Day-2, Cumilla_Shameem, page # 3).

Monisha Rani Das manifests the first group of volunteers – the underprivileged women who eke out a livelihood portfolio by combining a range of small earning sources. They often happened to be the former employees of BRAC-initiated social programs around health, nutrition, education, and social work.

2. **Students**

Mamun Ahmed, an Honors 1st year student at Patia Government College, Chittagong, is an example of our second category. In addition to his studies, he works as the village police. His father is a dafadar [1]. He is studying, but he worries that he might have to drop out of college because of the intense poverty in their family. His mother is critically ill, bed-ridden with paralysis, whose medical treatment eats away the lion's share of the income earned by him and his father.

His father informed him about the opportunity to work for BRAC. He also said that they (BRAC) would provide a meager honorarium of BDT 1000 per month only.

Mamun reasoned that even though the pay was not high, the amount of money was critically important for his family. Besides, he liked the fact that the voluntary job was not time-consuming.

Importantly, observing the activities of NGOs, he realized that development works could generate important contacts with different kinds of people. He used a locally used term - chin-porichoy (knowing someone formally or semi-formally) - to refer to the networks of human communications and relationships as an outcome of volunteerism for BRAC's project for socio-economic reintegration of returnee migrant workers (PDR_Day 2_Chittagong, Page # 1)

3. **Local professionals and entrepreneurs**

We identify Mr. Karim, a volunteer of the Patia Union in the Narshingdi district, as our example of the third category. He owns a pharmacy store in the local market. Therefore, people know him as a doctor, which is not surprising in the countryside. Any personnel associated with a medicine or medical facility are called daktar [the doctor]. He started his medicine business when he was in the eighth grade. He has a government license as a village doctor. He took midwifery training from Marie Stopes Bangladesh [2]. He mentioned that 12 midwives now work under him across the locality, which still does not exhaust his livelihood portfolio. He is also a commander of Ansar VDP[3] of the Patia Union. In this capacity, he has an office space in the Union Council.

Karim's profile influences the way he works in the migration project. He mentions with pride that he has 24 volunteers under him working on a project on local governance. Since Mr. Karim is the union commander, he can also enlist their help in the BRAC-initiated migration project. It is an example of how he can outsource some of his duties to other people associated with him professionally. His own bunch of 'volunteers' worked to identify and fill up the returnee identification forms. Hence, he does not have to traverse the locality as other volunteers do. Instead, he goes for a 'round visit' from time to time to collect the forms that his subordinates in the government-led project fill up for him.

Karim can also utilize his presence in the shop to find the returnees. Karim explains the logic of his working method in the following manner. If someone does come back from abroad, they will visit the market at some point. In this way,

he can count on their presence in the market to enlist them in the targeting process (PDR_Day_01_Narshingdi_Zabir, page #4).

There were volunteers with various socioeconomic statuses, including two students at the university level, one young veterinary doctor, and one doffadar (see footnote 1). Therefore, we can see that the project volunteers came from different backgrounds. They do work in different manners too. The students, for instance, were less familiar with the people beyond their immediate village. Therefore, they endeavored to reach all the corners of their appointed area through snowballing and enlisting the help of local people.

The government service personnel such as doffadar and commander of Ansar VDP already had an extensive network in different localities, which allowed them to work differently. Instead of asking at random, they more or less snowballed through their existing vital connections. Often, they were aware of who came back from abroad recently through their network and verbal exchange of information with their peers. The veterinary doctor aligned his volunteerism with his professional visits to the locality. They also thought it was an opportunity to promote his veterinary services when he searched for returnee migrants. Thus, the volunteerism for the BRAC migrants' reintegration project played a diverse but complementary role in the socioeconomic lives of the volunteers.

Training

Volunteers play a crucial role in targeting 'beneficiaries' and implementing other project activities in the field. Therefore, it is essential to look at the training and mentoring mechanism as they ultimately influence how volunteers perform their everyday operations. Volunteers must attend a two-day long training consisting of 12 sessions. It offers an introduction to BRAC and its migration program, current migration situation, causes, and types of migration. It also sheds light on relevant topics like the safe migration process and the reintegration process. The training session's prime objective is to inform volunteers of the activities they need to carry out in project implementation. It includes referral linkage and communication materials: their usage, distribution, and storage. The pedagogy emphasizes volunteerism's ethics; trainers encourage volunteers to draw up a work plan.

One of the sessions, eight, discusses areas of work for the volunteers. It lists three different sites of activities: (a) Identification of returnee migrants, (b) Courtyard meetings, and (c) Interpersonal communication. It also includes where and how the returnee migrants can be identified. Participatory group discussions are encouraged to elicit possible ways of identifying the returnees. Two geo-social areas are mentioned: (a) the airport is a crucial site for gathering information, and (b) the union council and the people from the community. A demo returnee migrant identification form is introduced to facilitate hand-on practices for the volunteers. In other parts of the same session, exercises on conducting courtyard meetings are carried out, and different interpersonal communication modes are presented. In a separate session, referral linkages and how the volunteers can facilitate them are discussed. Yet another session demonstrates communication materials to be used during the project.

Although it is commonly understood that the training session will occur before the volunteers start embarking on their activities, this was not always the case. There were some anomalies in timing. For instance, in the case of Chittagong, one of the districts that we have observed, the volunteers had started working on the project before they received any formal training. According to the district coordinator, the recruitment of the volunteers and other personnel for the branch was slightly behind other units. Upon the recruitment in February 2021, a brief orientation meeting, rather than a full-fledged training session, was organized to orient volunteers about the project in general, volunteers' roles, and activities. However, the district coordinator mentioned that the branch was planning to hold two separate training sessions for different localities under its coverage by March.

Mentoring

Apart from the formal training session, a continuous form of mentoring by senior officials guides the volunteers during their everyday activities. It is especially evident in the face of different obstacles faced by the day-to-day operation in the field. District coordinators receive a Training of Trainers (TOT) for three days. They, in turn, educate the volunteers. In monthly meetings, volunteers discuss different problems they face during targeting and ask for guidance. The common issues that they faced during our observation included the following. Often, the migrants or their families cannot provide the necessary information right away, such as the return dates, and they ask the volunteers to come back at a different time. On another occasion, the returnees complained that they did not eventually get any support, although they previously gave their information. As a result, they were reluctant to provide the data again. Also, in many cases, the returnees cannot demonstrate any valid documents to prove their migration status since they migrated through irregular means. Volunteers ask for direction from the branch officials present in the meeting on how they should handle such cases.

In cases of complaints of not receiving anything previously, the district coordinator Mr. Salam (pseudonym) from Shirajgonj district, instructed the volunteers not to give any false hopes. He pointed out that the general nature of BRAC in this particular project is more about facilitating different services and linkages rather than providing aid directly. As an example of this role, he talked about loan disbursement provisions from Probashi Kallyan Bank and training sessions for those who want to migrate again. He encourages the volunteers to discuss government services and facilities such as health allowance, assistance for families of deceased migrants, and scholarship for the children of the returnee migrants. They can also mention the Probashbondhu Call Center (a hotline operated by Wage Earners Welfare Board) and the BRAC hotline for further information.

Mr. Salam recounted two stories from his life to inspire the volunteers in their complicated everyday negotiations with the people. One story involved a woman in Narsingdhi whose husband died abroad. The widow applied to the District Employment and Manpower Office (DEMO) for financial assistance. The woman was illiterate, so her father-in-law took hold of the money using unfair means. The father-in-law convinced the district manpower office officials to hand over the money to him. When the woman later contacted the office, she was informed that allegedly she had given written permission to provide the funds to her father-in-law. The woman contacted the BRAC office about this issue. Mr. Salam tried to convince the district officials for about three months, but the effort didn't see any outcome. Finally, he had to take a strong position against the DEMO officials, which did help. Afterward, he could bring the woman's

money back from her father-in-law. After receiving the money, the paralyzed biological father of the woman came to the BRAC office to greet and bless Mr. Salam.

In another instance, Mr. Salam facilitated financial assistance for a returnee migrant who had a child with special needs. The child's father felt so happy that he came to the BRAC office and offered Mr. Salam some money. Mr. Salam, of course, had to refuse. Then, the grateful dad wished to buy some clothes for Mr. Salam, which was rejected as well. Failing to give a gif, the dad wanted to buy sweets for BRAC employees. Watching his persistence, Mr. Salam instead treated him with sweets. The love and gratitude expressed by this humble man impressed Mr. Salam very much.

Mr. Salam, in conversations with the volunteers, presented these two events as significant achievements in his life. He insisted that even simple referral and awareness works can be critical in people's lives in the locality. He wanted to convey a sense of accomplishment to the volunteers to inspire them to continue their valuable work in the community.

Grassroots targeting mechanism

Focusing on the volunteers' engagement with the members of the community and returnee migrants during the targeting process, the Process Documentation Research captured a wealth of diverse sets of correspondence, interaction, and interrogation between multiple groups of people. When the volunteers would walk in the local areas or ask about returnees at a village shop, they face challenging questions from the people and sometimes from the family members of migrants. They commonly face questions, or should we say interrogation, about the following issues:

- ✓ Why is this information about returnee migrants being collected?
- ✓ What benefits will migrants receive if they are enlisted and the BRAC for the same reason?
- ✓ Will they face any adverse effects from the information collected?

In the field, the volunteers became familiar with the pattern of these questions. They also learned fast how to handle such issues. In their attempts to reply, often, they banked on their knowledge of BRAC, its migration program, and the project activities

concerning the reintegration of returnees. Below we document different scenarios in which the volunteers find themselves or perform their acts during the information collection.

1. **Irregular migration and illusive documents**

Often, the volunteers had to deal with the sensitivity of asking for official documents. Questions about 'official documents,' such as passports, visas, return tickets, etc., can be perceived as very sensitive and may generate discomfort, suspicion, and anxiety among the community and returnee migrants. Since many returnee migrants are irregular migrants and do not have proper documents, they worry that giving any sensitive information may create problems for them in the future.

2. **The politics of pandemic**

The Covid-19 pandemic had particular relevance for the returnee migrants, who are often the target of formal and informal containment measures. One of the volunteers in Shirajgonj mentioned that government officials came to the locality during the height of the Covid-19 pandemic. They installed red flags in front of the houses of returnee migrants. Since Covid cases were rising during the targeting phase, people recently coming back from abroad were afraid or reluctant to share their travel information. They feared that the state administration might come back to bring their homesteads under the lockdown if they shared their knowledge about recent returnees [4].

3. **Aid expectancy**

Aid expectancy or benefits were prevalent during the encounter between the volunteers, the community, and return migrants. Regarding what the migrants will receive if they get enlisted, the volunteers often answered that they might receive some form of assistance or sahajjo, which in Bengali means monetary or

in-kind support. They did this, however, without any concrete promise. They also told them they might qualify for a low-interest loan from Probashi Kallyan Bank. They said that the migrant returnee would receive training and a certificate for their answer. However, they rarely mentioned the provision of psychosocial support. Our observation noticed that the volunteers did not elaborate on what type of training would be provided and what benefits the training programs would accrue.

Speech Acts

1. The communication language of the volunteers during the targeting was heavily influenced by the terminology of sahajjo-sohjojita (aid/assistance), training, and loans. In a few cases, they mentioned scholarships for the children, disability allowance, etc. In this way, they tried to sync their speech with widespread expectancy from NGO activities in Bangladesh.
2. When the volunteers replied to the queries and questions of the local people, they tailored their answers according to specific contexts and their judgments. Sometimes they gave a brief answer. But in some cases, they also came up with a detailed answer describing different facets of the project, especially when they sensed deep skepticism among the local people.
3. The volunteers did not stick to standard or structured answers. They creatively combined and shuffled different aspects of the project and the migration program of BRAC to convince the local people and earn their trust.
4. We also find something crucial missing in the whole operation. The project's overarching goal is the reintegration of the returnee into the community. However, this is rarely found in the speech acts of the volunteers. Their speech act often descended to a language of sahajjo-sohjojita, loan, and training.

The use of personal and professional networks

The volunteers exist in a web of social relationships with their surroundings. For instance, a village police personnel knows another village police. When he visits another village, which is not thoroughly familiar, he receives assistance from his colleagues. A doffadar visits his locality and informs the people present a social circle about the migration project, and they spread the word for him. People come to him with copies of passports and National ID cards to get enlisted. Members, locally elected representatives from different wards of a council, bring people to him to get them enrolled. The economy of chin-porichoy (knowing someone formally or semi-formally) plays a significant role in all of these cases.

From the discussion above, we can say that the volunteers typically approached targeting in several ways. First, they utilized their personal and professional networks to collect information about returnee migrants. Secondly, they visited places of social activities such as village shops or ponds and asked about returnee migrants who arrived after January 2018. The volunteers often found information about returnee migrants from the people socializing in groups at the village shops. The local people mentioned the names whom they knew and helped with the direction to find their house. Thirdly, while walking through the communities, the volunteers asked people whom they met at random on their ways about their knowledge of returnee migrants. Fourthly, they used the snowballing method. Once they met a returnee migrant or their family, they asked if they knew anyone else.

It also happened that when a volunteer was present in a locality and listing the returnee migrants, the news spread informally. Thus, people gathered around him to get himself or their close relatives enlisted. While volunteers encountered interrogation from the locals initially, they started to believe in the faint hope of getting some assistance (sahajjo-sohayota) from BRAC in the future. As the volunteers build trust in a particular area, the news of returnee migrant listing spread around.

A scene of correspondence

To get an idea of the rich interactions in the field, let us closely look at an instance of correspondence with community members during the search for returnee migrants. On a particular day, after walking for about 2 kilometers, Mr. Nahid, one of the field organizers (FO) [5] in the Comilla district, saw a man preparing to cast a net in a relatively big pond to catch fish. The FO inquired if he knew any information about migrant returnees in the village. Three other people were standing by the pond. At first, they were less enthusiastic to respond to the volunteer. They almost rejected the plea for information by waving their hand, indicating that they did not know anyone who had recently come back from abroad. However, the question stirred a little discussion when the FO and the researcher kept waiting. After a few minutes, one of them raised his hand and pointed the finger at a house on the west side of the pond. He said one person from the place has recently returned from abroad.

The street leading to the house was an unpaved road thickened with mud. Mr. Nahid walked towards the house. He shouted over his voice to draw people's attention from inside the house upon getting closer. A few moments later, a man in a lungi (vernacular dress) came out. Mr. Nahid asked him if anyone in this house had recently returned from abroad. The man replied that he had returned from Oman two months ago. His voice and tone lacked much enthusiasm for an engaged conversation. Mr. Nahid introduced himself and stressed his association with BRAC. He asked the returnee if he had some time to spare. Still, he was not very welcoming. He said, "Go ahead and ask me what you need to know in a neutral tone."

The conversation was hitting a dead end since the volunteer wanted to elicit information, but the returnee was disinterested in disclosing his travel data. Such an unpleasant scenario drew the attention of a woman who came out of the house at that moment. From the outset, she displayed a very different and approachable attitude than the other person. She identified herself as the sister of the returnee. When she heard that the volunteer represented a BRAC initiative, she was joyous to mention her own experience working in the BRAC education program as a teacher. Her entry into the conversation dramatically changed the nature of communication. She warmly invited the volunteer and her brother to go inside her room, sit and carry on the exchange. The covert hostility of the returnee towards the volunteer turned into an engaging conversation through her interventions (PDR_Day-1, Cumilla_Shameem, page #5).

The new goals of targeting: daily rhythm, reflection, and tension

Usually, each volunteer is supposed to make a list of ten returnee migrants per month. Besides, s/he needs to support BRAC staff in conducting four courtyard meetings and raising awareness about BRAC's reintegration program. However, in March 2021, a change occurred in the program reasoning. Each volunteer was asked to prepare a list of 50 returnee migrants within a month. The new goal required the volunteers to make a concentrated effort to identify a considerable number of migrants in a short time. Following observations could be made from the research in this regard:

1. Our findings suggest that volunteers have one or multiple other jobs. Often, volunteers carry out the task of targeting while doing their usual work/job. They intersperse the work of targeting with different roles - spatially and temporally. For many volunteers, the new goal of targeting 50 instead of 10 returnees translated as an added pressure. The sudden change in the number of targeted migrant returnees meant that they could not rely just on their existing network but had to widen their search and put a tremendous effort.
2. A positive effect of this development can be that the volunteers had to cover a greater distance and search remote pockets to find returnee migrants. In many cases, they had to go beyond their comfort zones. Thus, it can ensure more inclusiveness in the targeting process of the project. They also had to engage and rely more intensely on the community people to identify the migrants (see Figure 1), which perhaps worked towards fulfilling the project objective of making the community aware of migrant issues.

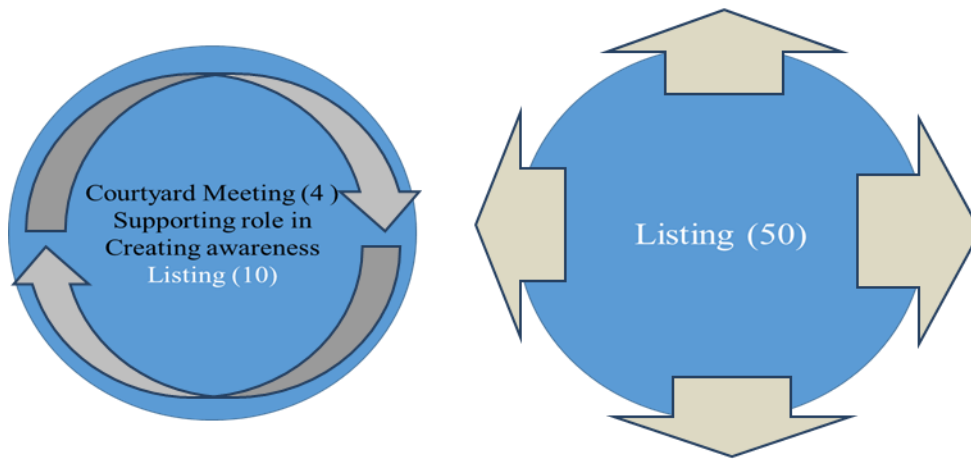


Figure 1: Visual Representation of Spatial Effect of Change in Listing

3. In some cases, people in the community were cautious about 'identifying' migrants in the middle of the pandemic because of previous unpleasant events of home isolation and different stigmas associated with it (see footnote 4). The volunteers had to make an effort to convince them using the 'brand value' of BRAC and its programs that they are not associated with the government or lockdown enforcement authorities.
4. Some branch offices announced extra incentives to the volunteers. One district coordinator, for instance, said that his office would pay an additional BDT 500 to the volunteers who would complete 50 returnee migrants during the month. He also said that he would personally reward the person who made the highest number of listings.

A female returnee and the uncertainty of inclusion

It is a troubling story of a woman migrant returnee from Narshingdhi who is uncertain if she will be able to get enlisted in the program due to document issues. The report will help us to see how the targeting mechanism works in everyday cases, cross-cutting the problems of structural vulnerabilities of returnee migrations, gender, and the official requirements for inclusion. Fulora Begum's current age is around 23-25 years. She has spent four years in Lebanon. On October 17, 2018, she returned without any assets or money to Bangladesh. Among her four siblings, she is the youngest. Her two elder brothers and one sister are married. When the brothers got married, they moved to Dhaka with their wives. Her father died when she was in her 10th grade. As a result, only she and her elderly mother stayed together at home. The married brothers did not care about them. She had to take care of her mother and herself.

After a while, she started to look for a job. Her uncle had a drug store in the local bazaar where she found a temporary position on BDT 100/150 wage per day. She and her mother lived on this money for a while. While working in the pharmacy, she learned that one could earn a lot of money if going abroad. One of Fulora Begum's 'distant relatives,' who lived in Lebanon, contacted her through a social media network and offered to work in the country. According to the agreement, she would need to pay BDT 30,000 first. Then sixty thousand, in total 90, would have to be paid from the earnings abroad. She shared the idea with her mother, but she didn't like the scheme.

Being frustrated with her mother, she shared the plan with her uncle. She could convince the older adult who took the responsibility of pursuing her mother. She raised BDT 30,000 and handed it over to broker Jhuma. After about two months, the broker arranged a visa for her, and she went to Lebanon. In all this, Fulora had no idea that she was getting implicated in a big syndicate of Adam Bebsayai (a coalition who sent people abroad, often in exchange for an excessive amount of money) in Lebanon.

Ms. Fulora was promised an excellent job in an office environment. Instead, she found herself as a housemaid in Lebanon. It was the beginning of a long story of progressive disappoints and suffering. However, the owner of the house and his wife were amiable. They fed her well, and she did not face any adverse situations. At the end of each month, her employer handed over her salary to the broker. A few months went by like this. One day, the homeowner casually inquired what she did with the money he paid her, especially if she sent the money home. She told him that she could not send the money as she would first have to pay BDT 90,000 to the agency. Only then can she send her

money home. She had hoped that she would be able to send it back one day after paying off the BDT 90,000 in total.

The employer was surprised to hear her answer as he had already paid for the visa. He called the agency's people, including the broker Jhuma asking them to explain what was happening. The people from the agency had other plans. They assured him that Mr. Fulora's salary would be sent to her mother, but they did the opposite in practice. Meanwhile, they forced Fulora to hide the truth from her employer. It continued for about two years, and Ms. Fulora did not know what to do. Meanwhile, she gradually learned some basic Arabic by watching the ways people interact with each other. She also learned to recognize local currency. She calculated that the agency had taken way more than BDT 90 thousand from her, perhaps twice. Seeing no other way, one day, she could not hold back anymore and told everything to her employer again. She hoped that she would find some solution to this and finally send some money home where her mother was desperately waiting.

After hearing the story of Fulora's deprivation, the employer decided to hand over the money directly to her, rather than the agency, from the following month. Still, Fulora didn't know how to send the money to Bangladesh. Hence, she made a phone call to "Aunt Jhuma," asking for her assistance to send the money home. Interestingly, she used to call the broker Jhuma her aunt, which manifests the intertwinement of exploitation and emotion in irregular labor migration. We do not know why she relied on Jhuma once again. Jhuma took it as an opportunity to hatch an evil scheme. She told Fulora to go to the roof with the money in her hand and speak something in Arabic to her employer. Jhuma convinced her that it would result in a salary raise and do her no harm. Fulora performed accordingly. However, it quickly turned into a nightmare. The employer immediately took her down and drove her to the agency's office. She later learned that what she had said on the roof can be translated as "increase my salary. Otherwise, I will commit suicide by jumping off the roof." She did not know the meaning of the Arabic sentence, which her aunt Jhuma instructed her to say. Sensing a psychological disorder, the employer handed her back to the agency.

Within a short period, the agency assigned Fulora to another house, where she would work all day long, but the employer would not let her eat a decent meal. Once, the employer starved her for three days in a row. Eventually, she stole an apple from the fridge to eat due to unbearable hunger. Unfortunately, the daughter of her employee saw the incident. They started to abuse her physically and informed the agency about the incident of stealing. Her aunt Jhuma abused her too on the phone. Fulora told her about the situation, especially that she was forced to be starved. Jhuma understood the issue

and confronted her employer, which turned the employer even angrier. They abused her again. On the next day, she had to head back to the agency.

Fulora began to stay in the agency. A few days later, she noticed that they talked about 'selling her' to a Black person. Realizing the unprecedented level of danger, she fled the place. She was running at night and could not figure out the general directions. Hence, she spent the night in the bush. In the morning, she met a Bengali woman out of the blue. She was from Comilla (a southeastern district in Bangladesh). Fulora explained everything to her and sought her help. The woman gave her some money and told her about "Chabra Bazar." She went to the designated location- Chhabra Bazaar- and saw that the majority of the people were from Bangladesh. Here she made a Dhormer Ma or 'fictive mother,' which is a tradition of initiating relationships for dependence and support. Her Dhormer Ma gave her shelter and assured her that she could stay there until she got a job. After about ten days, she managed a job in an office, where she received a good salary.

Some time passed in the new office, but her luck ran out when the people from her agency tracked her down. One night, they surfaced with her aunt Jhuma. They blindfolded her and taken to an unfamiliar place. She saved about two lakh taka from her previous two jobs. They took away the money from her and asked for more. They beat and forced her to call her uncle in Bangladesh to send thirty thousand Taka. Only then had they released her. She went to Chabra bazaar again and her previous office. But the office told her that she was no longer their employee. At one point, she had to beg for leftover boiled water from cooked rice from the people in Chabra Bazaar to eke out a living. Meanwhile, her mother sent her fifteen thousand Taka. She lived on this money for a while. Her agency spread the news that Fulora was an illegal migrant and that employing her entails many risks. As a result, she could not find herself a job again.

Following the advice of a fellow Bangladeshi from Chabra Bazaar, Fulora Begum did a Facebook Live to express her sufferings to the online community. Vulnerable people sometimes use social media to draw attention to their plights. It creates public pressure on the responsible person and entities through the moral outrage of the viewers. Sometimes they also catch the attention of the local media. On Facebook Live, she mentioned how the broker and agency took around four lakh Taka from her in four years while the agreement concerned only ninety thousand Taka.

Someone from the Bangladeshi embassy in Lebanon noticed the video. They called her and the agency people to the embassy. Jhuma tried to deny any wrongdoing at first, but after some time in the face of interrogation, she admitted everything. The embassy officials assured Fulora that Jhuma and her agency would be duly punished. But

according to her, nothing happened to them. Fulora Begum, on the other hand, was asked by the embassy whether they should arrange a travel pass for her to return to the country.

Fulora decided to return to the country with her travel pass. When she came back, she went through another period of misery. One day, the broker Jhuma's brother, who lives nearby, called and demanded money from her. He said they still owe her money. She retaliated and told him she would call a Salish (the traditional village arbitration system involving influential local peoples) if they kept pressing on. She would also inform the journalists. She claimed that she had evidence of her sister torturing her. Seeing that she would back down, they quieted down. She got married six months later, and she now has a 36-day-old daughter.

Fulora Begum told her story to the volunteer of BRAC's reintegration project in detail and mentioned that she was keen to join the program. However, the volunteer insisted that she would need to show some documents. Fulora neither had the passport nor the travel pass with her. Therefore, she wondered what would happen to her and if she would be able to get herself included in the project.

Returnees without valid documents

Like Fulora Begum, many return migrant workers did not have travel records and documents from the beginning; others lost or 'destroyed' them. The district coordinator of the Comilla region captures this issue in the following way:

"There are many [returnees] who have run away after being abused/harmed. Some were in jail before coming back, so they lacked the required documents. When they are released from jail, they are sent back to the country with a travel pass. In some cases, the domestic airport authority keeps the travel pass. We also hear that some people tore or burned their tickets and other documents in frustration and from a sense of acute injustice. After landing at the airport, they destroy all the associative symbols and documents of living abroad" (PDR_ District Co-ordinator_Cumilla_Shameem P#7)

With a close focus on 'filling out' the returnee identification form and checking the valid documents, some distinct issues came to the fore. Several observations could be made in this regard:

1. Prioritizing the form fill-up

As our findings suggest, volunteers seemed to prioritize filling out the returnee migration form, introduced in March 2021. Many returnee migrants were keen to share their stories, but the volunteers did not have time or scope to hear them at this stage. Their primary responsibility was to prepare a list of returnees not taking stock of their vulnerability at this moment. This view was shared by most FOs and district officials as well. However, in one case, a district coordinator mentioned that he instructed his volunteers to listen to the stories of the migrants because without listening to their life stories, they will not understand who is vulnerable and in need of support services.

2. Informal assessment of vulnerability

There was an agreement among volunteers that the assessment of the vulnerability of a specific person will take place in a later stage of targeting when field organizers will prepare detailed profiles of the potential beneficiaries. This view was shared by both volunteers and FOs almost everywhere. However, it was not entirely clear how the initial screening would be done. The volunteers sometimes pass-off information about specific people informally to program officials.

3. Necessary documents

Some documents were crucial during the targeting stage, such as a passport with an arrival seal, national ID card, visa, travel pass, and birth certificate. The passport with an arrival seal was considered the most critical document. For targeting vulnerable returnees without valid documents, there is a provision for getting a certified statement from the local union council Chairman or Members. However, volunteers did not always seem to follow the rule. As a result, returnees without official documents were often left out, as was the case for Fulora Begum.

4. Problem with identities

The volunteers would often notice that information on passports and information on supporting documents such as National ID or birth certificates sometimes do not match. It is often observed that in the paper, the returnee migrant has the

name of a relative or someone who they know. This relative perhaps came back from abroad but had a valid work permit. To take advantage of this, they exchange identities to maneuver the bureaucracy up to a point quite successfully. They often come back home without ever getting caught. Only if the police or other foreign authorities round them up for some incidence and match their fingerprints will they get caught.

Returnees with a forged identity were scared to share their information and documents with the volunteers, fearing any bureaucratic hassles later on. The people in their community were often skeptical of any survey works. Volunteers needed to take great care to convince the community. When there are questions of legality/illegality, asking for documents is very sensitive. The volunteers were puzzled about how they should handle these cases. In most cases, they had to exclude them.

5. Mistiming

A broad tendency was that volunteers often missed out on potential returnee migrants due to mistiming. Sometimes the returnee migrant was not at home when the volunteers went to their homestead and the other family members did not have access to his documents. Due to the gendered nature of rural households, sometimes wives did not dare to talk about their husbands' stay abroad in their absence. Likewise, they were afraid they could not share their husbands' information without their permissions. As a result, volunteers sometimes had to leave them out. They went to look for the missing returnee migrant again after some time if they stayed near. Sometimes, they mentioned to the family members that they [volunteer] could be reached at the BRAC office when the volunteers had a close connection at the Upazila office.

6. Problems with selection

Since the volunteers were not following any specific vulnerability criteria, they listed anyone who came back from abroad after January 2018. It was somewhat arbitrary. Interestingly, we can tentatively say that people who were 'better off' and had their documents had more chance of getting enlisted. On the other hand, those who were out working in the field or were taking a vacation in the Bazaar (rural people often spend a good deal of time in the local market socializing with others) were more likely to be excluded from the targeting process.

People who were subject to irregular migration and faced severe adverse effects lacked valid documents. The volunteers faced great difficulties in getting enlisted. They (the volunteers) were in a great hurry to find the next person to meet their target, so this was also a potential cause for missing out on the most vulnerable ones. In other words, the economy of having readily available valid documents played a part in getting enlisted for the project, irrespective of his present status or needs. The problem with valid identity can also be subsumed under this issue, on which we present one more point below.

7. Leaving Comment Boxes Empty

The returnee identification form contains 26 boxes that collect basic information about the returnee migrants. A box is there for the volunteers to comment on the specific cases, which was often left empty or labeled with comments such as 'interested in doing business,' 'business,' 'wants to take a loan for livestock rearing,' etc. We recall from the earlier section that the purposes of the training with details were not fully explained to the returnees, nor were other services such as psychosocial support mentioned. Therefore, the focus was on loan and livelihood training and sahajjo sohojogita (assistance), which is reflected in the comments on the returnee form.

8. No Observed cases of Chairman's certificate

In the case of migrant returnees who did not have valid documents, formally, they could obtain a certified statement declaring their recent arrival from abroad from the chairman of their union council. However, in our research, we saw no such cases- which took account of chairman certificates. Instead, we saw the exclusion of people without valid papers. An interview with project personnel in Dhaka indicated that 20% of returnee migrants without documents would be included.

Endnotes:

[1] This is a permanent position in the local government office at the union council level, the most elementary level of local governance in Bangladesh. His responsibilities include taking care of the union council infrastructure, running errands for the government representatives and secretary of the union, etc.

[2] Marie Stopes Bangladesh specializes in providing contraception and family planning services across Bangladesh. See <https://www.mariestopes.org.bd/>

[3] The Bangladesh Ansar (also known as the Ansar Bahini) is a paramilitary auxiliary force responsible for the preservation of internal security and law enforcement in Bangladesh. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bangladesh_Ansar

[4] In a blog post in March 2020, anthropologist Abu Ahasan noted during the initial peak of the corona-virus pandemic, the returnee migrants were perceived as 'the originator, the carrier, the spreader of the illnesses.' Consequently, the red flags were installed by the people from the administration mark the site of illness and disease. This had led to segregation and stigma for the returnee migrant during the initial outbreak of the coronavirus pandemic. See more <http://rottenviews.com/the-bio-politics-of-covid-19-and-a-new-kind-of-racism/>

[5] Although the job of listing is primarily lies on the volunteers, the field organizers (FO) sometimes did the listing because of the time crunch.