

Untold Stories of Migrants

Dreams & Realities

Edited by
Tasneem Siddiqui

About the book

This book presents the life and work of 150 men and women who migrated to different parts of Asia to earn a living. Research conducted on migrant workers usually aims to provide statistics and analysis, and that is important. What this book attempts to present, however, is the migrants' own voices, and how they have judged their migration experiences. Their stories reiterate that migration is an extremely complex phenomenon, and that there is no single narrative. It is multi-causal: there are macro level economic, social, political, and environmental realities that create the conditions for migration. These are mixed with micro-level factors like individual household characteristics, and meso-level factors, such as access to migration networks, and the presence of fee-charging recruiting agencies, both formal and informal, that contribute to migration decisions. The consequences of migration are also multidimensional. It has helped many of these men and women to bring major economic and social changes to their lives, households, and communities. On the other hand, it has exposed some to fraud, deceit, abuse, and even death. So far, Bangladesh and its labour-receiving countries have bilaterally managed the labour migration system. This book argues for multilateralism, and a greater role for the UN in setting minimum labour standards.



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Glossary and Abbreviations

| | |
|--------------------------------|---|
| AED | United Arab Emirates' Dirham (currency) |
| BDT | Bangladeshi Taka (currency) |
| B-Kash | A virtual money storage system which allows account holders to transfer funds via a mobile phone. It is widely used among migrants to remit/transfer money. |
| BMET | Bureau of Manpower Employment and Training |
| CCDA | An NGO of Comilla |
| Dalal | The word <i>Dalal</i> means “broker” or “agent” who facilitates migration, arranging flights, jobs and contracts. |
| GFMD | Global Forum on Migration and Development |
| Hundi | Informal means of transferring money and sending remittances |
| JOD | Jordanian Dollar |
| MRPCs | Migrant Rights Protection Committees |
| MYR | Malaysian Ringgit (currency) |
| OMR | Omani Riyal (currency) |
| RPDO | A local NGO of Tangail |
| SAR | Saudi Arabian Riyal (currency) |
| Semi-pucca/ pucca | The word pucca means “solid” in Bangla, Houses that are pucca are typically made out of brick and/or have a concrete base. |
| SGD | Singaporean Dollar |
| Shonar Manush Award | RMMRU awards returnee migrants and their families who have contributed to enterprise or community development |
| SSC | Secondary School Certificate |
| Thikadars | On a job-site, generally the provisioner of the workers or materials needed to complete the task or project. |
| Upazila | Local-level administrative unit in Bangladesh |
| USD | United States Dollar |

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Preface

Anything written on international migration often begins by with the observation that “migration is an extremely complex process.” It is indeed very complex as it takes place across borders. Along with origin and destination countries, transit countries also play an important role in migration. At each end, there are different cultures, policies, legal regimes, recruitment agencies, employers and migrant populations. Earlier, most short-term migrants going abroad were male, but since the 1990s, there has been an increasing feminization, particularly in domestic work and manufacturing. Both males and females who participate in the unskilled sector tend to come from marginalized groups of society. Although migrants are often talked about at national, bilateral and multilateral government forums, their voices are too-often left unheard.

Over the last twenty years, RMMRU has conducted primary research, policy advocacy and grassroots programmes in order to uphold the rights of migrants in Bangladesh and beyond. Since 1997, RMMRU has collected more a thousand testimonies from all corners of Bangladesh. For example, from 1999 to 2003, RMMRU interviewed hundreds of female migrants whose stories demonstrated both outstanding achievement and wretched hardship. RMMRU then began focusing on the efficient flow and effective use of remittances; collecting three hundred stories which highlighted the contribution of migrant workers to their families and local communities. Migration has allowed hundreds of migrants to break out of the chains of poverty and the constraints of class, allowing them to climb the economic ladder towards success.

Following the Arab Spring, many migrants from Libya were forcibly returned to Bangladesh as a result of the conflict. RMMRU took up their fight and mounted a campaign which aimed to establish their right to reintegration and fair compensation. The Migrant Rights Protection Committees (MRPCs) and grassroots NGOs provided front-line services to these returnees. In so doing, RMMRU came across their horrendous stories which highlighted fraudulence, exploitation, loss of land and other assets, sexual and physical abuse, torture, and death. RMMRU was the first organization to draw attention to the plight of irregular migrants travelling through the Bay of Bengal. However, migrants are not just passive victims, their determination and willpower has enabled them to rise up and bring their perpetrators to justice. Over the years, RMMRU realized that all these experiences and anecdotes form an integral part of the migrant story.

Naturally, RMMRU felt these stories had to be brought forward to a wider audience. To respect the privacy of the individuals who have provided us with their accounts, we have changed their names. All of the stories have been collected by RMMRU, except two from Cox's Bazar, which have been taken from newspaper reports (Protham Alo).

In 2016, Bangladesh will host the 9th Global Forum on Migration and Development (GFMD). This will be one of the most important multilateral forums for labour migrants to raise their concerns. Accordingly, RMMRU has decided to publish a number of testimonies from male and female Bangladeshi migrants in order to bring these voices forward. The volume is published as part of preparatory programmes for the GFMD 2016 undertaken by the Bangladesh Civil Society Coordination Committee (BCSCC) for GFMD. This compilation entails one hundred and fifty unique stories. We hope that these stories will help policymakers humanize and better understand the circumstances surrounding migration.

This compilation is the result of twenty years of work, and many hard-working individuals ranging from RMMRU staff to MRPC members, and migrants themselves.

We owe our deep gratitude to the migrants and families who bravely shared their stories with us in our various programmes. We also would like to express our thanks to the migrants who shared their success stories with us by mail in response to our call published in newspapers.

We acknowledge UKaid, International Labour Organization (ILO), International Organization for Migration (IOM), Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC), the Migrant Forum Asia (MFA), Bangladesh Bank, the Ministry of Expatriates' Welfare and Overseas Employment and the Bureau of Manpower and Employment (BMET) for supporting our various programmes through which we have been able to gather all these stories.

I am deeply indebted to all my RMMRU colleagues who helped gather and compile these stories over the years. This compilation is the result of a team effort. They have gone through hundreds of stories, selecting, verifying, editing and translating. Our team consisted of RMMRU-based programme and research associates Iffat Jahan Rimi, Bilkis Sultana, Mahmudol Hasan Rocky, Mahbubur Rahman, and Prodip Kumar Das, and the Canadian interns from the University of Victoria's Centre for Asia-Pacific Initiatives (CAPI) Kieran Stevens, Zachary Brabazon and Joel Toorenburgh. In the

editing and translation process, we partnered one Bangla-speaker with one English-speaker. This partnership contributed to the richness, and lucid precision of language. I am deeply grateful to all of them.

I am thankful to the UKaid funded British Council's PROKAS Project for enabling our endeavors with their generous financial support. I particularly thank Catherine Cecil, team leader of PROKAS, who took immense interest in these migrant stories.

Tasneem Siddiqui

31 December 2016

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

This book presents the lives and works of one-hundred-fifty migrants from Bangladesh. They migrated to a variety of locations across Asia. The aim of this book is to give a first-hand account of migrants' various experiences. The stories come from different time periods with different historical contexts. Together, the stories touch on all the different stages of migration: from pre-migration decision-making to post-migration integration. Both men and women are represented in the stories, with thirty-seven coming from female migrants, and the remaining one hundred and thirteen coming from male migrants. Our intention is to highlight that the migration experiences do not follow a single narrative.

Their stories are full of adventure and achievements. Some of the stories tell of a migrant breaking out of poverty and moving up the economic ladder. Other migrants experience social mobility and are able to overcome traditional values or taboos. At the same time, there is a dark side of migration as well. There are stories of migrants becoming paupers, losing their lands, homes, and sometimes other assets. Some of their stories are full of fraudulence, deception, inhumane work and living conditions and in some cases even death.

Some stories show the agency of women, shouldering the responsibility of being the family breadwinner, working hard in their respective countries and providing for an education for their children back home. There are also stories of women who did not succeed: experiences abuse and torture in destination countries, or deprivation of proper nutrition. Some women are mentally and physically broken by the physical violence and sexual harassment they faced during their work.

We have structured the book into six main chapters, based on their destination: the Gulf States, other Arab States, Southeast Asia, East Asia, and South Asia. Most of the stories that we present here are self-explanatory. Nonetheless, in the following, we are trying to summarize some of the major trends found in their stories. Our analysis first looks at drivers of their migration, followed by a commentary on the time-period, the money they spent on migration, and what they earned. Subsequently, we look at the fortunes and misfortunes of migration.

Drivers of Migration

Almost all of the migrants identified economic reasons as the major impetus behind their migration. Poverty, unemployment, business failures, ensuring a better income, and dreams of becoming rich are all mentioned by these migrants, over and over again, as a reason for their migration. Some of these migrants became unemployed due to the decline in relevance of their traditional vocation such as weaving, wild fishing, and others.

Social and demographic reasons are also quite common. The obligation or responsibility for their households and families was frequently cited among the eldest sons and daughters. Occasionally, the sudden death of an income-earning family member makes migration an absolute necessity. Adult children, and school drop-outs are often sent abroad by their parents to save them from becoming spoiled, lazy, or mixing with the wrong crowd. Some migrate to avoid their families incessant reminders and bothering about not having a job at home. Sometimes, the absence of working-age men in the family drive women to migrate. Some migrants just wanted to experience a new country, and others are just desperate to start a new life, to venture into a new world and face the unknown.

Social networks play a critical role connecting Bangladeshis to migration opportunities. Many migrants follow family members, relatives, or neighbours to their migration destination. These connections naturally share information, and opportunities and thereby facilitating the migration. Local *Dalals* (agents/middlemen) often entice and seduce families overstating the opportunities and possibilities. The families then share this with their children who may be out of work. This trend is especially relevant in connection to maritime migration to Malaysia. *Dalals* lure young workers from Siranjanj with the promise that migration will cost only BDT 10,000. These connections can have both positive and negative consequences for the migrant.

In addition to social and economic reasons, environmental factors also play a large role in the migration decisions. The loss of land, and therefore livelihood, to river bank erosion, salinization, waterlogging, and drought were all cited as contributing factors in migration decisions.

Year, cost and income from migration

These stories were collected over a time period from the late 1980s up until 2015. Eighteen percent of the male migrants in this book began their

migration journeys between 1988-1990. Around 14 per cent of male migrants migrated between 1991 and 1995. Just over ten percent of these stories of migration take place between 1996 and 2000, and another 10 per cent between 2001 and 2005. Almost thirty percent migrated between 2011 and 2015. Finally, just less than twenty percent take place between 2006 and 2010.

There were bans and restrictions on female migration from Bangladesh until 2003. Therefore, the majority of women began to migrate after this period. The highest proportion (46 per cent) went between 2011 and 2015. Another 36 per cent migrated between 2006 and 2010. However, this does not mean that women did not migrate before 2003. Around 13 per cent of these women migrated between 1991 and 2003, and 7 per cent migrated between 2003-2005.

The cost of migration is a major concern in migration literature, given that a person migrates to earn a living. General logic would dictate that someone going to work should not have to buy their employment, but the reality is quite different. Migrants often pay astronomical costs for a simple work visa. This is popularly known as the cost of migration.

These stories show that the cost of male migration was initially double that of female migration, but in recent years, it has grown to about four times larger. Up until the 1990s, male migrants paid about BDT 68,000. Between 1991 and 1995, the cost did not increase very much, averaging only BDT 71,000. However, after 1996, the cost of male migration increased dramatically. From 1996 to 2005 these migrants paid BDT 180,000 on average. From 2006 to 2010, it increased again to BDT 220,000 on average. Lastly, from 2011-2015, the average cost of migration rose to BDT 350,000.

Until the year 2000, female migrants paid around BDT 30,000 to migrate. From 2000 to 2005 the average was about BDT 43,000, and those who migrated from 2006 to 2015 paid BDT 76,000.

It is important to note that, in these case studies, income from migration did not increase much for male migrants over the years. During the early 1990s, on an average, lowly skilled male migrants earned around BDT 20,000 per month. By 2015, the average earning grew to only BDT 28,000 per month. Female migrants, on the other hand, earned around BDT 6,000 per month during the early 1990s, but their incomes increased to an average of BDT 14,000 per month during the period of 2011 to 2015. Of course, one has to take into account that not all migrants experienced regular payment of their

salaries. On the other hand, many of them earned extra income working additional jobs. Many migrants were not paid at all.

The Fortunes of Migration

These stories show all the fruits that migration can bear for a worker. Some of these migrants experienced regular jobs, and regular payment, allowing them to send regular remittances to their families. For many families, these remittances were the main source of income for the day-to-day cost of living. Some others saved a portion of their remittances for eventual investment into different ventures. Of course, the first and foremost dream of many migrants is to purchase land in their village or nearby cities, to renovate their home, or to construct a new one. These new homes range from a semi-pucca to pucca houses, single-story to multi-story buildings. In order to create income and employment for family members, these migrants have used their remittances to purchase agricultural and/or commercial land. Some of the returning migrants have constructed market places, shops or malls, as well as purchased new stalls in different areas. Migrants often feel obligated to bring family members abroad, to provide them with the same opportunities that they had. This is considered a significant indicator of a migrant's success, and there are a number of cases of this in this book. Interestingly, we also see some migrants purchasing work visas from their employers and then selling them in their local areas, becoming middlemen (*Dalals*) to earn money. In rural areas, marriage is an expensive institution in Bangladeshi culture. People must spend a lot, sometimes voluntarily, sometimes involuntarily. Often, the ability to arrange and pay for the marriage of a family member is considered a great blessing of migration.

Some of the returnee migrants have developed all kinds of business and enterprises. However, the kind varies depending on their region and environment. Returnee migrants from Comilla often invested in fishery businesses. One group established a fish-feed mill, and another group started an ice plant for the storage of fish. In Tangail, a few of the migrants have established hand loom factories which weave sarees. In Keraniganj, a number of migrants invested in a dairy farm, and another returnee from Japan established a hospital. Likewise, migrants in other regions invested in the mechanization of agriculture, purchasing tractors, power tillers, and rice mills for their land.

Other migrants have invested in transportation. They now own pickup trucks, micro-buses, CNGs, three-wheelers, and rickshaws. One migrant

opened a kindergarten school in his village. Although this school is a business enterprise, it still gives the locals access to quality education.

The stories depict both positive and negative outcomes concerning education. Some of those who migrated had to give up their educational opportunities. However, a large number stated that, through migration, they could ensure better education for their families.

Some migrants have invested in their community as well as in themselves. Many donated to their local mosque, and a few even constructed mosques. Some contributed to the construction or repair of mud roads which connect their houses and others' to main roads. Female migrants highlighted the importance of education for their children far more often than their male counterparts.

These stories also give account of the migration of husbands and wives to the capital city of India. These examples expose us to the reality of an integrated labour market. In Delhi, there is a labour shortage of workers in garbage collection. Therefore, the *thikadars* involved in garbage collection often pay their Bangladeshi co-workers to bring back other young workers from their respective villages. These *thikadars* are interested in the migration of couples, since the wives can be recruited to do domestic work, making the inadequate salary of garbage collection viable in Delhi through the joint income of husbands and wives. These irregular Bangladeshi migrant families face the fear of arrest and eviction, yet they continue to stay and work in order to keep themselves together as a family. Unlike female workers in other countries, these migrants working in Delhi are not bound to the homes of their employers. For that reason there are less instances of verbal harassment, physical violence, and sexual abuse.

Misfortunes of migration

These stories illustrate that migration has become an increasingly risky venture. Cheating, deception, and fraudulence are present in every step of the migration process.

The three most important functions of recruitment are: dissemination of information, recruitment of workers, and the payment of migration costs. These functions are too often performed by the informal *Dalals*. Stories upon stories show that the *Dalals* promise exorbitant salaries, give misinformation about the nature of work or type of job, and sometimes even lie about the country of destination. *Dalals* send these migrants with

so-called “free visas”. The understanding is that the migrants will be able to choose their job upon arriving at their destination. In reality, there is no such thing as a “free visa”. When these “free visa” migrants arrive in their destinations, they may not find work for months. Sometimes these jobless migrants are caught by local police and put into detention camps before being sent home to Bangladesh. In the case of those who are sent with visas tied to a specific employer, the migrant is often forced upon arrival to sign a new contract, with a much lower salary. In both these scenarios, these migrants are dissatisfied workers who end up returning soon after they leave.

Many of the female migrants experience good work and living conditions in their countries of destination. However, many others are not so fortunate. Almost all of the female migrants, whose stories are represented in this book, come from rural areas, and had no prior experience to the world outside their homes. Migration exposed them, not only to a new country, but also to a new culture. It can take quite a while to adjust to the food of a new country, and if they are not used to it, they feel that they are not being fed adequately by their employers. Female migrants, in particular, cite experiencing homesickness during their work abroad. Nevertheless, most of these problems can be overcome. However, some of the female migrants experience non- or irregular-payment of their wages, physical or verbal abuse, and sexual abuse and harassment. It is natural that the migrants facing these problems flee the houses of their employer, taking refuge in embassies, and calling home to organize their return. This has led to a number of traditionally female migrant-sending countries to reform their policies, either banning or reducing migration of women as domestic workers to some destination countries.

It is heartbreaking to see that many migrants lose out, even before migrating. For years, many are unable to migrate, even after paying the hefty fees. Another interesting finding in these stories is that: the success or failure of migration does not depend on whether they initially migrated through regular or irregular channels. It depends more on the characteristics of their employers. This means some regular migrants can end up in a harmful situation, while an irregular migrant may find a way to prosper economically and socially.

A number of these stories depict the consequences of irregular migration through the Bay of Bengal. According to UNHCR, from 2012 to June 2014, 80,000 Burmese Rohingyas and Bangladeshis have migrated through the

Bay of Bengal. There are stories of deception, abduction, ransom, detention, torture, death, and even mass graves. Many of these migrants, in the case of Bangladesh, are the poorest of the poor, mostly from climate change affected areas. Earlier, these people could never have participated in the international short-term labour market, as they did not have the money. The human smugglers lured them to migrate through maritime rout, by promising to charge very cheap fees of BDT 10,000. These migrants have no clue that they are about to face ransom, slave-like work conditions, and death. No outcome is more tragic than this.

Globalization has created many opportunities for Bangladeshi migrants to take part in the international labour market. However, it also exposed them to life threatening situations. Some of the stories tell of us of migrants who had to flee Libya, following the civil war sparked by the Arab Spring, in order to save their own lives. These migrants were caught in the midst of battling, ransacking militias, losing or having to leave behind everything they owned to flee to neighbouring countries like Tunisia, spending days living under open sky with no shelter. In the end they were repatriated by international agencies and the Government of Bangladesh. They returned home with nothing, and the Government paid some of them BDT 50,000 as compensation for their hardship. Nevertheless, their migration experience did not bear the fruit they had dreamt it would.

These stories also give us some interesting insights into repeat migrants. The majority of those who have done very well, economically and socially, as a result of their migration, generally do not want to migrate again. Of course, there are exceptions. A percentage of these migrants do not want to stay in Bangladesh, preferring the lifestyle they lived abroad.

Failed first-time migrants, on the other hand, often repeatedly attempt to migrate. The underlying assumption is that this particular *Dalal* was bad, and cheated them, and they would do better with a different *Dalal*. One cannot blame them because there are quite a number examples of migrants becoming successful only after their third or fourth venture. There are even stories of those who had successful first migrations, but failed in subsequent attempts.

Conclusion

These stories raise many issues. They highlight that there are problems not only in destination countries, but also in the countries of origin. Bangladesh has progressed well in the area of establishing a separate ministry to govern labour migration and framing new policies and laws

on governing short-term international labour migration. It has established banks for providing access to low-interest loans. Migration has also been integrated into Bangladesh's Seventh Five-Year Plan. However, there is a major inconsistency between these laws and policies and how migration is conducted in reality. Even today, *Dalals* are the major players in migration. Two alternatives are possible: either we must register the *Dalals*, bringing them under legal purview, or ban their operations and take stern action against those who are involved in migration processing without a license. Today, the Government seems more focused on recouping the money *Dalals* have taken, but the Government hardly takes any meaningful step to punish the *Dalals*. As of now, there is little evidence of *Dalals* being punished for fraudulent practices. Some labour-receiving countries of the Gulf are also realizing that there are problems in the current system of recruitment. Qatar is bringing in reforms in the Kafala system, Kuwait is fixing the minimum wage for domestic workers and the UAE is transferring the responsibility of domestic workers from the Ministry of the Interior to the Ministry of Labour.

Currently, labour recruitment is a bilateral issue between origin and destination countries. However, establishing minimum common standards on the issues of wages, working hours, living conditions, and recruitment procedures will help both origin and destination countries in governing migration. Therefore, multilateralism is the only way forward to bring change to the flawed migration system. The UN has formed the Global Forum on Migration and Development (GFMD) to deal with these complex issues. Unfortunately, the GFMD recommendations are currently completely non-binding. Over the next few years, the GFMD should aim to create common minimum standards and to create mechanisms that ensure countries maintain these standards. In 2015, the UN stated its new development agenda, entitled the "Sustainable Development Goals" (SDG). Migration was discussed as one of the possible SDGs, but was not chosen at the end. Nonetheless, the SDGs recognize the potential contribution of internal and international migrants in attaining its 17 goals. Migration was mentioned and accommodated in paragraphs 14, 23, 25, 27, and 29, as well as in targets 8.7, 8.8, 10.7, and 17.8. To attain the goals of these SDGs, participating countries must promote "safe and secure work conditions for all workers, including internal and international migrants".

CHAPTER II

MIGRATION TO GULF STATES

BAHRAIN

Brief stint in Bahrain gets me on my feet

Mohammad Mokammel

I am Md. Mokammel from Comilla District. I am a returnee migrant. My father passed away when I was young. I have four brothers, three sisters, and mother. My elder brother worked in Bahrain, helping my three sisters get married off, and helping my brothers continue their studies. In 2009, at the age of twenty, I migrated to Bahrain with the help of my family friends at a cost of BDT 320,000. To collect this sum, I had to sell my share of land and borrow from some relatives. My family owns a small amount of land, but it is not enough to provide for us. It is also hard to find job here. Due to the lack of job opportunities in Bangladesh, I had to go abroad. I am not well educated, passing only the *Dakhil* (*Madrassa* SSC) examination. I was interviewed for a job as a police officer, but they asked for a bribe. I realised that I needed to pay less to go abroad than to get a job with the police.

Before going abroad, my friend told me that if I went to Bahrain, I could get work in a market. However, after arriving in Bahrain I could not get in contact with the friend that made that promise. I searched, but never managed to find him. I was unemployed in Bahrain for one year. After learning the language, I managed to get a job in a market. My salary was BDT 35,000-40,000. After covering my living costs, I was able to send BDT 20,000 home to my family. With this money, my family was able to repay some of my initial migration loan, but there is still BDT 50,000 remaining. I worked in that market for one year and four months, but I returned home once my visa expired. I returned to Bahrain and I got my job back at the same market for nine months. My visa had some problems and I was detained by the police and then later sent back to Bangladesh. Now I have more responsibility so I returned to Bahrain. This time I decided that I will not go back again. I found work with a fisheries project. Upon return I got married and had a daughter. My job at fishing project, doesn't make me a lot of money. One day, I found myself with an opportunity to learn how to drive through a RMMRU program. In my experience, I have found that

when I have specific skills I can earn more money more easily. I will try to find work as a driver in Bangladesh. Perhaps one day, I will buy a car and rent it out to earn money.

Did not work first time, hoping it will second time

Abdul Hasan

My name is Abdul Hasan. I am from Tongi, Gazipur. My wife still lives in the village. Before my migration, my wife borrowed some money from an NGO to set up a grocery stall in the village. We were managing this stall, but we were faced with many challenges. People often took goods, promising to pay later, but then never returned. As the business was not succeeding and we were incurring huge debts, I decided to migrate to Bahrain. I was forty-three at the time and spent BDT 450,000 for the journey. In order to secure the money, my wife borrowed from an NGO and she sold her and her sister's jewellery. In a terrible turn of events, I was betrayed by the middleman as he disappeared with my money. I never in a million years thought I would be cheated by a person who had been my tenant for over fifteen years. Even though I had all my documents relating to the transaction, there was no way to apprehend the thief. I didn't give up and I began speaking with another man about migrating. He promised to secure me a job in Bahrain that would pay BDT 40,000 per month if I paid BDT 300,000. Given my past experience, I agreed to pay only one-third of the amount in advance. I promised to pay the rest once the visa was delivered. Accordingly, I received my visa, and then I went to Bahrain.

I got a job in a construction factory as a foreman with a salary of BDT 40,000. Unfortunately, my bad luck followed me. My passport and other documents were seized by my employer. According to him, there were "security reasons." I was told that my living costs were not covered and hence, the amount was deducted from my salary. As a result, I was able to remit only BDT 20,000 per month. This was not much given the huge up-front migration cost, so a great deal of it went toward clearing my debt back home. I could not contribute much to providing for my family, and couldn't help fund my children's education. My wife had to borrow some money from her father to deal with this. In Bahrain, I am now looking for a job with a better salary, but since I can't get my passport back I am unable to apply for these jobs. I fear that if I leave this job against my employer's will, the police may arrest me. My life is full of uncertainty these days, but what else can I do?

IRAQ

Sixty of us were sold into slavery

Zulfiqar Islam

I am Zulfiqar Islam. I am from the Chorbana village in Sirajganj district. When I was young, I studied at a *Madrassa*. Despite many attempts, I did not get any work in the countryside where I lived. My family, including my wife and three children, needed to be provided for. We did not have much agricultural land. I considered the potential earnings that I could get by moving abroad. I wanted to help my family, to give my children a better education, and to save money for my eventual retirement. So I decided migration would be a good option. In 2014, I went to Iraq. It was a difficult and dangerous experience. I worked there for seventeen months, but had to return home. After Iraq, I was supposed to go to Malaysia. I paid a middleman BDT 50,000 to help arrange for my migration there. A few days later, the middleman told me I would instead be going to Qatar, demanding more money: BDT 450,000. For that reason I had to borrow BDT 100,000 from BRAC Bank. Another BDT 100,000 I had to borrow from a local cooperative society. For the rest of the amount, I had to sell my land and borrow from my relatives. After all this borrowing and selling, I managed to pay the middleman his required sum to send me to Qatar. One morning the middleman came to my home. He informed me that he had got me a visa, and I would leave soon.

Immediately, I went for a medical check-up, provided my fingerprint, and completed other formalities at the government manpower office. One of the private manpower agents was responsible for my migration, working for the agency: Career Overseas. At 7:00 pm, I was present at that office. I stayed in a long queue with 60 other aspirant migrants for a long time. We waited for an official to inform us about the details of our visa. Finally, an officer informed us that they could not arrange a visa for Qatar, but could arrange us all visas to go to Iraq. Many were unwilling to go to Iraq when they heard this. However, the officer informed us that if we did not go to Iraq we would not get back the money we paid. Furthermore, he mentioned that in Qatar our salaries would have been only BDT 20,000, but in Iraq they would be BDT 32,000. He said we were lucky to be going to Iraq. Since none of us had any alternatives, we all agreed to go to Iraq. As soon as we reached Iraq, the middlemen confiscated all of our passports. We were

then forced into cars. I noticed my car was turning into an area surrounded by high security fencing, and there were armed forces standing out front. Finally we entered into a tin-roof house inside the security area. When we got out of the car, we found ourselves confined to a room. There was no way out. There were 180 of us in that room. We were told we would be taken to our workplace in the morning. So, the next day, they confiscated all of our mobile phones, and eventually returned them without the SIM cards. They told us we'd need to buy new ones for USD 15. Some of us did that and phoned home to tell our families we were fine, but in Iraq. Nevertheless, we passed our days in that confined area, hoping for work, but never getting anything. Later, they confiscated our mobile phones again.

We spent a month like this, and asked for our salary. Upon asking for our salary, an officer informed us that we had all been purchased. He said "why would we pay you any salary, we bought you. If you ask for salary again, you will be killed." We had difficulties with food, water, and other things, living in that tin shed house in the desert. The temperature was 60-65 degrees Celsius which caused skin diseases amongst some of us. I established good relations with one of the armed guards, managing to get a mobile SIM card from him, but I had to promise on the Holy Quran, that I would not disclose that he did this. After getting the new SIM card, I phoned Siddique Rahman (on recommendation from another migrant), an engineer in Bangladesh. I thought that, since this man was an engineer, he would be a good person with good advice. Siddique Rahman informed my family and together they lodged a case against the recruiting agency that kept us in slavery. Back in Iraq, we collectively demanded to be sent home. Sixteen of us were very vocal, and were separated from the rest of the group by the authorities. They told the group of us that we would be sent home. They put us in a car and took us to another area, isolated, empty of people, with only birds around. I thought that they were about to kill us. After three days someone came to tell us we would be taken to Baghdad for work. The engineer helped me contact Rights Jessore, an NGO in Bangladesh, who told me that they were working hard to bring us home. Still, we were taken to Baghdad. We finally got work making BDT 30,000 per month. I worked in Baghdad for six months, but the conditions were very difficult. Everywhere was under the gaze of CC cameras. If any of us stopped working, even briefly, to rest, they would notice on the cameras and come to beat us. After six months, I returned home with the help Rights Jessore and Shishuk. I was able to remit BDT 90,000 for all my time in Iraq. Currently I have no job. I don't know how I can provide for my three children, and help them in their education. I

have not cleared my debts, still owing BDT 300,000 to the aforementioned groups. I don't know what I will do next!

Heaven and earth difference in what *Dalal* said and what I faced

Haider Mia

My name is Haider Mia and I am from Sharsha in the Jessore district. I am from a farming family, but I was never really interested in following the footsteps of my father. There were no opportunities in my home community, so I decided that it would be best to look for employment overseas. In 2008, with the help of a local *Dalal*, I paid BDT 250,000 for a flight and visa to Iraq. The *Dalal* also arranged a two-year contract for a job at a hotel. My father had to lease 66 decimals (0.27 hectares) of his land in order to finance my migration. Although I was supposed to be received at the airport, nobody came for me. After two days in the airport, I informed the local police who then contacted the recruiting agency which had set up my migration. Subsequently, a representative from the agency picked me up from the airport and took me to Mazhab town. I started working immediately, but I had no fixed tasks. I had to attend to anything they assigned me. The *Dalal* from Bangladesh promised me a salary of USD 350, but I was only paid USD 200. After a lot of persuasion, my employer increased my salary by twenty-five dollars, still far short of what was promised. Even so, I had to work long hours and I was not paid any overtime. Sometimes, I worked twelve to sixteen hours a day! I also had difficulty getting proper food for myself. I managed two years under such conditions, but after two years, I was finally allowed to return to Bangladesh. Currently, I am trying to migrate to Lebanon because I hear that the conditions there are better.

KUWAIT

Creating a new self

Jamila Begum

I lost my father at a young age. I was married off very early, but a few years later my husband deserted me, forcing me to return to my maternal home. My mother did not have enough money to feed me properly, so I had to provide for myself by working as a day labourer, in government earth-digging programs. On a few occasions I developed relationships with men that I wanted to turn into marriage. However, these men were mainly interested only in other things. When they discovered what I wanted, they lost interest.

I left the country to get out of my depression, migrating to Kuwait for work. It was tough initially to adjust, but the family with which I stayed was pious and kind. Along with me, there were two other domestic workers. One cooked, while the other cleaned. I was responsible for looking after the elderly household head, as he was an invalid. When I first went there, I did not know how to take care of him. Gradually, one of the daughters-in-law in the house taught me everything, i.e. giving him a bath, taking care of his bed sore, giving him regular medicine, etc. I even learned how to give an injection to someone with diabetes.

I stayed in Kuwait for twelve years, working at the same house the entire time. They treated me like a family member. I used to join them in different women's parties. I was able to visit my home in Bangladesh two times, and helped two other girls from my village to migrate. I also sent remittances to my family, which they used to support their daily needs. When I finally returned, I brought home a savings worth BDT 800,000 with me. With the help of a family member, I bought a store in the marketplace, opening a tailoring shop. There I employed two people, a tailor and a helper. I have no plan to migrate again.

I could not even clear my debts

Mohammad Niaz Uddin

My name is Md. Niaz Uddin of the Dharmapur village, Sitakunda of Chittagong. I am a returnee migrant. We have five members in my family: my mother and father, a sister, my younger brother, and myself. We owned a small parcel of land, but it could not provide for all of us. I worked in the field of agriculture with my father, and I also owned a small grocery store in my village. However, for various reasons I had to close my store. Therefore, our only income source was our land which was simply not enough. Due to these factors, I decided to migrate to Kuwait in 2012, at the age of twenty-eight, spending BDT 200,000. I gave this money to a middleman. Apart from that I also had to spend another BDT 50,000 for the purposes of medical tests, transportation, clothes, shoes, bags, etc. I borrowed part of the money from my father, and borrowed the rest from the Islami Bank. The middleman promised to get me a job at a chicken farm with a salary of BDT 20,000. However, after arriving in Kuwait I found myself unemployed for six months. I had to spend money that I earned in Bangladesh to survive those six months. Eventually, I found work as a house-cleaner at a few different places, and also I got some part-time work in a shopping mall as a janitor. One day I tried to contact the middleman who had sent me abroad, but I could not reach him. I also got a job in a vegetable garden, making BDT 7,000 per month. After my daily expenses, I had no money to send home. I worked in that garden in Kuwait from 2012 to 2015, but due to the poor salary I saved nothing and remitted nothing. I was also unable to clear my debt with the bank. My father had to sell his cows and goats to help clear my debt with the bank, and now we have no other sources of income. I have no job in Bangladesh. My days are spent in miserable conditions. Although I help my father cultivate his lands, this is not enough to provide for our family. I'd like to migrate again to change my fortune.

I dream of opening a hospital in my area

Mohammad Moinul Hossain

I am from the Kolail village of Nawabgonj in Dhaka City. My two brothers went abroad in the 1980s and so I went abroad as well. My brothers were both working as drivers and so I learned how to drive before I migrated. I did it to join them, not to escape poverty per se. I come from a big family with ten children including me. For nine years, I lived abroad in Kuwait. I worked there as a driver. My brothers both worked there as well at the same time. Now one of my brothers has returned to Bangladesh, starting a business in Tangi.

When I returned from Kuwait, I established a rice mill. The business has been successful. Currently, I have two pickup trucks, and two shops with proper cement structures. I also have four gonda of land. This allows me to earn a good income of BDT 50,000 per month and it has also provided employment for a dozen others. I dream of opening a hospital in my village so that people can have better treatment.

Migration gave me confidence to expand from one business to another

Manik Mia

I am from the Poromtola village in the Comilla district. The economic situation of the village is quite poor. My family was suffering greatly from poverty. This poverty motivated me to take matters into my own hands. I decided that in order to alleviate our poverty, I should go abroad to look for work. I didn't have enough money to finance my own migration so I borrowed from some neighbours and relatives. With this money, I planned my migration to Kuwait. The year was 1993.

I began working as an unskilled worker. However, within one year, I was able to send money back to repay the debts that I had taken. I spent five years in Kuwait and then I returned to Bangladesh. I bought some land for cultivation. From this point on, things improved greatly for me. I decided to return to Kuwait. The second time, I stayed for nine years and then returned again to Bangladesh.

When I returned, I didn't know what I was supposed to do with the money that I had earned. I didn't know how to make a living in Bangladesh. At that

time, I got some advice and help from a friend of mine. Anis Mia and Tazul Islam advised me to cultivate fish from the ponds on my land and then also to lease some other ponds. He believed this would be a profitable business for me. With this advice, I started cultivating fish on my land and elsewhere too. In the first year, I earned a large profit. I was encouraged and I leased four more ponds from other part of the village. I made my own fishing nets and everything. I now have seven employees working these ponds. I engage more labourers when we harvest the fish.

With time, I have realized the great amount of food that fish consume. I am working to establish my own fish feed mill so that I can be more self-reliant and reduce costs. The machine isn't finished yet, but I hope it will be soon. My success was triggered and fuelled by my migration experience. I am so lucky to be able to provide and care for my family.

I transformed myself from debtor to a provider

Mohammad Ashique Mia

I live in the Terial Village of the Sitakunda *Upazila* in Chittagong District. I faced many hardships in the early years of my life. I had neither a job nor a business. I did not know what to do about my economic situation. On top of this, I was not highly educated. As a result, I found myself unable to raise my voice in society.

However, now my situation has changed. What I was unable to find in Bangladesh, I found abroad. I had to work very hard in order to earn this. It was very painful to remain far away from loved ones for such a long time. One cannot understand this pain unless they themselves endure this situation.

My elder brother, Abu Bakar, was the first person from my family to migrate abroad. He now works in Kuwait, where he has spent the last eighteen years. I myself migrated to Kuwait with Bakar's help, and stayed there for five years. My migration cost was BDT 90,000. In Kuwait, I worked for the same company for five years and I was able to save some money. These savings ended up changing my life. Now I have found my voice in society.

After returning home to Bangladesh, I consulted with Bakar and decided not to migrate again because I no longer feel economically helpless. Instead, I decided to try and do something better in my own country. Within a few years, my family acquired a significant amount of property and we opened

a successful business. The capital for these ventures was supplied by my brother and me. Earlier, we had been in debt, but now we had become rich.

As part of the decision to set up a business in Bangladesh, I purchased some land, started an aquaculture business, and a chicken farm. I owned one pond to hold fish, but I also leased another, so I could expand my aquaculture business to two ponds. After deducting expenditures, I earn, on average, BDT 250,000 per year from my aquaculture business, and from my chicken farming I earn, on average, BDT 150,000 per year. I also own a factory which produces sanitation products, and a small mall in a nearby bazar. The mall cost me BDT 2,500,000 to build, and now the rent from this venture pays me BDT 240,000 per year. My total assets are valued at nearly BDT twenty million. In my businesses I employ nearly forty employees. My family's success has hinged upon remittances moving through formal banking channels.

I achieved the results I wanted

Mohammad Farid Hossain

Finding a job in Bangladesh can be very difficult. In my own case, I could not find one. As a result, I decided I would have to migrate abroad. I dreamt of a job that could bring prosperity to my family. My family had not been very wealthy. My father owned a small business and he was the only one in the family who was earning money.

In 1997, I contacted a recruiting agency hoping to find information about going abroad. The recruiting agency helped me get connected with a job in Kuwait. Soon I was working in Kuwait as a postman. My salary was KWD 600 per month (roughly USD 2,000). While I was in Kuwait, I lived a very frugal life, saving every bit of money. This allowed me to save a large portion of my earnings. Knowing that this money would go to a good purpose helped me get through the difficult times.

I remitted my savings home though formal banking channels. I accumulated many real-life experiences abroad which helped me gain a deeper understanding of life. I also learned a lot about rules and regulations, and about office-work and other professional subjects.

I worked in Kuwait for thirteen years before returning home to Bangladesh in 2011. Currently, I run my own cloth business, which is going well thus far. I have also built a new home, and purchased some additional land.

Although I lived abroad, and had to be without my family for some years, I achieved the results I wanted. If one can make success at the cost of sufferings, I think those sufferings are bearable. However, one has to make proper use of their hard-earned money.

OMAN

If I had not gone to Oman I wouldn't be here today

Suresh Nath

I am currently seventy years old. Before migrating, I worked in a jute mill at Madhobkundo. I also worked on my own land, cultivating and growing crops. However, it was difficult to provide for my family in this way. For this reason, I decided to change my profession. Ultimately, I wanted to change my life.

After working twenty years in the jute mill, I had saved only BDT 80,000. I spent it all on my migration to Oman. I worked in Oman for twelve years, eventually bringing my elder son to live with me for a portion of my time there. Together, we tried to change our lives. Soon, my eldest son brought his two younger brothers to work with him in Oman. Currently, my three sons are still working abroad, involved with small businesses and enterprises. My sons remit money through banking channels. Using remittance money from my sons, I have now set up a small stall at College Road in Sitakunda, near my home. I also have five pieces of land near College Road, the total value of which is approximately BDT 50,000,000. I have already built houses on two of these properties. These houses pay me a handsome rent, a good portion of which I put in the bank for savings. I consider these earnings to be family income. My sons send their remittances under their mother's name, as she also owns some property.

If I had not gone abroad to Oman, I would never be where I am today. I worked hard to change my life, and my sons are now doing the same. If we did not use this hard-earned money, then all of our hard work would be for nothing. We are reaping the benefits of those years of hard work. Our decision to save the money we made abroad was important; if we had spent our money on a lavish lifestyle while we were abroad, we would have none of what we have today. I think all migrants should try their best to spend their money on things that are beneficial in the long term, rather than focussing on short-term luxuries.

My skills made the difference

Faridur Rahman

I belong to a family that barely gets by. However, migrating to Oman for work changed my family's fortune. Like many others, I migrated at the young age of eighteen. Since we could barely afford to feed ourselves, my family and I had to take out a loan to cover the migration cost.

Initially, I was assigned as a helper to an electrician. While supporting him in his work as an apprentice, I learned his trade. Years later, I left my company and joined another group of electrical workers as sub-contractor. Over this period, I had become financially quite secure in Oman. I used to send my extra money home through *hundi*, but over the years, I used both formal and informal channels, depending on the amount I was sending. I worked abroad for twenty-two years.

With the money I sent back my family members bought 16 decimals (647 sq. meters) of land. The current worth of that land is an estimated BDT 2,000,000-2,500,000. I also spent BDT 100,000 in constructing a brick house to replace our previous tin one. Upon my return I opened up a store in the local market, spending BDT 400,000. Now, I earn about BDT 15,000-20,000 per month from this store alone. Finally, I helped two of my fellow villagers to migrate to Oman. They are still working there, helping to provide for their families. I have earned my fortune, and I do not want to migrate anymore. To tell the truth, my life is an example of going from a zero to hero.

I never had to look back

Mohammad Ahsan

I am Md. Ahsan. I live in Chapatoli village, Chittagong District. A few years ago, I remember looking at the prosperity of my neighbours, who had family members working abroad, and I was inspired to do so myself one day. I tried many times, but somehow could never secure a job abroad. Finally, after some time, my dream came true, as I found a way to go to Oman for work.

After receiving my visa for Oman, I had it checked by local MRPC members. They found no problems with the visa, and I went ahead with paying the rest of my fees. I also wrote a letter which documented my visa payments

and terms. I had it witnessed by three persons, and emblazoned with an official stamp. Finally, I sent my visa fees through the bank, to ensure my expenses were especially documented and verifiable. After all this, I found myself still needing an extra BDT 100,000 to cover my migration costs, but I had no easy way to get so much money. In order to cover this cost, I thought my only option would be to sell my homestead land.

It was then that a local MRPC member took interest in my situation, and he brought me to a local NGO called Songshoptaque. Following Songshoptaque's advice, I spoke with a bank about taking a loan out. After reviewing my documents, BRAC offered me the necessary BDT 100,000, which enabled me to finally travel to Oman and start the job that I had dreamt about years earlier. So far, I have not faced any problems.

What I dreamt and what actually happened!

Hashem Rahman

I am Hashem Rahman and I am from Daudkandi, Comilla. I am a returnee migrant who left at the age of 23, in 2015. Before leaving, I was studying at Comilla Commerce College, in my second year, and I was also working in a garment factory in order to help provide for my family. I was part of a family of six: my parents, my brother and I, and two sisters. It was very difficult for us to provide three meals a day for ourselves. Since there were no alternatives, I decided to migrate. After paying BDT 350,000 to a middleman in, I was told by him that I would be given work at a restaurant in Oman. After reaching Oman, another middleman took me and other migrants to a dormitory. We had to spend three nights there. One night the owner came and seized our passports. He took us to a government office to verify our papers. The next day the owner took us to our place of work.

I was supposed to be working in a restaurant, but the owner told me the kitchen was still under construction, so I could not work there yet. Until the kitchen was finished he advised me to work in the construction industry, and I did. I met some Bangladeshi co-workers there that told me I wouldn't get my salary regularly. Some of them who had worked for a year or more had only received seven months of pay, and those who had worked six months had only received three months of pay. Like me, many of them were supposed to be working in a restaurant, but were forced to instead work in the construction field. This situation left me feeling completely hopeless.

I worked for one month, but got no salary. When I asked for my salary, the owner informed that it would be given to me later. On days where there was little construction work, I was assigned small jobs like working in a vegetable garden. One day, while working in that garden, I was told I had to climb a tree to trim some branches. While climbing up, I fell and was knocked unconscious. My injuries were so serious that I was taken to the hospital. My legs were in severe pain, and my backbone was fractured. I spent three months in that hospital. I had to have surgery and was forced to use a wheelchair for three months.

When I was able to walk again, in October 2015, I returned home. I am now searching for work in a garment factory. If I get a job I will stay in my country and never migrate again because of my terrible experience of two months of work in Oman. I never received my salary. I had poor luck. Migration gave me nothing but pain and unemployment.

I found peace nowhere, neither in Bangladesh nor in Oman

Rasheda

My name is Rasheda and I am a returnee migrant. I live in Sreepur, Gazipur district, and I am thirty-four. I got married at the age of eighteen. My husband had another wife and children, but I was not informed about that before my marriage. Within a year, I gave birth to a daughter. My husband became angry when he heard I delivered a female child. As a result he frequently beat my daughter. With no other options, I left my husband's home, and moved in with my father. There, I lived with my four sisters and three brothers, and because my father was only a poor labourer, he could not provide for all of us. It was a huge burden for him to provide for my daughter and me, so I decided to migrate. A female middleman, our neighbour, helped me to go to Oman after I paid her BDT 90,000. I was 31 years old then.

After reaching Oman, another middleman asked for another BDT 50,000 in order to get me a job. As I did not have that much money, I was unable to get a decent job. Still, I did manage to find employment as a domestic worker in a home, making OMR 60 (Omani Rial). There were eight members in that household. The head of the household was physically disabled. I was getting a regular salary, but I had to work very hard - helping to nurse my disabled employer, in addition to all the other household chores. With all

this work, I had little time to rest. Therefore, after a few months I became sick, and could no longer work as hard as I had. My employers had no mercy, expecting me to continue all of my work, regardless of my physical condition, but I simply could not go on. After a year and nine months, I returned home. I was eager to get over my illness and see my daughter. I don't want to migrate again. I want to find work in the garment industry here in Bangladesh.

Migration made me, migration broke me

Imran Ali

My name is Imran Ali, and I was born in Pirkhain village, Chittagong District, in 1961. Around the age of ten, I joined the *Mukti Bahini* in Bangladesh's Liberation War. As a child, I could move freely, and thus helped the freedom fighters by carrying bullets, grenades, and other things for the freedom fighters. After the war, I returned to my village, where I lived for a few more years, doing agricultural labour. In 1976, I went to Oman, seeking a better income. Having basically no money at the time, I went to my local Member of Parliament and took a BDT 20,000 loan.

I worked in Oman for eight years. In that time, I sent back a lot of money in remittances to my family. My father had died when I was young, so I took over the responsibility of looking after my siblings, paying for their education and wedding expenses, among other things.

When I returned to Bangladesh, I continued to support my family members. I also bought some agricultural land and began cultivating it. Soon after, at the age of twenty-eight, I married Sanowara Begum. We now have three daughters together. Around two years after my marriage, I went abroad for work again, this time to Dubai. There, I worked as a construction worker, working on many projects in different cities. I gained enough experience to eventually attain the position of chief foreman in my company. My expertise allowed me to make a very good contract with my company, and I thus procured great financial benefits for myself. I also made sure to look after the workers under my supervision, ensuring their welfare as best I could. It helped that my company happened to be a fairly good and reasonable one, providing the required uniforms, safety instruments, and other provisions.

Throughout this time, I continued to support my families with remittances. In 1995, I was able to get a nice four-month break from work to be with

my family in Bangladesh. My family enjoyed many of the little presents I brought with me on this occasion, like blankets and radios. My wife and I had a second daughter in 1996, and I moved back to Bangladesh again. This time, I had some savings in the bank. I remained for two years in Bangladesh with my family, before returning to my old job in Dubai in 1999. This time, my migration costs were much lower (BDT 30,000) because my employer bore much of the fees.

After eight years went by, I began working only part-time in the construction industry. The rest of my time was spent arranging visas and selling them to prospective migrants from my village in Bangladesh. Through this process, I brought many Bangladeshis into Dubai's construction industry. This small business, which I ran in cooperation with my employer, was quite successful until the economic recession of 2008, after which the business was effectively destroyed. The Dubai construction sector was so damaged by the recession that I was forced to move back to Bangladesh in 2010, carrying a huge debt with me. I was forced to sell most of my lands and assets in order to pay back this loan, but I have almost paid it all back. However, I was fortunate to inherit a house in my village, where I now live with my wife and children. Two of my daughters are now married. I spend my time looking after my cows and doing other agricultural work, while saving money and planning to go abroad once more.

Not everyone is as lucky as I am

Jomir Hossain

My name is Jomir Hossain. I am a resident of the Sirajpur in the Noakhali district. On the 16th of January, 2013, I travelled to Oman to get a job as a mason in the construction sector. At the end of the month, I thought that I would receive my salary, but unfortunately, I wasn't paid by my employer. This situation went on for five months. Without money, I had no other option but to seek help from other Bangladeshi migrants. One of the migrants helped me get in contact with a man named Abdul Jabbar. Abdul helped me get in contact with the RMMRU office in Bangladesh. After hearing about my problems, RMMRU suggested that I collect all of my papers and documents and go to the Bangladeshi embassy in Oman. I did not inform my employer about this plan. Somehow he discovered that I wanted to go the Embassy, and he became very angry. I didn't go. One of my fellow workers must have informed him. Somewhat luckily, my employer then told me that he

would pay me all of my overdue salary. He also said that he would help me return to Bangladesh. I received my overdue pay, and in November 2013, I returned to Bangladesh. Not everyone is as lucky as I am.

I could neither become a police officer nor a migrant, let's wait and see if I can be a driver!

Abdullah Al-Hasan

My name is Abdullah al-Hasan and I am originally from Fulgachipara, Chittagong district. In 2013, I paid a *Dalal* BDT 275,000 to travel to Oman for work. The money was collected by my father and my elder brother. My father had some savings, and had been leasing his land for some extra income. He used this extra money to help pay for my migration.

I have three brothers and three sisters. Our mother has passed away. All of my sisters have married. My eldest brother was living in Kuwait, and he is married with two children. My other brother lives in our home district, taking care of our land, and running a small business. Even though we own land, it is not enough to fully sustain us.

After taking my SSC exam, I tried to find a job. I thought maybe I would become a police officer, and so I took the requisite examination. It had two parts: written and oral. I passed the written portion, but failed the oral portion. Finally, I decided that maybe it would be a good idea to leave Bangladesh and work in another country to earn extra money. I knew that it would be possible to earn a good amount of money abroad - the same could not be said of Bangladesh. My earnings would help my family and also allow me the opportunity to save. Unfortunately, the Government of Kuwait was not granting visas then. So, even though my brother was abroad there, he couldn't help me.

Due to all this, I decided to go to Oman with the help of a *Dalal*. He told me that he had arranged a job for me there. I would work at a shop earning BDT 30,000 each month, he said. He said that my accommodations would be arranged by the company, but that I would need to pay for my own food. However, when I arrived in Oman, I soon learned that what the *Dalal* had promised me would not be my reality. I found out that I would actually be working as a construction worker. I had never done any construction work before. I lived there for only five months. I often had no work at all. My wages were paid out to me on a day-by-day basis. The work was physically-

demanding and difficult, so I was unable to keep it up for a long time.

I was forced to return back home, but I was still unable to find a job. However, I soon learned about a driving programme that RMMRU was running. The news of this programme was a blessing. On the 20th of March 2016, I began attending the driving programme which was scheduled to last forty-five days. In training, we did a theoretical component, and a hands-on component with a trainer. When I had decided to return to Bangladesh, I told myself that I would begin something practical: maybe plumbing, or electric work, and so this driving programme worked out well for me. Learning to drive was always a dream of mine and RMMRU helped me to achieve this. Currently, I am trying to migrate abroad again. I now have the opportunity to travel to Saudi Arabia. If this works out then. If not, then I will stay in Bangladesh and find work as a driver.

QATAR

Migration helped my family to stand straight again

Mohammad Kayem

My name is Md. Kayem. My family is from Maoa. Quite sometimes ago we left our village as our ancestral land was taken over by Padma river. My father was a driver and we lived in Korail slum of Dhaka. When I was fifteen years old there was a fight in our slum and someone was stabbed. Police came and arrested me with many others. I was in jail for three months. After paying a lot of money and going through a court case, my father finally bailed me out of jail. It took another few years when I was finally acquitted. I was in class seven. My education got stopped as the school will not allow me to study. I also did not get job anywhere because of my past. Except my father all of us moved back to our village. We started staying at one of our uncle's house.

Another uncle of mine was staying in Qatar. Seeing my father's hardship my uncle agreed to take me to Qatar. However the condition was that I would have to marry his daughter. We all agreed, we got married and in 2014 I joined my uncle in Qatar. My uncle bought a visa from a local Bangladeshi *Dalal* by paying BDT 380,000. My uncle paid half the amount and my father arranged the rest. My uncle found a job for me in a construction company. Since then I am working there. I am earning around BDT 25000 per month. I stay with my uncle and every month sent BDT 20000 for repayment of loan. The loan have already been paid. My younger brother used to work at a garments factory. I decided that he should also come here. He will be earning more than double in Qatar. Accordingly I bought two visas, one for my brother and another one for selling in our village. We made BDT 100,000 profit by selling the visa and my father and brother organised rest of the money. Two months ago my brother joined me. His visa is not tied with his work. We have connected him with a tailoring shop. He has just started working there. With two brothers earning I am hoping that my family will be quite okay. My father has worked hard all along his life for us. Now it is time for him for retire.

Migration helped me to accumulate savings

Mohammad Niamot Uddin

I am Md. Niamot Uddin. I live in Kushiara village in Comilla district. I am currently a migrant, working abroad. I have six members in my family including myself. My father owns a fishing business, my younger brother studies in a *Madrassa*, and my younger sister is currently studying in class 10. My father's income is not enough to provide for us all. I looked for work everywhere, but I could not find work in this country, so I decided to go abroad. The middleman I found work through was one of my relatives.

In July 2010, when I was twenty-eight years old, I migrated to Qatar. My migration cost was BDT 330,000 that I managed through loans from relatives. In Qatar I got a job in a private bank and am now working as an office assistant, earning BDT 40,000 per month. After all my living expenses I still have money left over. I send that money to my village through the NCC bank. I have quickly cleared all my debt and helped pay for the marriage of one of my sisters. Currently my family in Bangladesh experiences better living conditions than before.

I live in fear of debt collectors

Nasir Alam

My name is Nasir Alam. I am from Chandpur, Noakhali, and I am 47 years old. Before migrating I worked in the construction industry, making BDT 10,000 per month. This was not enough to provide for my family. My three children were studying at the time. My family had many needs and wants, so I decided to migrate. I contacted a recruiting agency called Career Overseas, which one of my relatives in the village had put me in touch with. They sent me to Iraq for BDT 450,000. I was promised a decent job with regular salary. This led me to borrow this whole amount from my relatives. I was supposed to go to Qatar, but ended up in Iraq instead. I faced many dangerous situations in Iraq, beyond my imagination. I got no work there. I stayed in the desert, in the terrible heat. I often had no food. I was frequently physically abused. After 5 months, the head of Career Overseas visited us in Iraq, scolding us and beating us when we asked to go back home. Since our mobile phones had been taken away we could not inform our families back home. I managed to get a hold of a phone to contact Rights Jessore and my family after three more months. I informed them of my situation

and they took the necessary steps to bring us back. Currently I have no job at home. I am not educated enough to do office work, and I don't have enough money to start a business. I still owe a huge amount of money to many groups and people. I could not even stay home for this reason, as debt collectors would not leave me alone. I live in fear of them asking me for money I do not have.

Everything worked out well; my story is of success and prosperity

Mohammad Hasnat

I am Md. Hasnat. My father's name is Md. Mojammel Haque Molla. I live in Najirpur village in Chandina *Upazila*, Comilla District. I attained a S.S.C education, but due to my lack of funds I was not able to study further. After leaving school, I was unemployed.

I was thinking of going abroad. Accidentally, I attended an MRPC-organized courtyard meeting, and I learned that if I go abroad after taking proper training my income would be higher, and I would be exploited less. After that, through communicating with one of my relatives, I got the idea to come to Dhaka and learn the plumbing trade. After I had spent some time getting trained as a plumber in Dhaka, one of my relatives offered me a work visa for Qatar. However, this relative demanded that I pay them BDT 350,000 in exchange for the visa. My family was not able to obtain this sum of money for me.

Not being able to afford my visa greatly distressed my family. My father got in touch with an MRPC member named Akhteruzzaman to discuss this issue. Following his advice, in October 2015, I went to the Centre for Community Development Assistance (CCDA) in Comilla with my father. There, a CCDA employee brought me to the Migrant Welfare Bank in order to submit the necessary documents to procure a migration loan of BDT 150,000. Soon after, I received the migration loan, and, at last, on October 15th, 2015, I went to Qatar for work. Today, I continue to work in Qatar, and I am currently earning BDT 20,000 from my plumbing job. Now, my financial support has given my family members hope of a better life and future.

SAUDI ARABIA

Traffic accident lands me in jail!

Abul Nasim Fakir

My name is Abul Nasim Fakir and I am from Gopalganj town. In 2003, I migrated to Saudi Arabia. I was promised a job as a chauffeur there, and I secured a visa through a *Dalal*. I was placed with a company that did not pay me what I was promised by the *Dalal*. I didn't understand everything about my visa and unfortunately, one day, when I got in a traffic accident, I learnt that I was sent on someone else's visa. As a result, I had to serve an eleven-month prison sentence as punishment. There was nothing my family could do to help me while I was in jail. I tried to contact the *Dalal* after I was released, but it was of no avail. I returned to the company where I had previously worked. They allowed me to work with them again, but this time they paid even more poorly. In 2008, I returned back to Bangladesh with little savings. The money I brought home was so small that it was not enough to start a business or get any head-start. I hope to migrate again, but next time, I will be more prudent and I will make sure that everything is in good order. I wish that I had been given some training before my departure because that could have helped me immensely. I could have avoided many of the problems that I encountered.

I started swimming to cross the river, but it became broader

Abul Bashar

My family was in dire poverty. My family did not have any choice other than to depend on me, and I had no choice available other than to depend on migration. All our family property had been lost in previous generations. I did not want to live a life like this anymore. In order to change our family's condition, I started exploring opportunities for migration. In 1988, I went to Kuwait, spending BDT 55,000. I acquired this money by taking loans from moneylenders as well as from relatives. My cousin, who was already staying in Kuwait, helped me.

There is a saying in our locality that "I started swimming to cross the river and the river became broader". Within a year of my migration, the Gulf War between Iraq and Kuwait began. We desperately fled from Kuwait by foot, and by car and then we were able to return to Bangladesh. I already

had loans and could not find any suitable work upon return. So I migrated again through a recruiting agency, this time to Saudi Arabia. I gave 14 years of my youth to that country. I did not have any education and nor did I have any skill. For a long time I worked there as a cleaner. Although my salary was not much, my income was regular. My family informed me that my younger brother was in bad company in our locality. I bought a visa to bring him to Saudi Arabia in 2003. After couple of years, I returned to Bangladesh and sent another brother of mine to Saudi Arabia. Sending my two brothers abroad was one of my major investments of my migration.

My main dream, however, was for my family to own its own land and assets. I bought eighteen decimals (728 sq. meters) of land close to the Dhaka-Chittagong road. Now I have three stores in the local marketplace which are rented out. I personally manage a tea and beverage store in the same market. I have employed two workers to help me in the store. It was true that I had to work very hard when I was in Saudi Arabia, but I did learn how to manage workers. I never thought that someday I would have my own bank account. When I came home on holiday, I opened a bank account in my father's name for sending remittances. Since then my interactions with the bank have never stopped.

Jointly we three brothers own property worth of BDT 9,900,000. If the three of us had remained working in Bangladesh for day and night we never could have dreamt of accumulating such wealth! Sometimes when I look back I feel sad but at the same time I also feel contented. As the elder son of the family I fulfilled my familial obligation.

I wish I could share what I learnt

Sirajuddin Mintu

Everything in my life was going normally until I passed the HSC exam, at which point my father passed away. My father was the only income-earner in our family and so it came as quite a shock. Naturally, the family was devastated and we didn't know what we would do. With each day, things got worse. I decided that I had to do something. Many of my neighbours had migrated to Saudi Arabia. One of my friends had left the village for the city to pursue an education. He asked me if I would be interested in migrating to Saudi Arabia. I began to think about this possibility, but I was not sure how I would arrange to pay for everything.

Eventually, I decided to go to Saudi Arabia. I took a loan and my friend's father also lent me some money to arrange for my migration. Once I arrived in Saudi Arabia, I got a job in a restaurant, but my wages were low. I wanted to pay off the loans I had taken as soon as possible to take the pressure and stress off of my family. Once I paid off the loan, I continued to send money back home so that the household could prosper. At first, I sent money through Hundi (illegal means), but after a while, I began to send money through the bank. My remittances paid for the basic needs of my family: food, clothes etc. Eventually, we had enough money to purchase some land in my community. The land was valued at BDT 150,000-200,000. When I returned home, I opened my own department store in the Borotakia Bazar. I spent BDT 70,000 to build my own house. I had spent nine years in Saudi Arabia. The experience and money that I earned there helped to change my life.

The only thing I wish is that I could do more with my life in Bangladesh. I wish I could share more of the prosperity and learning that I acquired from working abroad with my fellow citizens.

At last, enjoying the benefits of my hard work

Najimuddin

I did everything I could to go abroad! I even sold my father's land. My elder brother took dowry from his wife's father which was then used to finance my migration. However, this was not enough money. Therefore, I was required to take out a loan. My family didn't have the means to help me with this as the financial situation was very poor. I went abroad to help my family gain financial stability.

My migration to Saudi Arabia cost me BDT 120,000. I spent thirteen years of my life in there, and I worked as a salesman. Within three years, I was able to pay off my loan. At that time, I helped my brother to join me in Saudi Arabia. We both were working for the same company as salesmen. After my brother, I helped ten other Bangladeshis migrate to Saudi Arabia. I helped set them up with jobs once they arrived. With my brother beside me, things were easier to plan. We were both remitting money back to our family on a regular basis. Our family's financial situation improved significantly as a result. My father was able to buy one hundred decimals (0.4 hectares) of land. On this land, we built our home. We used the same parcel of land for

agricultural purposes and we also had a pond to cultivate fish. The land, therefore, started serving as a source of income for the family.

After fifteen years in Saudi Arabia, I felt very confident returning to Bangladesh. I opened a department store in my community. The store brought me enough income to invest in two buses which I used to start a transportation company. The transportation company brought me BDT 40,000-50,000 each month. The market value of all of our assets is BDT 5,000,000. My businesses currently employs between six and seven people. All of these benefits, however, came at a cost. While I was in Saudi Arabia, my employer beat me and verbally abused me. Now that I have returned to Bangladesh, things are much better and I am finally enjoying the benefits of my hard work. Now, there is no need to look back into the past.

Like father, like son

Mohammad Hashem

In 1988, I went to Dubai. I was in my 30s at the time of my migration. The constant lack of money was very difficult for my family. We had gone through many financial crises. This situation encouraged me to go abroad so that I could earn money for my family. However, when I reached Dubai, I could not find any well-paying work. There were no other options for me so I decided to return to Bangladesh. After a few years had passed, I considered migrating again. One day, I was presented with an opportunity to go to Saudi Arabia.

I went to Saudi Arabia with a visa. I worked here and there but I was unable to find a steady job, and so I was not able to earn a lot of money. I saw some people selling vegetables so I decided that I too could begin selling vegetables. The vegetable business proved profitable. I was able to earn about SAR 800 per month. With this income, I started sending money back to my family. I earned a little bit more money than was needed for my daily needs and so my family was able to buy a parcel of land with these savings where they built a house. I arranged to have my son join me in Saudi Arabia; though I worried he would not have the same opportunities as me. After my son was set up in Saudi Arabia, I returned to Bangladesh.

Again, I saw that my neighbours in Bangladesh were doing well with their poultry farms so I decided to do the same. I started a poultry farm on my land near to my house. My son returned also to Bangladesh and

got involved in the chicken business, buying and selling to make a profit. Our poultry business has been doing well. I had gone abroad to help my familial situation and I feel lucky that everything worked out so well. Many of the migrants that I met in Saudi Arabia faced difficulties that I was lucky enough to avoid. My hard work has helped me succeed both in Bangladesh and abroad. My son and I are happy in Bangladesh now and we have no desire to migrate abroad again.

I migrated twice; but my biggest success came when I returned

Mohammad Idris

I was unemployed and I saw that many of my neighbours had migrated abroad and so I thought that I should also migrate abroad in order to earn money. I decided to migrate to Singapore in 1991. Getting to Singapore was not a problem, however, when I arrived in Singapore, I was deceived by my employer. I was supposed to be paid SGD 500, but I ended up getting only SGD 300. My *Dalal* told me that I would be working in a hotel, but I ended up working on a construction site.

Because I had taken a loan, I was obligated to pay it back and I had no other option than to accept the work and eventually pay off the loan. I worked on this construction site for four years until 1995. After that, I returned to Bangladesh. I did not wish to ever return to Singapore. After twenty-three days back in Bangladesh, I arranged to migrate to Saudi Arabia. When I arrived, I did not face any problems. The job paid very poorly. According to my job contract, they were supposed to pay SAR 600, but they only paid SAR 320. They told me that I would be working as a mailman, but when I arrived I was told that I would be working as a cleaner. There was nothing I could do to protest this decision. I worked there for three years and then I returned to Bangladesh. With the money that I earned, I bought a house and some land which I used for a dairy farm.

I didn't know much about dairy farming, but I learned quickly. Now, I have twenty-four cows. Everyday, we pump 300 litres of milk. Subtracting all overhead costs, my yearly income is between BDT 500,000-600,000. Given that things with the dairy farm are going well, I have no need to migrate again. I am now focused on raising and educating my children.

Everything worked out well

Mohammad Maruf Ali

I come from a family that struggled to make ends meet. My father was the only one who was employed and making money for the family. As a result, I used to think I would go crazy. As I was the eldest of the family, I felt obligated to step up and do something for our family. I thought a lot about this situation, but if I stayed in Bangladesh I couldn't take care of my sister and my brothers properly. There were no opportunities available for me in my home community. What was I to do ? Be a day-labourer or a shopkeeper? None of these jobs would bring in enough money to provide for my family. Therefore, I decided that perhaps migrating abroad would help me earn more.

I began seeking out information on how to go abroad and eventually I found a way to get to Saudi Arabia; the year was 1986. At first, I was working at various residential properties doing different jobs - whatever was needed. Then I started working at a hotel; there were no better options. I was without training, but I concentrated hard on my work and I earned SAR 1,000 per month. After sixteen years, in 2002, I returned to Bangladesh.

While I was abroad, I helped a few relatives, including my brother, come to Saudi for work. Now, they are established there. With my savings, I was able to buy some cattle. I also bought some land and planted some seasonal crops. On my farm, ten to twelve persons were employed. I felt immense pride in being able to provide jobs for a few in my community who were previously unemployed. Despite the good that came from it, my migration was a very trying experience. However, in the end, it helped bring some financial stability to my family and for that I am glad that I did it.

Earning real riyals!

Hazi Mohammad Elahi

My family didn't have enough money to pay for my education after Class Twelve (H.S.C). We were going through some financial difficulty, but I felt there wasn't much I could do to help. There was nobody else available to help my family get through this tough time and the government didn't offer any supports. In this situation, I felt the only thing I could do was to go abroad in search of work. I had a difficult time arranging for the money to migrate, but

after sometime I was able to get enough. In 1981, I migrated to Saudi Arabia.

Luckily, I was clever, and this helped me to secure a job as a salesman even though I had no training. I earned SAR 1000 per month. I remitted some money back to Bangladesh through the bank. Things were going well and I was able to return to Bangladesh to visit my family. I passed twenty-seven fruitful years working in Saudi Arabia. I was far from my relatives and my country, and I basically lived in the desert. I asked myself why I was doing this. Of course, I was doing it for the money and I had to endure in order to do better for my family. In 2007, I returned to Bangladesh. My remittances enabled me to purchase and built a two-storey home. I started a garden, and I also planted some crops. I earned money from my garden and from the harvest. Then, I opened a sawmill next to the local bazar. The profits from the processed wood generate revenue for me and I employ some people from my village who had previously been looking for work. I was able to establish myself as a businessman and then subsequently, I was able to help others, which brings me tremendous joy.

I changed my life and helped others do the same

Shahnewaz

Before I migrated, things were difficult for my family. After my migration, things improved vastly. I had this goal in my head from the beginning. In 1983, I used a recruiting agency to help me go abroad to Saudi Arabia - at a cost of BDT 40,000 - to begin working and earning a decent wage. I worked and lived in Saudi for twenty-four years, working as a painting contractor.

I stayed there for a long time so by the end of it, I had amassed a great deal of savings. With my earnings, I have started a few businesses in Bangladesh. I had not taken any training before having migrated. If I had, then surely, I would have a better opportunity. However, there were not many opportunities for me back then.

My remittances allowed me to build a two-storey home near Sitarganj college. I spent BDT 2,000,000 to build this house. Now, I live there and I rent a portion of it for some additional income. Moreover, I have also bought 26 decimals (0.1 hectares) of land and I have started a poultry farm. I also have a fish pond. The current value of the lands is about BDT 20,000,000. Through my hard work and smart decisions, I have been able to achieve this position. Currently, I employ almost thirty people. Now, not

only do I have financial stability, but my prosperity has spread to benefit others in my community. It's simply not enough to go abroad and earn money. One has to develop a plan to invest the money strategically so as to have a meaningful impact in the community and to create a worthwhile future for one's family.

Migration helped me to fulfill my lifelong dream

Mohammad Entas Hossain

I was born in a very poor family in Bhatkura village, Korotia of Tangail. My family had twelve members. As my father was unable manage the income to feed twelve mouths, he sent me to work in a handloom factory at the age of twelve. I was a good student, but, due to my new job responsibilities, I could not continue my studies. Initially I was sad. Nonetheless, while spinning the wheels at the factory, I used to think, "I wish I could be an owner of such a handloom factory!"

By accident, I got a chance to migrate to Saudi Arabia for work in 1990. In Saudi Arabia, I learned the Arabic language very quickly and I got a job. After five years of hard work, I came back to Bangladesh on vacation. I bought three plots of land for my family. I came back for good after another five years. This time I fulfilled my dream of establishing a handloom factory. I set 36 machines in a 1 acre plot. Everyday 150-200 saris are produced in my factory. Around 200 handloom workers are working in my factory. The wholesalers buy *saris* from me and supply them to different parts of the country. From almost a landless position, my family now owns five acres of agricultural lands. I also have pisciculture and animal fattening enterprises. I am not satisfied by only changing my own economic condition. I paid the cost of migration for two of my brothers who went to Malaysia and Saudi Arabia. I have helped to my other brother to establish a coaching centre.

Because of my migration success, RMMRU gave me the extraordinary Shonar Manush of Bangladesh award (Golden son of Bangladesh).

Community now sees me as a highly accomplished individual

Mohammad Kader

In 1986, I went abroad to work in Saudi Arabia. Though it was generally difficult, I lived in Saudi for sixteen years. At first, I was working as a

labourer and then I learnt how to be a welder. Through my time in Saudi, I never felt a sense of belonging to the community.

Being from Nawabgonj in Dhaka City, I left so that I could provide a better life for my family. When I returned in 2002, I started setting up shops at the local market, and I was successful in these ventures. The community now regards me as an highly accomplished individual. My brothers helped me establish these businesses which now allow me to earn BDT 20,000 per month. All of my shops allow my family to be cared for. I have been able to employ twenty people. Since this success, I have been able to devote my time to my community. I currently serve as the secretary of the Jubo league.

Now, I'm the boss!

Zia Hossain

I grew up as the fifth child of nine. We had a big family and money was always tight. We came from the Aultia village in Tangail Sadar *Upazila*. To earn more money, I decided to go abroad. I was sick of sitting idly by watching my familial situation. So in 1999, I took a job in Saudi Arabia.

I worked there for some nine years and then in 2008, I returned to Bangladesh. When I returned, I took a course from Jubo Unnayan Kendra (training institution). After that I invested myself in an agriculture project. I purchased various seeds and created a garden spanning 300 decimals (1.2 hectares) of land. Now, many people come to visit the gardens. I have four workers who maintain the plants and the land. I have also opened a pharmacy. All-in-all, I have seven employees. As for my family, we now have a home with a proper concrete foundation. These ventures have provided my family with financial security.

Moving into the fast lane of life

Abdul Kaium

I am from Tangail Sadar *Upazila*. I am from a very poor family and I never had the chance to have a good education. I didn't have the money to go abroad, but that didn't stop me from trying. I sold my house and borrowed some money from relatives and a local NGO to finance my migration. I was very unhappy prior to my migration. I went to Saudi Arabia and spent a number of years there. When I returned, I was able to re-establish myself and I started a car-repair garage, where I employ fifteen people. I have also bought some agricultural land. My dream is to expand my garage business: buying more tools, hiring new employees etc. I especially hope to employ and train the youth from my home village.

Now, my days of poverty are long gone

Shariful Rahman Thandu

I come from a middle-class family of Singair village in the Tangail district. As I was the son of a middle-class family, we had some connections in the political world. I really wanted to help people. However, doing so was very difficult. As a result I talked with a middle-man and decided to go abroad. My family also agreed with me. So, I went to Saudi Arabia after collecting enough money. Luckily, I was able to get a good job there with an adequate salary. I came back to Bangladesh after living there for five years. One of my sons joined me while I was living Saudi Arabia. I also found a partner for my daughter while I was there. I did my best to save the money I earned so that I would be able to provide for my family.

I have a shallow tube-well for irrigation, and I bought a digging machine for preparing land. I also now cultivate fish, and have a cattle farm. Besides these, I have a shop in the market that I rent. I am also connected with the construction sector. I am connected with all the activities of public service of my area. At present, nine persons are working for my business regularly. Now my days are much better, and the days of poverty long gone. I am now looking forward to overcoming new challenges in the future.

Despite my family's protest, I migrated and succeeded

Mohammad Ataur Hossain

I am a member of a poor family from the Khorshila village in Tangail district. One day I met a recruiting agent in a market near Kalihati. Without any work opportunities in my home community, I prepared myself to go to Saudi Arabia following the advice I got from this agent I met with. My family members didn't think that it was a good idea. But I didn't give up on my decision, and I overcame all of my familial obstacles. I managed to finance my trip by taking a loan from my relatives and selling some of my own things.

When I arrived in Saudi Arabia, I was able to get a steady, well-paying job. I worked hard. When it was available, I worked overtime hours which allowed me to accumulate more savings. My income eventually increased and when I returned home, I was able to buy some land in my hometown. I rented a shop in the market. I have a grocery shop with two employees. I have also rented two CNGs to earn some money and I cultivate some farmed fish. We had a concrete building made for us. I have not only given attention to investment, but also to savings. I have different types of savings accounts. Each month, I accumulate about BDT 100,000 without expenditure. There are about nine persons employed by my businesses.

Don't stop dreaming

Mohammad Sadequl Hossain

I come from Sohodebpur village in the Tangail district. My father is a farmer and spent his days cultivating the land and working as a sharecropper. When I first suggested working abroad as a way to help the family, he suggested that it would not be possible for us as we were too poor. He said the best I could do was to cultivate his share of the land alongside him. However, I did not give up on this idea.

Based on my uncle's advice, one day, I migrated to Saudi Arabia. Financing my migration was very difficult, but it was worth it. I worked in Saudi Arabia for some time, before returning to Bangladesh. At first, I bought some land with my earnings from Saudi Arabia. Step by step, I started a decorating business with phone, fax machine and sound system. With the earnings from this business, we were able to build a home. I am married

and my wife is now an elected representative of Union Porishod. Thanks to my migration and my improved economic situation, I am leading a happy life with my family.

The golden son of Bangladesh

Abdul Hashem Chowdhury

I am from the Khoshkandi village in the Comilla district. After receiving my education, I realized that I wanted to help my community by bringing the different segments of society together. Personally, I made the leaders of Khoshkandi spend BDT 60,000 - 70,000 on infrastructure in the village. After that, the people of my village were pleased with me and passed on more responsibilities. Sometime later, I came to understand that not only do I have to serve society, but I must also earn money. After thinking for sometime, I decided to migrate abroad. So in 1993, I migrated to Libya. I worked as a welder in Libya. After six years in Libya, I returned to my village and took the initiative to begin cultivating fish. I started to cultivate fish on more than 500 decimals (2.02 hectares) land beside the Khoshkandi village with some village people. I named this venture the Khoshkandi Fisheries Ltd. People elected me as the executive director of this project as they were happy to see my efficiency. I also try to develop the project by the help of my skill.

After managing this project for two years, I decided to migrate again; this time to Saudi Arabia. I worked there as a skilled salesman. After nine years, I returned home. This returning was the last migration of my life. I connected again with the fisheries and was elected the Managing Director of the firm. Besides this, I am connected with some other business ventures. I earned a large amount of money through my fisheries project. But I wanted to go further: to cultivate fisheries, we need to buy a lot of food. If we have a feed mill ourselves then it will be much more affordable. Accordingly, I established a shared feed mill with some other people. Now, I am the head of this feed mill. One day following the advice of the chairman of MRPC of RMMRU I established a spice factory. Now I have at least twenty-five employees. My ventures have brought me great wealth. In 2011, I was honoured by RMMRU as a Shonar Manush of Bangladesh (“Golden son of Bangladesh”).

Grateful to MRPC for processing the return of my father's body

Papiya Akter

I am Papiya Akter. I live in Tejpur village in Kalihati *Upazila*, Tangail District. In 2013, my father went to Saudi Arabia to work, in order to better support his family, which included three daughters and myself, his son. My father worked in Saudi Arabia for one year and six months. Through this work he was able to support our family and repay some prior loans.

Then, while in Saudi Arabia, my father died suddenly one day from a stroke. Of course, this news devastated our family. In order to have my father's body repatriated, my family sought the services of the Nagbari MRPC. In order to find information on the whereabouts and circumstances of my father's body, the Nagbari MRPC communicated with the District Employment offices and applied to repatriate the deceased. Three months went by, and with much uncertainty still present over whether the body could or would be repatriated; a local NGO, RPDO, reached BMET and inquired whether the application for repatriation had been received or not. They discovered that, indeed, the application had not been received. Immediately, RPDO communicated with RMMRU to ensure that a new application be submitted directly to BMET's office.

Once the application had been properly submitted to BMET, my father's body was repatriated to Bangladesh, and, within one month, we were able to hold funeral services for him. We are very grateful to the Nagbari MRPC – especially members Kamal, Jashim, and Latif Bhuiyan – for their role in overcoming the difficulties of the repatriation application, and thus ensuring my father returned to rest in his home country. I am ever-grateful to the members of the Nagbari MRPC, without whom this would not have been possible.

I couldn't bring my son's body back

Dhirendra Shutrodhar

I am Dhirendra Shutrodhar. We belong to a Hindu community. About eight years ago, my son Dulal went to Saudi Arabia. The *Dalal* informed us that it was easier to get a work visa in the Middle East if the applicant is Muslim. Accordingly, my son's passport was issued under a Muslim name. Dulal started work as a driver, and work initially went very well.

Our family consisted of Dulal, his wife and children (two daughters, one son), myself and my wife. When Dulal first started working in Saudi Arabia, things were going very well. However, after five years in Saudi Arabia, Dulal was tragically killed in a road accident. This devastating tragedy cannot, of course, be described in words here.

Receiving this dire news, the Gala MRPC offered our family a helping hand. The MRPC committee helped us apply for both the repatriation of Dulal's body and for financial compensation for our family. After waiting for a long time on the pending application, I had discussions with MRPC members about why our claim was not being processed. I revealed to MRPC that my son had been working in Saudi Arabia under a Muslim identity and name – even using it in his passport – and we found out that this was the major obstacle for our claim process. Conflicts between different documents regarding my son's identity were stalling our application to repatriate the body and receive compensation. At this point, RPDO, a local NGO, stepped in and entered into a communications with the DEMO office. RPDO and RMMRU managed to convince the government functionaries of BMET that Dulal was genuinely our son, and the Muslim name was just for working convenience. Ultimately, BMET paid BDT 196,000 to our family in compensation. Tragically, we were not able to repatriate my son's body.

If the MRPC, the RPDO, and RMMRU had not stepped in for us, we never would have been able to collect the compensation. Nonetheless, I will die with this pain in my heart that I was unable to purify my son's soul through a proper funeral.

I failed as a migrant but succeeded as an entrepreneur

Mohammad Jillur Abedin

I am Md. Jillur Abedin. I live in Silimpur Union in Sadar *Upazila*, Tangail District. Wanting to change my fortunes, I went to work in Saudi Arabia in August 2010. After working for some time there, in February 2011, my company forcibly returned me to Bangladesh. At the point of my being forced to come home, I still had not been able to repay the cost of my initial migration, and thus I found myself in debt upon my return. I was, at this point, quite helpless to pay this sum. I could not sleep at home because debt collectors hounded me day and night. I had to sleep at different neighbour's houses to hide from them.

I participated in a meeting organized by the local Silimpur MRPC. Learning of my condition, an MRPC member gave me some advice for how to deal with the issues facing me. Following their suggestions, I began to formulate a plan to start a business selling cattle. I knew I had to provide for my family. To help me with this initiative, the Silimpur MRPC assisted me in applying for a reintegration loan in September 2013 from the Migrants' Welfare Bank. This loan would help me stand on my own strength as a businessperson.

As a result of MRPC's help, I received a loan for BDT 100,000 within three months of applying. At the present time, I am now successfully engaged in the cattle business, and I am grateful to the MRPC members for their help in getting me to be economically reintegrated.

I am satisfied, I have realized my dreams

Mohammad Kaiser Alam

I am Md. Kaiser Alam. I live in Bankina village of Kalihati, Tangail. I am a returnee migrant. My family was very poor, which is why I decided to migrate in the first place. I have six brothers and one sister. I lived with my parents, my wife, and two other brothers. We did not have much land. The rice we produced was not enough for the whole family. So sometimes we had to purchase rice from the market. I worked in a small shop, earning a very small amount of money. For this reason, I decided to find work abroad.

In 2007, when I was twenty-one years old, I migrated to Saudi Arabia, at a cost of BDT 300,000. Fifty percent of that amount was subject to high interest. The rest of the loan was without interest. I had a job as a cleaner at a guesthouse, making SAR 400 per month (equivalent to BDT 10,000). The majority of this money went towards my living expenses, leaving me nothing to send home during the first six months of my stay. After the initial six months, I started doing overtime jobs to earn some extra money, working in different residences (other than the one I was assigned) as a cleaner. This helped me make an additional BDT 20,000-25,000 per month. I was finally able to send some money home, and clear my debt within the year. Furthermore, I purchased some land in my village and leased some more additional land. I also renovated my home. Before my floor was made of clay, but is now replaced with tiles, and the house is now shedded with tin. I returned home after three years on a 40 day leave. I bought land in my village and in the nearby town. At the end of my leave I returned to

my job in Saudi Arabia. I also started working overtime again in different residences. I became an expert at my job. I worked for another two years and six months, saving more money, and finally returned home. Now, having secured a license as a deed writer, I am working in a land office. I have decided to stay in Bangladesh for the rest of my life. I have kept my savings in the bank. I have two daughters, the eldest of which is starting Grade two. The youngest is only 1 year and six months old. My spouse is a housewife, and she takes care of my elderly parents. I am happy now because I could realize my dreams.

I worked for four years, but my wages were paid only for one

Farida

My name is Farida. I am from Boruha village of Tangail district. I am a twenty-seven year old returnee migrant. I have one son and one daughter. My husband divorced me within a few years of our marriage. After that I returned to my father's family, bringing the children with me. I stayed with my parents while they were alive. However, after the death of my parents, it was difficult to stay with my brother's family. I then moved to a different home, but could not afford it.

As a result of these troubles, I decided to migrate, and I went to Saudi Arabia in 2007 at a cost of BDT 110,000. In order to acquire the money, I had to sell the jewelry that I purchased for my daughter. The middleman told me that I would get a job as a cleaner of a airport or hotel, but upon arrival I was given the work of a domestic worker. In the home where I worked there were ten family members. It was difficult to adjust to their schedule as they all slept during the day and kept awake at night, forcing me to work almost twenty-four hours. I had almost no time to rest. However, food and clothing were available. My salary was BDT 10,000 per month and I received it regularly for a year. But at the end of year when I asked for leave to go home the employer stopped paying me. After that I worked for three more years without salary. Whenever I asked for the money I was owed the household head told me it would be given later. I thought I would receive all my money together at the end, but I was lied to. I never received those three years of pay. I gave up and returned home. Currently I have no job. I had not even made enough money to buy back the jewelry I sold to pay for my migration. I want to try and migrate elsewhere to earn a living.

However, I do not want to work as a domestic worker again. I would prefer to work as a cleaner, otherwise I will not go.

Whatever I touched, turned into gold

Monirul Hossain

My name is Monirul Hossain. I am from Boruha village of Tangail district, and I am a returnee migrant. The main reason for my migration was so I could provide for my family. I lived with six brothers, two sisters, my parents, four nephews, three nieces, and others. There were a total of 30 people living with me, sharing food. After finishing my higher secondary certificate I began to trade in jute in Narayanganj. However, I did not make much profit from this business. My elder brother also had a business from which he did not make a lot of profit. Considering all of this, I decided to migrate, thinking I would make a better living elsewhere. I did not discuss my decision with anyone else.

Thus, in 1991, at the age of eighteen, I migrated to Saudi Arabia at a cost of BDT 55,000. The middleman that assisted me told me that I would get work as a technician, which I did upon arrival. My salary was BDT 15,000. I worked there for two years and returned home. Then, in 1995, I migrated to Singapore, getting a job in a club as a receptionist with a salary of BDT 40,000. I also had some part time jobs on the side. My total monthly expenses were only BDT 20,000 per month, so I was able to remit a large amount home and put it into a savings account in Bangladesh.

I worked for another two years before returning home. I stayed in Bangladesh for a few years and got married. Later, in 2006, I migrated to Dubai to work in the construction sector. My salary was BDT 35,000 and I worked there for two years before returning home in 2008. My wife and three daughters live in my village. My eldest daughter is studying in Grade 6, my middle daughter is in Grade 3, and my youngest is only four years old. I renovated my village home with some of my money. I currently have no job, so I am thinking of migrating once more, this time to Taiwan. I hope that by the end of 2016 I will get a chance to go abroad. I was never cheated at any point during my migration work, my migration cost was minimal compared to many, and I received my expected jobs upon arrival. These factors are motivating me to seek work abroad.

Not all domestic worker employers are bad

Mariom Begum

My name is Mariom Begum. I am from Keranigonj, Dhaka. I am a thirty-five year old current migrant. I was married at the age of twenty. I was enjoying my family life with my husband and children. However, after twelve years of marriage my husband suddenly died. This development put me in a difficult situation, as I had no personal income, and my husband left no savings or property for us. I had no other option but to return to my father's home. My father was a sick man. He had had a bad stroke. He was under treatment, taking medicine regularly. This cost him a decent sum. Therefore, it was a burden for him to provide for my two children and myself. My mother advised me to migrate. I decided to go to Saudi Arabia, spending BDT 60,000 to get myself a job there as a domestic worker. The employer provided the visa and ticket and I did not have to incur any extra cost. My salary as a domestic worker was BDT 20,000 per month. I also got bonuses of BDT 20,000 for both Eids. However, I could not leave my employer's home at any time because of my work. Nevertheless, I have no difficulties in getting food or clothes, and whenever I get sick my employer takes me to a doctor. I get my salary on a regular basis and remit some of the amount. My son and daughter are currently studying back home. My mother looks after them with the remittances that I send back. I have regular contact with my children and other family members. My mother informed me that the amount I am remitting is enough to provide for the family. Moreover, I am also saving a portion of my remittance in a bank.

Being ill abroad is better than staying home with my husband's other wife

Salma Begum

My name is Salma Begum. I am from Keranigonj, Dhaka. I am a returnee migrant woman. I had to return early from my tenure abroad because of an illness. Before I migrated, my husband was a rickshaw puller, but he did not make enough money to provide for our family. I lived with my husband, father in law, mother in law, husband's previous wife, their children, and myself. Therefore there were always problems in our family in terms of food, house rent, children's education, etc. For these reasons I decided to migrate to Saudi Arabia in 2015, spending BDT 20,000, and getting a job as a domestic worker.

I worked for a family of six. I started my work with great enthusiasm, but I did not have good luck. I faced many difficulties in getting food, accommodation, or rest. I soon became ill, but my employer thought I was just pretending to be sick so that I would be able to return home. He refused to take me to a doctor and my physical condition worsened. Even then, I continued to work. I thought it was better to stay there than to return to living with my husband and his second wife. However, when the illness got very bad, they sent me back to the recruiting agency. The officials there also did not believe that I was ill. They did not provide me with food or other necessities and often ill-treated me. I had to stay there for 15 days. After those 15 days, my household head came to visit, finding me in a very poor condition she finally understood the situation. She cleared all my dues, and gave me an extra BDT 4000 on top of my salary. She advised the officials to send me back home. The official arranged my return, purchased my ticket, and took all the other necessary steps. However, they deducted a good portion of my salary for that purpose, finally sending me home in December 2015. I am still sick and unfit to work. My treatment is ongoing.

Company visa ensured greater success for me

Md. Yaqub

My name is Md. Yaqub, and I am from Munshiganj. I am a 49 years old. Before I migrated, my family had no property. My family consisted of six members: my parents, two brothers, and 1 sister. My brothers were working on other people's land. The amount of money we all earned was not enough to provide for ourselves. We had to borrow a large amount to arrange my sister's marriage. In order to clear this debt, and to bring financial stability to my family, I decided to migrate. At the age of 35, in 2001, I migrated to Saudi Arabia, spending BDT 200,000.

The economic condition of my family was really very poor. In order to get this sum I had to borrow from other relatives. However, I did manage to get a job in Saudi Arabia, making SAR 700 per month as a landscaper. My company covered my living expenditures, allowing me to save almost my entire salary and send it back home. After seven years my salary increased to SAR 1500 per month. The money I remitted was used to clear all my debts.

I took leave from my job to return home and be married. Moreover, I renovated my home and purchased new land. I still have a valid visa to Saudi Arabia, and will return there soon, staying until my visa expires.

I migrated for a job, not sex, thank you!

Tamanna Begum

My name is Tamanna Begum. I am from Purbogora village, Raninagar, Naogaon district. I am a returnee migrant. My family was very poor before my migration. My husband was a rickshaw puller, but his earnings could not provide for our entire family. We had no lands to cultivate either. We have a son who is studying. We hope he will complete his studies and become a good man one day.

For these reasons I decided to migrate, going to Saudi Arabia in 2016 to work as a domestic worker, at the age of twenty-six, altogether paying BDT 125,000. On top of that, I had to give some BDT 7,000 to the middleman that helped me go abroad. When I came to Dhaka for the training, he asked for some more money. I did not have this money so I sold one of my earrings.

The household I worked for in Saudi Arabia had 14 members. The first few days went well, but they quickly started harassing me. Several adult members of that family tried to coerce me into sexual relationships, but I did not agree. As a result, they started to torture me in various ways. Finding myself in this situation, after only 15 days, I escaped. I left all my things there except for the smart card. The next day my employer lodged a case against me. He claimed that I stole jewellery and a large amount of money from his house, but this was not the truth and I told the police this. The police searched me, but they got nothing except the smart card. I was then assigned to another house. This time the household head was not prone to torturing his employees, but he did confiscate my passport. When I tried to get it back, he would not return it. I escaped this household too after seven days and returned home. I am now working in a garments factory in Bangladesh. My husband does the same work. We are doing better. I will never go abroad for work again.

My migration was full of deceit and torture

Ratna Begum

My name is Ratna Begum. I am from Narayanganj, and I am a 30 year old returnee migrant. Before my migration I worked in a bachelor's quarter, cooking for them. I have one son. My husband said he would pay all my expenses during my marriage, and promised to give me a certain amount of money each month. He also told me he would build a house. However, after my marriage, he gave me only BDT 2000 per month while my house rent was BDT 5000. I lived with my two sisters and my son while my husband lived elsewhere. Due to the situation we frequently quarrelled. I dreamed that, no matter what, I would help my son finish his studies. I never got a chance to study, to become educated. My childhood was hard because my mother died when I was young.

For these reasons, I decided to migrate, going to Saudi Arabia with the help of a middleman, whom I paid BDT 70,000. I had to borrow this amount from my relatives, but also promised to pay BDT20,000 in interest on this amount. My middleman told me my salary would be BDT 20,000 per month as a domestic worker in Saudi Arabia. However, in Saudi Arabia, I was assigned to one family one day, and another the next. I worked at many different houses within my first month there. Sometimes working for only one day, sometimes several. I faced difficulties with food in all the houses, and I did not receive my salary at the end of the month. I was also tortured by some of the families. One person threw a water bottle at me when I asked for my salary. In another household, the male members tried to coerce me into a sexual relationship. When I refused, they hit me. I informed my husband about all of this, who lodged a case against the middleman who sent me there, and brought me home. He had to spend BDT 45,000 to do all this. In total, I worked for eight months in Saudi Arabia, for many different families, but only received salary for three months. Furthermore, my salary was not in line with the promised amount of BDT 20,000. I only got BDT 16,000 per month. I have started working as a cook in the bachelor's flat again. My husband works as a labourer in the construction industry. My only son is ten years old and studying in class 4. I have not been able to clear all my debts that I accrued before and during migration.

Remittance helped my father's treatment

Abul Kazem

I am Abul Kasem, and my home is in Dohar *Upazila*. In 1992, my father sent me to Saudi Arabia, which cost our family BDT 70,000. My family thought that, if I went abroad for work, we could improve our economic conditions and start saving money for the future. Before going abroad, I was a shopkeeper, and my monthly earnings were BDT 5,000. My earnings were not enough to cover the family's growing expenses, and we had frequent money problems. Looking at some of our more prosperous neighbours, who had a family member working abroad, my father got the idea to solve the money problems by sending me abroad.

It was not easy for me upon my arrival in Saudi Arabia. I faced many challenges early on in my tenure. I noticed how much my lack of education complicated my life during this early period abroad. It took some time, but eventually, through learning important things like language and local knowledge, my situation began to improve.

During the last five years of my stay, I was earning 70,000 BDT per month in Saudi Arabia, and was able to help my family greatly. During this time, my father died, and it was hard to be away from my home, but I knew how important my earnings were for my family. My earnings and work experience encouraged my brother to want to come abroad, and eventually I brought him to Saudi Arabia. After four years working together in Saudi Arabia, my brother and I returned to Bangladesh briefly so that both of us could be married. After a short period, we headed back to work in Saudi Arabia.

It was very difficult for us to leave our wives in Bangladesh. Living away in Saudi Arabia always had an element of sorrow to it, especially once we had kids. However, my continued earning allowed my wife to purchase a comfortable house (864 sq. feet) for BDT 900,000 in 2004. We also have purchased a good deal of agricultural land now, and have saved of money for our family's future. My children's education is one of the most important things to me – I know how important it is for success in life – and I am going to use our savings to ensure that they get the education they need. My brother and I also spent a large amount of money during my father's sickness.

My story is one of success and prosperity, but I know that I was fortunate to migrate when I did. Bangladeshis who have migrated after 2005 have generally not been so lucky in their working conditions.

Skilled migration increased my income

Abdul Kader

I am from Lakshmiprasad village in Dohar District. My father died in 1994, which influenced my later decision to become an international migrant. In 1999, I went to Saudi Arabia for work. My wife is living in Dohar still, taking care of our children. When my father died, I was unemployed, and it was my brother, who worked in Saudi Arabia, who stepped in to bear the burden of financial responsibility for our family. My tasks were limited to household chores. My father did leave us some agricultural land (7 decimals), but this was not enough to support a family. Furthermore, there was, at this time no work in my village, and thus my elder brother invited me to join him in Saudi Arabia.

My elder brother bought a visa to work as an electrician from a broker in Saudi Arabia who was of Bangladesh origin, who in turn bought it from a Saudi national. The visa cost BDT 250,000, which I borrowed from family members and a Mohajan (money-lender). I have now lived abroad for fourteen years, and I am now considered a skilled worker. In the beginning, I was working for a monthly salary of BDT 12,000, but now my salary has increased to BDT 40,000. Being paid more now as a skilled worker has allowed me to send even greater remittances home.

During my time abroad, I was able to return just a few times to Amar Sonar Bangla (“My Golden Bengal”). During one of these visits, in 2010, I got married and built a house (at the cost of BDT 450,000). My wife and I consult on all financial decisions, even though I am in Saudi Arabia for much of the year. In order to keep things running smoothly for my family, I must remit at least BDT 100,000 per year.

Currently, I have BDT 400,000 in my bank account, and I also place BDT 500 per month into my wife’s bank account. We do not have any outstanding loans, and I must say that my family is experiencing prosperity through my earnings. For example, my wife and I are currently paying for my sister-in-law to attend school. She is currently in class 7, and altogether her monthly tuition and private coaching costs BDT 500 per month.

Last year, upon returning to Bangladesh, I donated BDT 30,000 to help construct a local *Madrasa*. When I went to Saudi Arabia for work, I dreamt of being financially independent and building my own house. Today, I have been able to make both of those dreams a reality. In the future, I would like to return home to Bangladesh permanently and start my own business.

I helped one hundred Bangladeshis to migrate

Mohammad Jaman

I am Md. Jaman and I am from Keraniganj, Dhaka. Despite coming from a lower-middle class family, in 1981, I was able to secure a diploma in pharmacy from Sir Salimullah Medical College in Dhaka City. It had been a difficult time for our family, but our fortunes seemed ready to improve. In February of 1986, I secured a job in the Saudi Ministry of Health working as a pharmacist. I found this job through the Bureau of Manpower and Training (BMET), a bureau that used to bring work visas. It no longer does that, and, instead, *Dalals* and recruiting agencies are the major dispensers of work visas.

I started out with a one-year contract, but due to my skills, they extended my contract by three years.

My stay overseas was very successful. While I was there, I helped secure employment for at least 100 people in Saudi Arabia. I also helped arrange for accommodation and medical care for migrants. I was even able to help my younger siblings migrate to industrialized countries. Once I returned to Bangladesh, I used my earnings to set up an export-oriented corrugated packaging factory where fifty people are currently employed. In time, we plan to engage fifty more workers. Additionally, I own four houses, one store and some arable land. The current value of which is nearly BDT 20,000,000.

I am not defeated by poverty any longer

Mohammad Belal Hossain

I no longer struggle with economic insolvency. I had to work hard abroad to earn my money. Life does not always go smoothly. Once upon a time, my family was in a state of near-starvation. My children's suffering caused me great distress. I always had to think about how to mitigate our problems. My family's want for food and other necessities brought deep sorrow. I grew tired of always fighting the same battles against the same problems. Thus, I decided to migrate to Saudi Arabia in 2004.

I went to Saudi Arabia to earn money for my family's well-being, and especially to ensure my children receive higher education. I migrated through a recruiting agency. In order to be able to pay the migration fees,

I had to sell some of my agricultural lands and to get loans from family members. Before I migrated, I was a tailor, and so in Saudi Arabia I also found work as a tailor. My monthly salary was SAR 900 (USD 240). Within a short period of time, I established a good relationship with my employer. He was satisfied with my dedication and expertise with regards to my work. I worked up to twelve hours per day.

I returned home in 2009. I had to work very hard while abroad, and it was really difficult to stay in that country without my family. I was often homesick, and I missed having my wife beside me. It hurt that my children were not with me. I could have stayed abroad longer, but I returned to be with my family. Upon returning home, I started a tailoring business, and I employed six people in my shop. I have a dream to expand my business and employ more people.

However, I have no idea what would have happened had I not decided to migrate. Certainly, migration brought good luck to me. Although I am not, by any standard, extremely rich, I no longer face the difficulties of insolvency and hunger. In fact, I am quite prosperous now, and I don't have to worry about my family. I built a home with the money I earned abroad, and I also purchased some agricultural lands. I want my children to be highly educated. I believe that it is possible to strengthen the village economy with migration, and especially through formal-channel remittances. As well, in addition to remittances, the return of workers like us, who start up our own enterprises, is a very important pillar for local economies in Bangladesh. There are a lot of returnee workers who would also like to do this, but they need information and loans to do this.

We finally got our pucca house

Nasima Khatun

My name is Nasima and I am from the village of Islampur which is one of the more remote villages of Gomastapur in Chapai-Nawabgonj. Many people in Chapai make their living as construction workers, both inside Bangladesh and internationally.

My husband migrated to Saudi Arabia in order to earn more income and provide for our family. Before his migration, my husband Hafiz Amirul had worked as a teacher at a local *Madrassa*. He was earning only BDT 3,000 each month and this was not enough for the family to get by. My husband

left his teaching job and went to Dhaka to work for a construction firm. After a few years of work, he got a chance to migrate to Saudi Arabia. This migration changed our family's life and future. Through migration to Saudi Arabia, my husband was able to earn BDT 20,000 each month.

Migration helped my family to achieve greater economic security. My husband's dream was to live an honorable life. He always wanted a pucca house, and now we may be able to realize this at last. In the absence of my husband I have taken over the responsibility of child rearing, home management, and, as well, the supervision of construction of our homestead. My husband and I developed a partnership. He earns the money abroad, and I use his remittances rationally, in consultation with him. In our current life, we find much contentment.

Migration abroad is a decision I regret

Alimuddin

Born in the year of Bangladesh's independence, I passed my whole life in my native village of Islampur in Chapai Nawabganj until 2006. I decided to leave and migrate to Saudi Arabia. In migrating abroad, I thought I'd make a better life for myself. However, my migration has not granted me the affluence I sought after.

I now have three children, two girls and one boy. My son, Wasim was born in 2003, and he has autism. My wife, Badrunnesa, and I never completed our SSC, so, despite our desire to educate our children, we didn't have the knowledge ourselves to pass on. Thus, I dreamt of travelling to Saudi Arabia and then I could earn enough money to provide for the family and help my children have a better future.

When I arrived in Saudi Arabia, I was never able to get permanent work, and so I worked day-to-day, never earning enough. In fact, I earned less in Saudi Arabia than in Bangladesh. I earned BDT 6,000 to 10,000 per month. Thus, it was very difficult for me to send any money back to my family. While abroad, I was able to send a bit, BDT 1,000 - 1,500 per month, but it was not sufficient and not what we expected. The agent who had set me up in Saudi Arabia on free visa had promised me a permanent position, but it didn't pan out when I arrived. Moreover, I couldn't speak Arabic well.

After some twenty-eight months in Saudi Arabia, I decided that I couldn't go on anymore. I wasn't earning enough money and my family needed my

support. There was no male member in the family, My wife was feeling insecure as my older daughter was growing into a woman. My son's treatments were also costly. I returned to Bangladesh and started working again as a day-labourer earning only BDT 150-300 per day. The only assets I have left are my family and our homestead. To finance my migration, I had to take loans and sell other assets of mine. They are all gone now. My migration abroad is a decision I regret. It did not help me to better provide for my family and the travel cost was very high.

Migration devastated me

Sajeda

I am Sajeda. My family is from Agailjhara in Barisal district and I spent most of my childhood in this same village. I was my parents' first-born child. I have four sisters and one brother. I studied up to class nine in school. My father was the only breadwinner in the family and so I, as the eldest, decided I had to do what I could to help the family out. Even though I am a girl, I wanted to help the family as a son would. Through my earnings, I thought I would be able to ensure better education for my siblings, and perhaps contribute savings towards a higher dowry and ensure a better husband for myself once I return. However, the experience was not as I anticipated. In fact, my migration to Saudi Arabia destroyed my family. I heard about the opportunity to migrate to Saudi Arabia through a girl at school who was going to do the same thing. The *Dalal* told us that our income will change our social status, and that it would bring pride and honor to our families. In 2006, at the age of twenty-one, I went abroad, dreaming of earning money and reducing the family burden on my father's shoulders. My family had to take out some loans for my migration and even with the high interest rates, we figured it would be a worthy investment.

When I arrived, I was told that I was going to be doing domestic work, but the *Dalal*'s could not organize work for me for more than three months. When I was finally assigned a job at a beauty parlour as a helper, it was a let-down. It didn't pay well at all and I could hardly communicate with anyone. I did not understand Arabic. For the first three years, I could not send any money because I was earning so little.

I was lonely and I missed my family dearly. After some time, my visa expired and, finally, I decided to go back home. My return home felt like a tremendous failure. I am deeply ashamed of the debt and pain I have caused

my family. I wish I had never left for Saudi Arabia. Our family now begs for money and my father works harder than ever to keep us afloat.

My elderly father does not need to work in the field anymore

Abdul Moin

I am Abdul Moin. I am now 37 years old. I studied up to class ten and I am a returnee migrant from Saudi Arabia. I dropped out from my school and I joined my father in agricultural work. Soon afterwards, however, I decided I must go abroad for work, because the income I was making at home in my village was not enough. Thus, in 2002, I went to Saudi Arabia to work. My family hoped my wages would help us to build a new pucca house, among other things.

In Saudi Arabia, I worked as an electrician's assistant. Over the years, I learnt the trade myself, and I started to make enough money to improve my family's economic circumstances. As a skilled technician, I receive BDT 250,000 annually in salary. Over the last year (2013-2014), I was able to send BDT 220,000 in remittances, which finally allowed my family to realize our dream of building a *pucca* house, as well as open a store. Some remittances were also donated to help with the building of a local mosque and a kindergarten school.

I have since returned to Bangladesh, but I would like to go abroad for work again, because my salary was much better there. Before I migrated, My family had been landless; we were sharecroppers on the lands of others. Now we own our own land. Every asset I currently own, and all of my savings, is solely the result of my earnings as a migrant labourer. We also have bought a store and we sell cloths in the local market. My father is now 65, and, because of our newfound prosperity, he does not have to work in the field any more, and instead manages the store.

I am prosperous because I migrated

Abdul Tareq

I have a large family, composed of ten members in total. My family resides in Kushtia. One of my brothers does business in Kushtia City, while another brother has migrated to Dhaka to work.

After I completed the SSC examination, one of my relatives informed me

that he had a visa for Saudi Arabia which he planned to sell. I decided to go to Saudi Arabia for work. My family agreed to support me in this, and, thus, in 1998 I went to Saudi Arabia at a cost of BDT 130,000. In Saudi Arabia, I began work in the service industry. I am still working there today, and I make BDT 40,000 per month. Every two to three months, I send remittances to my father (most recently, I sent a sum of BDT 200,000). The remittances I have sent have allowed my family to build a *pucca* house for BDT 600,000 in 2012. As well, my family uses the remittances to pay the costs associated with cultivating and harvesting from the 66 decimals (0.27 hectares) of agricultural land that we own.

Of course, none of this would have been possible had I not gone abroad. The improvement of my family's economic circumstances is entirely due to my migration, as well as that of my brother working in Dhaka. Along with this, having my other brother in our home also helped in the investment of my remittances.

I came back empty-handed and heavy-hearted

Morjina

I am Morjina. I am twenty-two years old. Before going abroad, I used to work in a jute mill in Sirajganj. One day, I heard about working overseas through an announcement playing on a microphone. I looked into it and arranged to migrate to Riyadh in Saudi Arabia. I wanted to improve our lives and bring some income for the families. I thought that if I went abroad with a proper visa and some training, then things would work out well for me.

Unfortunately, I was mistaken. I encountered many obstacles and challenges, and I was abused physically and mentally. My employer was cruel to me. They did not provide proper nutrition and I was not used to the local foods they had. All of the food was kept in one room which was locked. Without proper nourishment, I soon fell ill. I was so tired that I was often unable to stand on my own two feet. But there was no time to be tired or sick - work had to be done! They hit me with whatever object they could find lying around. When they had guests over, I was locked into my room. My room was dark and infested with bugs. I used to have bites all over my body. Sometimes, I was lodged in the stables next to their camel. When I cried or complained, the torture and abuse intensified. They banned me from communicating with the outside world. This caused a lot of problems.

They spoke Arabic and so I was also unable to understand what they were saying. If I ever complained, they told me that I had been bought, that they had paid good money for me and that if I returned the money to them, then they would send me back to Bangladesh.

One day, when the house was empty, I reached out to a local agency for help. Two more months passed and I got in touch with the Saudi police. In time, I boarded a plane and returned back to Bangladesh. I was never paid for any of my work. The whole idea of going abroad was to earn money, but I came back empty-handed and in greater pain than when I started.

I am proud for being able to arrange my sister's wedding

Kamal Islam

I am Kamal Islam. I am from Comilla district. I am a returnee migrant. My father passed away when I was a young man, leaving me, my four brothers, three sisters, and my mother to provide for ourselves. My elder brother worked abroad, and helped to marry off two of our sisters. My other brothers and sister continued their studies. We owned only a small parcel of land that was insufficient to provide for our family.

I finished my studies after passing my SSC examination, but this level of education is not enough for a good job. My elder brother helped me get a visa to go to Saudi Arabia, and, because of my visa, I had no trouble getting a job. The company I worked for bore my cost of residence while I paid for my own food. I get BDT 35,000 as salary for my work. After my costs of living are paid I can send home BDT 25,000. With this money, my family was able to purchase land and build a house. My two younger sisters have also been married off. The remittances from my brothers and I were the only source of funding for the marriages of my two sisters.

I returned to Bangladesh the same year my sisters married, and got married myself. I now have a son and daughter. My two brothers started a grocery store. I was unemployed when I found the RMMRU driving programme, but now I am learning how to drive. I am interested in learning how to drive because drivers get a good salary abroad. If I get another opportunity, I will go back to Saudi Arabia, but only if I don't have to pay too much. If I stay in my country then I will buy a car and earn money as a driver, at first working in Dhaka and gradually, as I become more stable, I will think about returning to Comilla.

UNITED ARAB EMIRATES

Rough beginning, but now I'm a successful entrepreneur

Azam Uddin

I am Azam Uddin, and I am from Chowdhury Para of Chittagong. My brother Belal Uddin and I went to the UAE when we were young men. I found a stable job, but my brother did not. He went back to Bangladesh after wasting five years of his life.

When Belal returned home, he had very little money. I gave him some money, and he used this to set up a small poultry farm next to our homestead. Initially his business struggled to find success, but, with time, things started to get better and better.

Now, our small poultry business has become large. It has fifteen hundred layer-chickens and every day we receive around 1300 eggs. Besides this, we also have 1500 broiler chickens. I and my brother have spent around BDT 12,000,00 in this enterprise. We have also diversified our business. Initially I bought some agricultural land. We produce paddy as well as cash crop there. We have our own power tiller and rice machine. We have a store in the local bazar. Through our enterprises we have secured employment for twelve persons. Our family never thought that our brother Belal will take over such responsibility. Our family won the 2011 *RMMRU Shonar Manush Shera Remittance Baboharkari Poribar Award*.

From trouble-maker to money-maker

Nasirul Haque

In 1990, I went abroad with the goal of improving my family's financial situation. I also had some personal reasons. For example, I used to get in brawls and so my family members wanted me out of the country. For twenty-three long years, I lived in the United Arab Emirates (UAE). I did a few different jobs until I finally found steady work there as a salesman. My movement between jobs was largely due to the fact that I didn't have any experience when I began.

It cost me BDT 80,000 to organize my migration. I had to take a loan in order to have enough money for my trip. As soon as I arrived in the UAE, I tried to do everything and anything to pay back my loan as soon as possible. I didn't

want my family to encounter any trouble from the person I borrowed money from. Failure wasn't an option. This motivated me to be more hard-working and active. Through my earnings, I built a house for myself in Sitakunda Mohadebpur, at a cost of BDT 2,000,000. I rent a portion of my house to another family which brings supplementary income. Additionally, in the local bazar, I invested BDT 2,000,000 in a clothing shop, and delegated the business responsibilities for this shop to my son-in-law.

Currently, I am opening a department store on Sitakunda College Road which I have named Shanza. The store is an investment of BDT 900,000. Additionally, I have also begun a transportation business. My rental fleet has three CNGs and three micro-buses. My businesses employ about twenty-five people, and I currently earn on average BDT 150,000 per month. All of this was made possible with my remittances and the utilization of the money I made while abroad – my family helped me in this respect. It's not simply enough to go abroad and earn money. One has to develop a plan to invest the money strategically so as to have a meaningful impact in the community. Even though I was without training and education, I was quick-thinking and hard-working which in turn empowered my success.

BMET helped me get justice

Mohammad Shahed Mia

I am Md. Shahed Mia, and I live in Kaujan Uttar Bara village, Basail Upazila, Tangail. My father's name is Badsha. Trying to make a change in our family's economic condition, my father sent me to Dubai for work, which cost us BDT 285,000 (USD 3631). As per the contract with the broker, my monthly salary was set at BDT 20,000. However, in practice, I only received BDT 10,000 per month for my work. This underpayment caused me great distress, but I continued to work, so I could fulfill my father's dream.

However, suddenly, and without any notice, the company sent me back to Bangladesh in February 2013. After returning to Bangladesh, I tried to speak with the broker about what happened, but he constantly avoided the acknowledgement of my plight. All he would say was that it was my fault, and my mistake, in returning to Bangladesh, when – in reality – I had been forced to do so.

While in this predicament, I knew from my relatives that a migrants' rights

protection organization was operational in our area. So I went to one of the meetings organized by the Fulki Migration Rights Protection Committee, where I learned about the BMET initiative which compensates abused or deceived migrants for their losses. After this, following the Committee's advice, and with the help of the Rural Poor Development Organization (RPDO), I filed a formal complaint online to BMET on January 29th, 2015. After a complaint hearing on March 18th, 2015, BMET approved me to receive BDT 60,000 in compensation. Despite the stress I endured under these extenuating circumstances, I nonetheless was relieved and satisfied to receive this compensation.

Constantly worried about termination

Ashraful Mia

My name is Ashraful Mia. I am from Bhatkura village of Korotia *Upazila*, Tangail. I am a current migrant. My family makes its living on agriculture, but we don't have a lot of land. We used to spend our days in difficult conditions. The amount of rice we produce in our land is not enough to feed the large family of ours, which consists of fifteen people in total. My elder brother was already working in Saudi Arabia. He sent back some money, but it was not enough. I also got married in this time, so I had to concentrate more on my immediate family.

To earn more money for my family I went to Dubai in 2004 when I was twenty years old. It cost me BDT 200,000. I did not have the money, so I sold part of my land, and borrowed money from family members. I quickly found a job in as a labourer, earning BDT 10,000 a month. After my daily living expenses I am only able to send a small amount home to Bangladesh. Along with the main work, I started to do extra jobs. Unfortunately I can only send money sporadically. The working conditions in Dubai are not good for migrants. As a result, lots of people have their jobs terminated without any notice. I know that this could happen to me as well. I may lose my job and have to return home any day. However, I have saved some of my earnings, and, along with the money I sent home, my family built a tin-shed house. Some of my remittances helped with the marriages of my two sisters, as well as my nephew. My youngest sister is studying, and my youngest brother has started attending law school. His name is Sultan Mia, he wants to stay in Bangladesh to do something for the country.

It is difficult to work with people who treat you poorly

Selina Begum

I am Selina Begum. I am from Nagarjalfoi village of Tangail district, and I am a returnee migrant. My husband was a driver, but the money he earned was not enough to provide for our family. My only daughter was in school at the time, and I wanted her to be able to continue her studies. Therefore, in 2013 I migrated to Abu Dhabi. I was twenty years old and the process cost me BDT 35,000. Luckily, I didn't have to borrow any money, as I had enough saved. My job earned me BDT 12,000 per month, as per the contract. I had no prior experience of working abroad, or had any idea about the behaviour of foreign people. My dream was to work hard, earn a lot of money, and fund my daughter's education, among other things.

However, my employer was a bad person. The house where I worked had twelve members: the household head, his two wives, and children from those two wives. They were never courteous. They always spoke to me in harsh language. I had to live in an indecent environment. I was not given food on a regular basis. They behaved dishonourably towards me, always treating me poorly. I got depressed. At that time I also lost my mother who looked after my fourteen year daughter back home. Due to all of this I returned home in 2015 after two years of working abroad. I have no job at the moment, and I am looking after my family. My husband is still working as a bus driver. He doesn't earn much, but somehow we manage our family expenses. I don't plan to migrate again. I left for Abu Dhabi with a great hope; however, I was not treated decently by my employer's family, so I will not try again. It is difficult to work with people who treat you poorly. Even for a higher salary I would not go to work for those people.

Dowry goes up if the bride belongs to a migrant family

Junayed Alam

My name is Junayed Alam. I am from Dharmapur village, Sitakunda of Chittagong district. I am a current migrant. My father owned a small parcel of land which produced rice, but not enough to provide for our family. As the eldest son I felt responsible for helping my family. There were ten members in my family: two brothers, three sisters, my mother, my wife, one son, and one daughter. My younger brother and sisters were studying. I also had a job to help provide, but it was not enough.

For these reasons I decided to migrate in 2012, at the age of 39. My migration cost to go to Dubai was BDT 575,000. To make this money, I had to sell my land, and borrow money from my relatives. Upon arrival there I got a job in an electronics shop, making BDT 35,000 per month. This was enough to cover my living expenses and send a small amount home on a regular basis. I have also been able to clear my debt. In the meantime, my other brother also started working in Chittagong sadar, and he also sends money. We renovated my village home, and built a 1 story building that has the foundation of two stories. Along with our joint incomes, and my father's produce from land, we are doing okay. My sister and my daughter both got married recently and, because people know that one son is abroad, we had to pay unusually large dowries. I also spent BDT 500,000 to arrange my daughter's marriage. My only son is currently studying in college, and I hope that one day he will be a good man. I think that my work abroad has brought me success as, currently, I feel I am well-off.

First for the family and then for me

Mr. Rakesh Debnath

I am Rakesh Debnath of Daroga hat village, Sitakunda of Chittagong district. I am a returnee migrant. My family is not well-off by any means. I live with my three sisters, my father, and my mother. We have no land to cultivate. My father works on leased land, cultivating betel leaf. However, this resulted in greater expenditure than income, becoming a burden on us. In order to clear our debts we tried borrowing money from the national agricultural bank, so we could produce more betel leaves. Unfortunately, this plan did not work. My father arranged the marriage of my elder sister before my migration. He spent about BDT 300,000 for that marriage. My sister's husband is a migrant worker, who is currently abroad. Despite that, my father had to give jewellery, furniture, and clothes to marry off my sister. It seems that migrant households have to pay more when they are marrying their daughters or sisters off.

To pay for all this he had to borrow more. I cannot complain too much, however, as that brother in law of mine sent a work visa for me and helped me to migrate at a lower cost.

As a result, I migrated to Abu Dhabi in 2013 at the age of 24 with the help of a middleman - a distant relative. My migration cost was BDT 170,000,

which my father borrowed from a local business society. I was lucky because within a week, I got a job as a plumber, despite never having done that kind of work before. I started making BDT 12,000 per month. My living expenses took up almost my entire salary, leaving me with nothing to remit. However, after working for a year my salary increased to BDT 20,000, enabling me to send BDT 7000-8000 home each month. I worked there for two years, clearing my debt to the business society. I returned home in 2016 with BDT 100,000 in savings. With that money I helped arrange the marriages of my two sisters, but had to borrow some more to make it happen. I am trying to migrate again, this time I plan to do something for myself. I have had some offers, but the salaries were so poor that I rejected them. If I migrate again, I want a salary of BDT 40,000 or 45,000, as I am now a skilled plumber. My problem is although I am skilled as a plumber I have no certificate to show for this skill. I wish there was a way for me to receive a certificate of this sort.

Prudent use of remittances turned my migration into a success

Shafqat Hassan

My name is Shafaqat Hassan. I am from Fulgachi para village, Chittagong, and I am a returnee migrant. My family consists of four brothers, two sisters, and my mother. My father died eight years ago. My sisters are married. When I migrated, my two elder brothers were married. They worked as drivers. My second brother worked in a hotel, and my youngest brother was studying, but I was unemployed.

I could not find a job at home, so I decided to migrate to Dubai in 2012 at twenty-four years of age, paying BDT 210,000. I did this with the help of one of my cousins, a middleman. I was lucky that I didn't have to borrow any money in order to pay for my migration cost. My father had left me some money when he passed away. I immediately got a job at a supermarket in Dubai as a salesman, making BDT 18,000 per month. I got my salary regularly and was able to remit home a decent amount. Currently there are thirteen members in my family, including the wives of my brothers and their children. I always remit my money to my elder brother's account. My family set up a restaurant in Sitakunda with a portion of the money that I sent home. We are making good returns on it. My oldest and youngest brothers are managing this restaurant while the other two work as bus

drivers. When my visa expired in April 2016, I returned home. I don't want any job in this country, and I have plans to migrate again. Part of the reason, I was successful as a migrant because my family made prudent use of my remittances.

I would like to do something for the hapless widows

Rashmin Akhter

I am Rashmin Akhter. I have been working in the UAE for the last five years, only coming home on holidays. My father died when I was only thirteen years old, and my family moved in with my aunt. Soon after, my aunt arranged for me to be married. I was only in class eight in school at the time. My husband was a small-business owner.

One and a half years after my marriage, my husband died. I came back to my parental home. I was left to live in our very small house (1 decimal, 40 sq. meters of homestead land) with my two brothers and my daughter. This was, of course, a very hard time for me, and I became depressed. During this time, a relative came to my house, offering me work in an insurance company. I agreed, and began work as an insurance agent. The income from this job was just enough to live on. While I worked for the insurance company, I also learned tailoring work. I bought a sewing machine and began doing tailoring work on the side. Doing both of these jobs allowed me to expand our homestead land by an extra two decimals (91 sq. meters), which cost BDT 14,000.

My elder brother got married during this time, but – due to him and his wife's circumstances – I continued to support them, which stretched my resources. I was unable to fill all the needs of my family members through my work at the time. It was at this stage that one of my relatives suggested that I go abroad. I thought this would be a good idea. I did not have any money to pay for the migration cost. My relatives suggested that I could take a bank loan by mortgaging my land to the bank. In this way, I spent BDT 60,000 to migrate. In 2008, I went to the UAE, leaving my daughter, under the care of my brother. I used my earnings (BDT 650,000) to construct a new house, but construction was halted because we ran out of money. I have bought sewing machines to my sister in laws. I also brought a 21" coloured TV and fridge home, and I now have a custom-made box-bed in my room. I am planning to put in a water-line and water pump for our house. To get a job

in a company my youngest brother had to bribe the officials, so I provided that money.

My work in the UAE has enabled me to be debt-free. In the future, I would like to purchase a flat in Dhaka city, and, as well, I would like to do something for the helpless widows in my country. I am also preparing for my daughter wedding's, and have already bought jewellery for her from UAE.

Migration was the only way to change my future

Abdul Siddique

Migration was the only way that I could change my future. I am from Kullab village in Mymensingh district and before I migrated, my family had fallen upon hard times. I could not afford to send my children to school. In 2001, I went to Dubai, UAE, which cost me BDT 150,000. My goal in working abroad was to acquire land for my family cultivate, to help my extended family, and to create more opportunity for children.

However, upon arrival, I found that my salary was lower than promised, and the work was different from the description I had been given beforehand. Because of the low wages, I often could not get three meals a day, and the neighbourhood I lived in was very run-down and congested. My life early on was often distressing because of these and other reasons.

However, I persevered, and gradually was able to make enough money to help improve my family's situation back home. With my remittances, they were able to purchase some agricultural land and build a new house. In following years, I helped my brothers get work in the UAE. The remittances also helped my children once it was time for them to be married. My family now lives comfortably, and we have been able to save some money as well.

In my village, many people cannot support their families on agricultural labour alone. Therefore, an increasing amount of them are doing what I did, and going abroad as migrant labourers. Many face challenges when they go as unskilled workers to Middle-Eastern countries, but many also have been able to improve their families' positions and to pay for more and more schooling for their children.

My salary was not paid for a year

Jamila

My name is Jamila and I am from the Gopalpur village in Madaripur district. I went to Dubai in 2007 to work as a housecleaner, travelling there with a two-year visa. I spent BDT 90,000 in order to finance my journey, and I had to take a high-interest loan in order to collect the requisite funds.

In Dubai, I worked at a hospital for wages of BDT 14,000 per month. Additionally, I worked as a domestic worker in my spare time. Unfortunately, I had a misunderstanding with my employer. He filed a case against me and my salary was not paid for one year. After a lot of effort, I managed to secure a one-year visa extension. This didn't help much either because I could not get a job that paid a decent wage. I returned to Bangladesh, but I haven't found any work yet so now I am trying to migrate again, this time to Libya.

A nightmare and a total failure

Mohammad Abdul Kader Azad

I am Mohammad Abdul Kader Azad. In November 2007, I migrated to Dubai to work in the construction sector, specifically with aluminium-steel. I paid BDT 225,000 to a *Dalal* to arrange for the flight over, the required visa, and the job. My salary was only BDT 18,000 per month. There was no overtime work available and so it was difficult to save.

After two years of work, I left for three months to return to Bangladesh. When I returned to Dubai, the company decided to terminate my contract. All the plans that I had made with my family were now useless. Most of my earnings were used to pay for household expenses at home.

The only good thing that came from this whole experience is that I was able to help pay for my daughter's wedding. Nothing else came from it. I am still trying to pay off much of the debt that I incurred throughout the whole ordeal. It was a nightmare and a total failure.

After training, I will migrate again

Modina Begum

I am Modina Begum and I am from Durgapur village of Madaripur. In 2006, through a local *Dalal*, I migrated to Dubai at a cost of BDT 70,000. My eldest brother helped finance my migration costs. I spent four and half years there and in 2011, I returned home to Bangladesh.

Initially, I was paid BDT 10,000 per month, but after two years, due to my experience, my salary was increased to BDT 12,000 per month. Understanding the culture, the language, and the work was very difficult, especially during the first three months, but my employers were always good to me. They were patient and helped me learn the required skills. Everyone was very supportive and well-behaved.

Of course, the working hours were long and difficult. My day usually started at 6am and went through to midnight, but I was often given breaks in the middle for rest and leisure.

During my stay, I remitted BDT 550,000 to my family, and I brought back a savings of BDT 500,000. The savings has allowed me to build an additional room onto our house. I also opened an account at the bank to store the remaining BDT 250,000.

I had to work hard for these achievements. Now I am being trained more formally at a technical training centre (TTC), and I have plans to migrate again to Saudi Arabia. Based on my new training, this time I hope to get a better job with a better salary. I am now familiar with Arabic, which will help me to secure a better job with a higher salary. If all goes well, after I migrate to Saudi Arabia, I hope to return to Bangladesh and do something meaningful with the rest of my life.

I have worked hard and now I want to spend time with my family

Haque Mia

I am from Barodiya village in Bhaluka *Upazila*. I got married at age twenty-four. My wife and I were really struggling financially before I migrated. We were only able to afford our basic necessities; we couldn't manage to put away money in savings, or acquire other assets. I worked as a labourer on a fishing trawler, and my monthly salary was BDT 5,000. We owned very little land ourselves. It was not enough to be able to properly supplement my income by cultivating.

When I was 34, my wife gave birth to our first son. This event made me reflect even more on our family's economic position, and especially about our family's future. I concluded that I must migrate for work. Thus, in 2004, I got in touch with a labour broker to help me go to the UAE for this purpose. In the UAE, I worked as a salesperson and made BDT 20,000 per month. I was very poor when I started work there – having no savings of my own – and was forced to rely on loans from my employer. I was unusually lucky in this regard, but I paid those loans back within a year.

Using my earnings with the support of my family, I began to purchase agricultural land in 2005. Over the next few years, I would acquire small pieces, whenever I could afford it. I returned to Bangladesh in 2011, but the very next year, using the savings I had acquired abroad, I purchased real estate in the local *Upazila*, spending BDT 120,000 to acquire three decimals (121 sq. meters) of land. I have also built a semi-pucca homestead in village.

Presently, I have no loans to pay off, and our family has modest savings stored away. My decision to migrate clearly has benefited my family in numerous ways, and we greatly improved our financial position because of my time in the UAE. Now in Bangladesh I earn BDT 28000 per month. I have no plans to go abroad again; I have worked hard, and now I want to enjoy my family and look after our health.

Wealth is meaningless unless you share it

Abu Sadek Babu

My name is Abu Sadek Babu. I have been living in Abu Dhabi in the United Arab Emirates (UAE) since 2009. I was born in Anowara in the Chittagong district in 1985, and lived in the same house until 2000 in Pirkhana (Haildhan Union) in Chittagong district. I am married, but my wife and I have not had any children. My mother died in 2007, and my father is unemployed. My two brothers Sadek and Saheen, have never left our native village; they continue to live with our father.

I went to school in my home village from 1990 to 1999. I was then admitted to the Heal High School. From here, I passed my SCC exam. After passing my exam, I moved to Chittagong to work as a garment supervisor. From there, I decided to migrate abroad to Abu Dhabi in 2009. I was able to get a “company visa” which helped me migrate. I moved to Abu Dhabi hoping to make a better living for myself. I was fortunate to have some friends and family in Abu Dhabi already so I moved in with them in a shared house. I began working at an optical company as a frame craftsman. After three years, I moved to my own place, which was closer to my workplace. At the time of the interview, I was still living in this place. Since my migration, I have consistently sent money to my parents. I have also sent money to help build a mosque in my local village.

During my time abroad, I have been able to travel back to Bangladesh to visit my family. It was during one of my trips back that I married my wife, Akimon Sultana. On another visit, I helped my father rebuild his village home. I have also helped my poor relatives and neighbours in education and marriage.

Illegal work in Dubai more fruitful than legal work in Saudi Arabia

Miraj Haque

I am from Boalkhali village in the Chittagong division. In 1981, I migrated to Oman. There, I worked in the construction sector taking on various projects involving buildings, roads, and other public works. I also worked part-time as a gardener, and as an electrician, doing some simple wiring work.

I started out earning BDT 5,000 per month, but, with time, this increased to

a monthly salary of about BDT 20,000. I lived in Oman until 1997, saving a little for myself while remitting the rest back home to help cover my family's regular expenses. By the time I returned home, I had saved BDT 1,000,000, with which I bought nearly 120 decimals (0.5 hectares) of land.

After some time in Bangladesh, I migrated again, this time to Saudi Arabia. I got a job at the King Saud University, but the salary was meagre, only SAR 400 per month. After three years in Saudi, I decided to travel to Dubai. I had only a tourist visa, so I began earning money through informal work. Despite this, I earned more in Dubai than in Saudi Arabia, about BDT 20,000 to 30,000 each month. Unfortunately, after two years, I was arrested by the authorities and deported. Since returning home, I have started raising cattle, fish, and poultry to sustain myself. I have also leased ten kilometres of roadside from the government where I decided to plant 200,000 teak and other timbre-producing trees. These trees provide the impetus for my sawmill and wood business. I earn about BDT 40,000 per month from these businesses. My property and business assets are valued at BDT 20,000,000. I am a happy person living with my wife and children.

The hardship is now over

Mohammad Yunus

I live in Chowdhury Para in Sitakunda, Chittagong District. When I reached adulthood, I knew that my family now would expect more out of me. I would have to support my relatives any way I could. However, I had no clue how to do this, because I had neither education nor property. Therefore, I began to fall under severe social and mental pressure.

In order to escape this situation, I decided to migrate. I noticed that many people had changed their lives by migrating, and thus became inspired to go abroad myself. I went to Oman, and then Dubai afterwards, altogether spending twenty-two years abroad. During the stage of life when many people want to stay with family and friends, I remained abroad working. I was often very homesick. However, I could not return home before I had accumulated substantial savings.

My first migration to Oman cost me BDT 80,000. I got a job in a car rental business, and later, when I went to Dubai, I remained working with this same company. At the outset, I had no training, which made those early days quite difficult for me. However, I eventually became an expert in this

vocation, and began earning a relatively substantial income, a good chunk of which I sent home as remittances.

After returning home to Bangladesh, I started a business with the savings I had acquired abroad. I also built a home near Sitakunda College, which I rent out for BDT 20,000 per month. I also have started a car rental business in my village, modelled after the company I worked for when I was abroad. As part of this business, I own two large transport trucks, which now run throughout the country. I also have a number of stalls at the Sitakunda Bazar, which I rent out for a handsome amount. Through my ventures, I employ twelve people.

When I look back, I remember the days of sorrow and hardship, the days of my youth. However, my present prosperity makes the pain of those memories disappear.

I wish there were more helpful organizations like MRPC

Moina Begum

My name is Moina Begum, and I am from the Chotto Amtala in the Barisal district. I have a big family, and, since I am the second-oldest child in the family, I always felt that I had many familial responsibilities.

By 2009, I had arranged enough money to go to Dubai so that I could start to make some money for my family. I had been taking Arabic courses at the Mirpur Training Centre, so when I finished I was ready to go to work in Dubai. The work I did in Dubai was very difficult. However, because I had studied Arabic, I was able to overcome these difficulties without too many problems. My employers were nice people, and I faced no problems with food.

After four years, the work had completely exhausted me. I became ill and had to return to Bangladesh. After returning to Bangladesh, I recovered and tried again to go abroad for work once more. When I was trying to go abroad this time, I met with RMMRU and they helped me get in contact with the Greenland Training Centre (GTC). At the GTC, I met with two representatives from Dubai, and there I had an interview for a job. Through this interview, I received a position as a janitorial supervisor at a school in Dubai. On the 22nd of August 2014, I flew to Dubai for this job. I wish there were many organizations like the MRPCs working to help us migrants find the type of job I found. I also think that we should be more respected.

In my good days, how can I forget Goni Mia

Kalam Khan

I'm twenty-eight years old, and my wife and I have a four-year-old daughter. Our home is in Akoisora village in Brahmanbaria District. Seven years ago, my wife and I married, and my father, who disapproved of the union, disowned me. At this point, I began work as a day labourer.

I had a few friends who were going abroad for work. The amount of money they were making was impressive, and it made me think I better do the same and migrate for work. I discussed this with my wife, and she agreed with my thinking, though we both understood that we did not have the money to afford the travel costs. Thus, I went to my father-in-law's house to ask for financial assistance. My father-in-law gave some money. Still it was not enough. Out of desperation, I even went to my own father's house, but he said he could not help me.

I did not know what to do. I decided my only option was to seek a loan from a local Mahajan (money-lender). I was finally able to get a loan from the Mahajan, and I was then on my way to Dubai. However, visa complications at the airport caused me to miss my flight. I tried, again, to fly to Dubai three months later, and – for the same reasons – I failed once more to get aboard my flight. This was in 2010. People told me that because I was not lucky, I would never be able to go abroad. I was so very discouraged by these events; at this point, I was heavily indebted because of the loans I had taken out to pay for the travel costs.

I may have been unlucky in visas, but I was incredibly fortunate to have a wonderful, compassionate person for a neighbour in my village. Seeing the pain I was experiencing, a neighbour of mine, Goni Mia, lent me some money and I sought out another broker for a third migration attempt. The broker took some money up front, and agreed that I will pay the rest after I got to work abroad. This one ended up being a successful migration, and I finally was able to go to Dubai. The last migration attempt alone cost BDT 280,000, which speaks to the financial risk that can be involved in migration.

Initially my monthly earnings were relatively small, but over the years I have been able to acquire a good income. Currently, my monthly income is BDT 60,000 per month. As such, I have successfully paid off all my loans, and my family really is in a much better position. We are happy. We have

savings in the bank. I still have more dreams. For instance, I myself only completed schooling up to class five, but I want my daughter to be able to go so much further than I did. I want her to have all the schooling she needs. I also want to buy a new house, and to purchase agricultural land.

I also will never forget Goni Mia, without whom I never would have been able to go abroad and do these things. I will always remember him, and try to help and support him, as his kindness has forever impacted my life for good.

For the first time in our lives, we have financial stability!

Rupa Begum

I live in Keoradugi Village, in Lakshmipur District. I am 48 years old. I have a twenty-year-old son, Abdul Rahman, who has migrated to Dubai for work. My daughter, Halima, is twenty-two years old, and is married and lives with her husband. Both of my children have good situations currently, and they are not experiencing financial scarcity.

However, before Abdul Rahman migrated, our situation was much different. The father of my children took another wife when Abdul and Halima were ten and twelve years old respectively. At this point in time, my mental condition was, naturally, not very good. Abdul, Halima, and I were on our own. Abdul was not able to go to school past class 5 due to a shortage of money. Abdul thus started working very early on, as a day labourer on other peoples' land. I also began to do handicraft work, but this labour earned me only very small sums of money. I was worried about Halima, especially concerning the money that would be needed when she would someday marry.

One day, my older brother visited my house. Discussing the challenges facing our family, my brother suggested that Abdul go to Dubai for work in order to support the family. At first, I did not agree. My son, however, was very enthusiastic about the idea, and, finally, he won me over. In 2012, helped by my brother, and with the assistance of some loans, he migrated to Dubai.

Now, Abdul earns BDT 20,000 per month, 7,000 of which he remits to us at home. In 2013, Abdul helped his sister get married, and now, if her and her family need anything, Abdul helps them. I am happy at how Abdul has succeeded, and how brave he has been for our family. I have high hopes for his future. Right now, Abdul is gradually repaying the migration loan that

he took out two years ago. He dreams of building me a new house, and he also hopes that his brother-in-law will someday join him in Dubai.

My employer taught me how to read the Quran

Sultana

I am Sultana. I am from Matlab village, Chandpur District. My husband wanted to go abroad through a local *Dalal*. He paid BDT 90,000 for going to Dubai. But he was cheated. He was sent to Dubai with a fake passport. Within a few months, he was deported to Bangladesh. However, even after this experience, he still desired to migrate again. He tried to use a different agent to go abroad. The agent informed my husband that the cost of migration for women was almost half of that for men. Thus, my husband proposed to me that instead of him I should go work abroad. If things were to go well, then I would be able to bring my husband abroad.

In 1994, I went to Dubai. It cost my family BDT 31,000 to do this. My employer was very good to me, and treated me as a family member. My work consisted of taking care of their four children and their elderly grandfather. In the beginning, I struggled to communicate with my employers, due to the language barrier between us. However, over time I was able to improve the communication. When they learned that I was a Muslim who could not read the Quran, my employer helped me to learn Arabic so I could read the holy text.

I was earning BDT 5,000 per month. At first, I did not know how to send money back home. It was wife of my employer, the lady of the house, who taught me to send remittance through the bank. As well, she helped me to record voice messages and sent to my family members at home. I was not, in the end, able to bring my husband abroad. After five years in Dubai, I returned to my home in Bangladesh. When I was abroad, I missed my children the most. It was also difficult when my mother died while I was abroad. We have extended our homestead with the help of my remittance.

Sickness in the family

Nur Mohammad Shaheen

My name is Nur Mohammad Shaheen. I am from Chittagong district and my village is Fulgachipara. In 2012, I migrated to Dubai with the help of my uncle. The migration cost was steep at BDT 230,000. I was able to gather this sum with the help of my family, and I also borrowed BDT 50,000 from a friend of mine. My uncle had a shop in Dubai and so he said he would help me arrange for a job there. I went to Dubai and started working at my uncle's shop. Suddenly, my mother became ill, suffering two strokes in a short period of time. This was a difficult time for my family. As a result, I had to return to Bangladesh in 2014.

My whole family lives together; collectively, we are big, consisting of two parents and seven children. However, we only have a small amount of land that we are able to cultivate. As soon as my mother's health became stable, I wanted to return UAE again. However, obtaining a visa was difficult at that time. Saudi Arabia was offering visas to Bangladeshis so I thought about applying, but the question was, who will pay for me?

For the moment though, I have no proper job, so I am working with my brothers in the restaurant. I am not satisfied here. I would like to do something else. During this time, I found out about a driving programme that RMMRU was offering. I was always interested in learning to drive, so I thought this would be a great opportunity. A driver's license would make me much more employable and could open the door to other opportunities. If I am able to go abroad again, then I could easily start working as a driver. If I cannot, I can start this work here in Bangladesh.

Skilled migration reduce the chances of exploitation

Rohomat Hossain

I am Rohomat Hossain from Chittagong district. In 2008, at the age of 19, with the help of one of my relatives, I migrated to Dubai for BDT 200,000. I gathered this amount by borrowing from my relatives. Before migrating, my relatives told me that I will be working at a shop in a market in Dubai. However, once I reached Dubai, I got work in a garden, making BDT 18,000 per month. The owner covered the cost of my food, but I had to pay for my own housing. After all my living expenses, I was often unable to send any money home on a monthly basis, but after saving over periods

I manage to send BDT 20,000 or 40,000 home. This money was used to repay my migration loan. The work in the garden was very hard, and the salary was poor compared to what I would have made in a shop. For these reasons I was forced to return home. I dreamed that I would improve my family's economic standing by migrating, but I failed.

My four brothers and I owned a small amount of land, and my father looked after it until he recently passed away. I was interested in learning how to drive because I know there is a great demand for drivers abroad. It is not an easy job to learn, but the salary is very good. I am now getting a chance to learn to drive through a RMMRU program. I am learning attentively as my uncle has promised to get me a job in Kuwait if I learned how to drive. As promised, he sent me a visa, and I will soon migrate to Kuwait (at a cost of BDT 200,000).

CHAPTER III

OTHER ARAB STATES

ALGERIA

Overcoming injustice

Mohammad Tazul Haque

My name is Tazul Haque and I am from the Kagmara village in Sadar Upazila, Tangail District. My father, Md. Samsul Haque, is a construction worker. Having to raise two sons and three daughters, my father had a very tough time meeting the needs of our family.

To improve our family's economic condition, my father sent me to Algeria in March 2014. The migration cost our family BDT 175,000. According to the contract, my monthly salary was to be BDT 3,000. However, after two months of work without payment, the company for which I was working forcibly returned me to Bangladesh.

After returning to Bangladesh, I tried to speak with the labour broker, who simply tried to console me, promising to send me somewhere else. Two years passed. Eventually, I attended a meeting organized by the Migration Rights Protection Committee in Gala, which informed me of the possibility of procuring compensation for my losses in Algeria. Following the Committee's advice, and with RPDO's assistance, on August 23rd, 2015, I filed a formal complaint with BMET online. On September 2nd, 2015, I received BDT 90,000 in compensation from the labour broker. I am deeply grateful to the Migrant Rights Protection Committee for their work in righting this injustice.

JORDAN

Sisterhood beyond borders

Doli Begum

A few years ago, I was working in a garments factory in Dhaka. I found out that a few of my coworkers were going to Jordan to work in the garments industry there, so I decided to migrate to Jordan with them.

In my family, I am the sole earner. My father abandoned my mother, me, and my two other siblings, when were still very young, and thus my mother had a very hard time raising us alone. I dropped out of school in class six for financial reasons. After sitting idly at home for two years, when I became fifteen, I left my village and came to Dhaka with on of my aunts, to work in the garment industry.

I wanted to help my mother financially, so that my other two sisters could continue to study. My stay in Jordan was very fruitful. I enjoyed good working and relatively decent housing conditions. My company arranged my stay in a mess with my other female co-workers from different countries. I learned so many things from my co-workers about their countries. I learned to cook some Sri Lankan foods from one. I also picked up some Hindi, because we spoke it so often in the workplace.

I stayed in Jordan for seven years, but returned in 2013. I am deeply satisfied that I was able to fulfill my obligation as the eldest daughter, as we were able to arrange the marriage of both of my sisters. Now it is only my mother and I at home. I am only twenty-eight years old, and someday soon I hope to get married.

Improving my children's lives more important than keeping my good-for-nothing husband happy

Momena

My name is Momena from Tangail district. I am 45 years old and I currently work in Jordan. One day, my husband suddenly died. This threw me into a difficult situation. I started sewing around this time. Later, my family members married me off to my husband's younger brother, who was unemployed at the time. My sewing work was our only source of income. These factors influenced me to think about migration, so I contacted some

agencies, like the Bangladesh Overseas Employment Service Limited (BOESL). I migrated ten years ago to Jordan and before doing so I got trained in a garments factory. A few years after I had migrated, my second husband advised me to return home. He threatened to divorce me if I did not. I did not want a divorce, but I also did not want to return home. My husband then divorced me, so I am now sending my earnings to my father. With the help of my money, my father, mother, brother, and his wife are looking after my children, and are living well. Improving my children's lives was more important than keeping my useless husband happy.

Migration helped me to get married

Jannat Ara

I am Jannat Ara. I had no interest in studies. As a result, my family members tried hard to marry me off. I worked in a garment factory in Dhaka for three years, but remained unmarried. The reason for this was demand for large sums of dowry that was beyond my family's capacity to pay. Therefore, I decided not to get married. Instead I decided to migrate as my elder sister had. I contacted Bangladesh Overseas Employment Service Limited (BOESL) and migrated to Jordan where I now work in a garment factory, earning BDT 26,000 per month. I am able to send part of my salary home regularly. My father and brother are saving my money in a bank. They want to keep some money aside for my marriage. In 2015, I returned home for two months during which I received a number of offers for marriage. Finally, I got married. My husband wants to go abroad like I did. I think someday I will be able to bring him to Jordan. I have saved BDT 400,000 from my remittances. I will spend this for the purpose of helping us both go abroad for work. However, if I fail to help him to migrate, he will start a new business at home with that money. The objective of my migration was to save money for marriage. I am successful in that regard.

They substituted my contract on arrival

Papri Khatun

My name is Papri Khatun. My father's name is Sheikh Aziz. We are from the Bakhunda village in Faridpur district. Our family was not well-off and so my father had the idea that he would send me to Jordan to earn some money. On 27 February 2013, I got some housekeeping training from the local

Faridpur government training centre. After the training was complete, I was able to travel to Jordan. First, I went to my sponsor's house. His name was Yusuf Md. Abdullah Hammad. According to the contract made between my sponsor and me, they said I would get USD 175 per month, however when I arrived in Jordan, this was not the case. They made another contract with me, giving me a much lower salary. Not only that, but I was not even given basic day to day necessities like hygiene products or clothes. My employer tortured me. I contacted my family and my father tried to get me brought back to Bangladesh. My father contacted RMMRU to help repatriate me. After RMMRU heard about my situation on 18 June 2013, they went to the BMET office with all of my documents and papers. My father submitted an application to repatriate me to Bangladesh. After several follow-ups, the BMET office was finally able to help me and I returned to Bangladesh on the 12 of December 2013. I am grateful to BMET for looking at my case with compassion. When I am alone, I feel very sad. Many go abroad and have success, but I was the one to encounter bad luck.

My losses can never be overcome

Jhuma Khatun

My name is Jhuma Khatun. My father's name is Sohrab Molla. I am from Sultanpur in the Faridpur district. On the 12th of July 2013, I travelled to Jordan to work as a housekeeper. I did this with the help of a few individuals: a local *Dalal* named Ishak Sarder, and his brother Sabu Sharder, and also the son of the Chairman of Bhadrason *Upazila* whose name was Shawon. The trip cost BDT 60,000. Before I left for Jordan, I did a housekeeping training course with the Sheikh Fazilatunnesa Karigori Training Centre that lasted twenty-one days. Five days after the training ended, I got a flight bound for Jordan. Just before entering the airport, the son of the Chairman gave me a packet to hand over to those who were coming to get me at my destination. However, the other girls flying with me told me that the packet might be yabba (drugs), and as suggested by them I threw the packet in an airport toilet. On the 13 of July 2013, I reached Jordan. A representative of my *Dalal* met me at the airport and brought me to their office. My employer met us at the office and gave me JOD 3,000 (USD 4,200). Later I was told that with that money the owner had bought me. On the 14th of July, I started working. Sometimes my working hours were from 7am to 3am. They gave me a bit of bread, a cup of tea and some fruit each day, and once a week, I

received a serving of rice. After I started working, my employer's two sons approached me asking for sex, but I refused and so they physically abused and tortured me for resisting. One day, one of the sons raped me. I was unable to protect myself from such aggression. After the first time, they came repeatedly and raped me again and again. One month later, I spoke with my father on the phone and told him what had happened. My father then told the local *Dalal* what was happening. He asked the *Dalal* to take action immediately. The *Dalal* did nothing and so my father complained to the local Chairman. The Chairman then arranged for a local arbitration between my father, the *Dalal*, and Shawon. The arbitration concluded that I would be brought back to Bangladesh within ten days. The ten-day period elapsed and nothing happened. However, during these ten days, the *Dalal* and Shawon went into hiding. Again, my father filed a complaint according to the Anti-Trafficking Law of 2012. The complaint was lodged at the police station, but the officers did not take the case seriously. Later, my father brought the case to the Member of Parliament for Faridpur. The case was then referred to the Home and Foreign Ministry. My father had to pay the BDT 40,900 for my flight home. Finally, I was brought home. Once I returned to Bangladesh, I was immediately admitted into the hospital. To this day, I must see a counsellor to deal with what has happened to me.

Irregular migration seems easier than regular migration

Sahana Khatun

My name is Sahana Khatun. My father's name is Md. Ali. I am from the Alipur village in Faridpur district. My father worked as a businessman, and he was a freedom fighter. He has three children of which I am the oldest. Around the year 1978, my father disappeared. To this day, we have not figured out what happened to him. There were some days when we went without food. After three years, my mother got a job in Faridpur Sadar Hospital as a caregiver. After I took the SSC, we didn't have enough money for me to continue with my studies. My aunt had been working in Dubai and through her I was able to get a job there. In 1996, I travelled to Dubai and worked as a telephone operator after paying BDT 25,000 to travel there. However, I had to return to Bangladesh because I could not communicate.

Even so, I tried again in 1997. I went to Saudi Arabia to work as a janitor in a hospital after my uncle helped me get a job there. This job allowed me to earn BDT 7,000 each month. After two years, by 1999, I had learned Arabic

sufficiently. With this job, I started working in catering as a server. In my free time I made some extra money by sewing children's clothes, hats, and paper dolls. I sent some money back to my mother in Bangladesh to help her. I also saved some of my earnings in a bank account. After some time, I brought my brother to join me and to work in Saudi Arabia. I had learned many skills and began earning BDT 25,000 per month. In 2002, I returned to Bangladesh and at that time, I had saved BDT 500,000.

In 2003, I got married in Madhukhali in the Faridpur district. Once I was married, I bought some land and made a home there which costed BDT 300,000. However, one day, I realized that my husband was becoming addicted to alcohol and drugs. This caused a lot of turmoil with the family. In 2009, I sent my husband abroad for a job using the money I had saved. However, my husband never sent any money back to me. More importantly, by falsifying documents, my husband's brother transferred the house I built into his wife's name and filed a case against me. Then, things with my children and my mother became very difficult.

After that in May 2012, I found out that the government was sending Bangladeshis to Jordan to work as housekeepers. Hearing this I went to Faridpur Technical Training Centre (TTC) and I arranged an interview. I needed to complete a twenty-one-day housekeeping training course. But luckily, on the 4th of October 2012, I was able to leave for Jordan. The next day, my new employer brought me to their house. On the 6th of October, I began working. After being there for a month, my employer brought me to the bank to pay me my salary. My job contract stated that I would receive JOD 200 per month, however, they only gave me JOD 150. When I protested about this, their kindness quickly disappeared. When I asked about my salary again, they claimed to have contributed four-months worth of salary to my bank account. But I couldn't see any of the deposits they claimed to have made. When I mentioned that none of the deposits had shown up, they tormented me. After asking many times, I finally received my full salary. They did not give me enough food, and kept me in a room under the stairs without a window. They didn't allow me to shower everyday so they could save water.

After five months, I complained to the local *Dalal's* office, but this did not produce any results. Then, I contacted RMMRU for help. RMMRU gave me the address and phone number for the Bangladeshi Embassy in Jordan. I tried again with the *Dalal's* office, but nothing happened. On 20 May 2013, I went to the *Dalal's* office once more and they told me that if I

wanted to go back to Bangladesh, then I would have to pay BDT 300,000. Otherwise, it would not be possible to send me home. On May 23rd, they found me a different employer in Jordan who had paid JOD 2,000 to the *Dalal* to hire me. My new employer had a son, and he tried to physically abuse me. I was unable to sleep. After that day, I tried to get them to bring me back to the *Dalal*'s office. My employer agreed with me and brought me to the *Dalal*'s office. At the *Dalal*'s house, I encountered my first Jordanian employer who then brought me back to their house. The first three days passed without any problems, but after that they began tormenting me again.

I could not take this anymore so on August 14th, I met a staff member from the Bangladeshi Embassy. She checked my physical condition and then decided that I needed to return to Bangladesh as soon as possible. However, they didn't do anything after this meeting. So again, on the 26th of August, after my first employer abused me again, I went back to the Embassy. The Embassy then took me back to the *Dalal*'s office and instructed the *Dalal* to send me back to Bangladesh as soon as possible. In the interim, they kept me in their office for twenty days, but then finally on the 15th of September, I was able to return to Bangladesh.

My lazy, useless husband

Jesmin Akter

My husband never had a steady job. Due to his lack of commitment to work, he was sacked several times by his employers. In such a situation, every now and then, our family had financial difficulty, and my husband used to send me to my parents house. When I heard about international migration from my neighbours, I decided to do something on my own, and secure my children's future.

My father paid my migration costs, and my husband and my two sons went back to our village and stayed with my parents, so that my mother and other sisters could look after them. I went to Malaysia and worked there in a glove factory for five years. While working there, I was earning about BDT 5000 per month. With my earnings I was able to ensure my children's education, and a portion of their daily expenses. My father also helped me construct a small tin shed on our family land. My children now also have a home of their own.

In 2008 I migrated again, this time to Jordan. I worked there in a garments

factory. With overtime, I was earning around BDT 13,000-15,000 per month. I stayed in Jordan for four years. Although my husband does not work, he is a good father. Both my sons are doing well in their exams. My eldest son got a 5-point GPA on his SSC examination. With the income from my second migration, I bought some more land close to our village. Once I returned, I did some training in duck rearing. Now I rear ducks at my home and sell them. I am quite satisfied. Migration helped me ensure a roof over my family's head. My sons are getting a good education. What else could one ask for?

LEBANON

Luckily, my employer was also a woman!

Rabeya Begum

I am Rabeya Begum. I live in the Vaatkura village of Tangail district. I have a husband, one son, and a daughter that currently live with me. My husband is a rickshaw puller. One day, my husband became sick. He would become tired easily from his work. We had no other means of income. Before I decided to migrate, we were in poor conditions with no extra money on hand. I needed to get a job, but could not find one in the country. I had to migrate. I was just 31 years old at the time. I migrated to Lebanon spending BDT 70,000. I borrowed part of this money from my relatives and BDT 40,000 from moneylenders on interest. I partook in training by a government agency in Tangail before departing. The law states that female migrant workers, intending to work in houses, must take one month of training before leaving. I had a medical examination and provided my fingerprint.

I had a job immediately upon arriving in Lebanon, but it only made me BDT 9,000 per month. I worked as a domestic worker in a household of one female. Her husband had passed away and her children lived elsewhere. The household head was good to me. She provided me with good food and clothes. She also helped me to earn some extra money by giving me part-time work at her relatives' houses. In return, I worked very hard, and within a short time I was able to clear all my debts. I happily worked five years in this situation.

Once I took leave to visit my home. I brought BDT 700,000 that I had saved during my stay in Lebanon. I bought four decimal (162 sq. meters) of land and gave BDT 200,000 to my daughter's husband so that he could migrate to Qatar for work. He is now earning BDT 20,000 as a construction worker there. When I decided to return to Lebanon, I contacted my former employer, but she told me she had already hired a new worker. Regardless, I still wanted to leave for work. Now I have submitted my papers to go work in Saudi Arabia. I am worried about this as I hear a lot of bad news about the work conditions for female domestic workers in Saudi Arabia. Currently I cannot decide if I really want to go or not.

Treated like a slave

Soheli Akter

My name is Soheli Akter. I am from Mahishasura, Narsingdi. I am a twenty years old. I come from a very poor family of ten members of which I am the eldest child. I married, but was forced to leave my husband within six days of our marriage, as I discovered he was a drug addict and a gambler. Before migrating, I had a job in a garment factory, making just BDT 5,000 per month. With that money we had to live in very poor conditions. One day, when I was in my village I met a middleman who told me about the opportunities abroad. This inspired me and I wanted to go. I had to take loans with huge interest in order to cover my migration cost. Then, in 2015, I migrated to Lebanon at the age of nineteen, paying BDT 80,000 to that middleman. Once in Lebanon, I became employed as a domestic worker in a family household of six. I worked almost twenty-four hours a day for them, and I did not receive my salary. Whenever I requested my salary, they told me that they “purchased me for a great sum” and so they could treat me like a slave. They told me I would never receive any salary. To deal with this, I contacted my middleman who promised me that if I worked better and harder, making my employers happy, I would get my salary. I believed him and did my best to work as hard as I could, but still did not receive my salary. I worked in this way for a year. At the end of that year, my employer took me to the *Akama* (Contract) office because I had no contract for work. I said I did not want a contract as I wanted to go home, but no one understood my situation or wanted to help me. Finally, after much work and with empty hands, I returned home. I had also become ill during my time working in Saudi Arabia. I now have a huge burden of debt on my shoulders which I cannot clear. I am now looking for a job in the garment industry here.

Our son is our only hope - not migration

Roma Begum

My name is Roma Begum. I am from the Noyadiya village of Netrokona District. I am twenty-eight years old. My husband's name is Moti Mia. He owns a small business, selling mattresses and pillows. My son is studying in college which has cost our family a lot of money: academic fees, book purchases, academic coaching etc. We could not afford all of

this. Regardless, we wanted our son to continue studying, despite the cost. In order to help pay for my son's education, I decided to migrate. I went to Lebanon in October 2013 to be employed as a domestic worker, paying BDT 93,000 after selling some of our assets. There were three members in the household I worked for. I was mistreated from the very beginning of my employment. I tried to work my absolute hardest, but still my employers were not happy with me. Both the husband and wife beat me several times. I worked for nine months, but I did not receive any of my salary. Whenever I asked for this, they would get angry with me again. On top of all this, the father would try to have sex with me, often while drunk. However, despite all of his attempts, he failed each time. Still, I wanted to continue my job and I tried to get my salary, but I could not. I informed my husband at home about the situation, and he subsequently contacted the District Manpower and Employment Training (BMET) office to launch a case against my employer. He also gave the office BDT 20,000 to fly me back home. I returned to Bangladesh in July of 2014. Currently, I have no job at home. My husband is still working at his small business. We pass our days in want. My migration has cost us dearly. Now, our only hope is our son. We hope that he will soon finish his studies and get a good job. I don't know what we'll do without him.

My husband appreciates that my migration saved our family

Amina

I lived my whole life in Kariyala Union of Brahmanbaria district until the day I went to Lebanon to work as a domestic worker. We were a small family, comprised of just my husband, my mother-in-law and my two children. My husband was originally a share cropper. We didn't own any land so sometimes he worked as a day-labourer on other people's land for some money - around BDT 300 per day. He didn't get work every day, maybe only every second day. Thus, our monthly earnings were usually around BDT 5,000 or less. It was very difficult to support our five member family with such little income.

Our situation grew worse when my husband got sick. He could only manage a small amount of work each month, and his earnings fell drastically. We went to our relatives for a loan so that he could go to see a doctor. The doctor gave us the terrible news that my husband had a brain tumour. I had

never felt so helpless. I could not imagine where I would find the money for his operation. By the grace of God, I was able to get a loan of BDT 100,000 from my relatives, and my husband was able to get the necessary operation. For a long time after the operation, he was unable to work. I tried to manage our family's expenses by taking more and more support from family members and from a local moneylender. I also had to manage all the household tasks. My mother-in-law helped me take care of my baby boy. I grew increasingly exhausted by the hefty workload.

One day by accident we met a broker for labour migration. He suggested that I could go abroad for work. My husband and I thought over it for a while and we jointly decided that I should migrate. Thus, after acquiring another BDT 100,000 in loans, I went to Lebanon for work, leaving my husband, daughter and our 3-year-old son in the care of my mother-in-law.

I was in Lebanon for three years working there as a domestic worker. The work was strenuous as I was responsible for the upkeep of sixteen rooms, as well as the care of the boss' three children. The conditions were harsh. I received only one meal per day. The few meals that I got were also quite insubstantial, generally consisting of only a few small pieces of bread. This pattern caused me to grow increasingly weak and malnourished. However, I persevered and stayed back, paying off all of our family's debts. When my visa was over I came back.

My son was already six years old. While many people work hard and take on extra tasks to further their position in their company, or to ensure that their salary will be increased, many women, like myself, are thinking only of bringing more and more benefits to our families when we do such things. As well, as both an international migrant and a mother, women such as myself are not able to show affection in-person to our children, and thus, we work extra-hard to send even more gifts and remittances to our loved ones. My husband wants me to migrate again. But I have decided that I will not stay without my children any more. God knows who will win, my love for children or the need for income.

I plan to migrate again, but this time with more training

Shefali

I am Shefali and I am from Dikreer Chor in the Faridpur district. In January of 2008, I migrated to Lebanon with the help of my cousin's sister. I took a loan of BDT 50,000 to pay for my travel to Lebanon. While I was there, I earned BDT 7,000 per month. My employer was a good man. Essentially, my job was to watch over his two children and perform some other household tasks. I worked for just over three years and regularly sent remittances back home through the National Bank. One of the first things I did with my earnings was to pay off the loan I took. The rest of the money was used for household expenses back in Bangladesh. I also managed to save BDT 100,000 over my time in Lebanon. Currently, I am attending a housekeeping training course at the Faridpur Technical Training Centre. I plan to return to Lebanon for work. Hopefully, with my formal training, I will be able to earn more than the first time.

My hard work earned me my employer's respect

Soma Akhtar

I am from the Khorsha village in Faridpur. I spent BDT 65,000 to travel to Lebanon in 2007. I had a two-year contract lined up to work as a domestic worker. I had to borrow money from my family and take a loan of BDT 40,000 with interest to finance my journey. I used to get BDT 6,700 per month. My employer was good to me. After my initial two-year contract ended, it was extended by another year and a half. When I requested that my employer increase my salary, it was raised to BDT 10,000 per month. I must say that my hard work and skills helped me to earn the confidence and trust of my employer. This contributed to the positive relationship we had with each other. Within six months of my stay, I was able to pay off the debts I had taken. I remitted money to my mother. Even with the little bit I was sending home, my mother was able to buy a small parcel of land. I returned to Bangladesh and now I am now taking more training on housekeeping so that I can go to Lebanon on a free visa. I have attended a one-day pre-departure training that was put on by RMMRU. This helped me to learn a lot about migration. The organization also help to arrange a loan from a migrant welfare bank to finance my journey.

I fled abuse and went to jail for it

Samina Begum

I am Samina Begum. I am twenty-one years old, and my home district is Faridpur. In 2009, I went to Lebanon as a domestic worker with the help of my sister who was already working there as a domestic worker. My sister helped me secure a Kafala visa from a Lebanese family. My sister came back to Bangladesh on vacation, and then I returned with her to the Lebanese city of Sin el Fil. During this time, my sister informed me of the nature of my upcoming work, including salary details and other benefits. I was not made aware of contract papers or any other documents. I started working and found that there was no limit to my daily working hours. I often worked seven days a week, usually for 16-18 hours a day. The work mainly consisted of daily household chores, like cleaning and cooking. I worked hard, but did not receive a regular salary for the first few months. After two months, I received my salary for the first month. When I asked for my pay on time, my employers got upset, often scolding me and beating me.

Eventually, the family's younger son began sexually harassing me. I did what I could to protect myself, but I didn't talk about this with his parents who were my employers. One night, the son sexually assaulted me. Luckily, I managed to fend him off. After this, I shared what had happened with his mother. However, she did not believe me, and instead responded by blaming me and beating me. After this incident, I ran away from the house and took refuge at the residence of one of my sister's friends in the downtown area, ten miles away from Sin el-Fil.

While I was hiding out, my employer filed a case against me, alleging that I had stolen valuables from his house. The police then arrested me and sent me to jail. After six months, an NGO rescued me from jail and brought me to their shelter, which is where I presently reside. The sisters from Caritas told me that I made several mistakes. For example, I did not use a recruiting agent. As well, I did not take any prior training about domestic service, and I had no knowledge of Lebanese law, which prohibits employees like myself from leaving the workplace without prior notice or informing the Ministry of the Interior. Throughout my time in Lebanon, I had no contact at all with the Bangladesh consulate in Lebanon. Basically, the lesson of my story is one that affirms the importance of migrants receiving information on support mechanisms and the legal frameworks in receiving countries.

BMET helped me come home!

Bina Begum

My name is Bina Begum and I come from the Rajoir *Upazila* in the Madaripur district. My husband deserted me one day, leaving my daughter and I to fend for ourselves. Things weren't going so well for me financially, so I went to a local *Dalal* who then set me up with "Jinan Trading and Contraction." It was arranged that I would go to Lebanon for work as a housekeeper. I had to pay BDT 60,000 to leave for Lebanon on 16 September 2012. I dreamt about going to Lebanon and that I would make something of myself there. However, it didn't take long for me to encounter a number of problems. I didn't know Arabic and this really made things difficult. In fact, I was abused by my employer. They did not provide me with proper meals and they didn't pay my salary on time. It went on like this for two to three months, but I couldn't take it - mentally or physically. When I decided that I wanted to go back to Bangladesh, my daughter, Asma Begum, helped me to return. She sought out RMMRU who helped her complete the application forms for BMET. BMET then started the process to help resolve my case. RMMRU followed up with the BMET several times throughout the case. Finally, on 22 December 2013, I returned to Bangladesh.

LIBYA

First time succeeded, second time cheated

Mohammad Akteruddin

My name is Md. Akhteruddin. I am from the Muradpur village in Comilla district. Before migrating, I had a small business, but I didn't make enough to provide for my wife and son. Eventually, the business failed. I wanted to find a job that would pay well so that when I became old and could no longer work, I would be able to live comfortably. While I was thinking about this, a person from my neighbourhood approached me with an offer to introduce me to a middleman. The middleman that he would get me job as a plumber in Libya which would pay USD 600 a month. He asked for BDT 400,000 to make the arrangements. I believed him and borrowed enough money from my relatives to be able to pay him. Accordingly he sent me to Libya. However, once I arrived, I found that the middleman had lied, and I did not have a job. To survive I worked in a hotel for a few days, and as a mechanic in car garage. Although I was paid 400 Dinars per month, the middleman took away 100 and I got the rest - only 300 Dinars (BDT 16-17,000). It was very difficult to pay off my debts with this small salary, and at the end of each month I had no money to send home. What's worse is that the place where I worked in Libya was a conflict zone. Every now and then I would hear gunfire and bombs. On top of this, I had no official permission to work in the country so I had to work in secrecy, hiding from the authorities. For this reason, I couldn't stay long. I had to return home. When I returned, I explained everything to the neighbour who introduced me to the middleman in the first place. I told him I wanted to launch a legal case against him because he had cheated me. However, just when I was about to do that the middleman and the neighbour fled the village, and I don't know where they went. I tried to contact them by phone, but their phones were switched off. Libya was not even my first migration experience. Before going to Libya, I went to Dubai and worked there. With those savings I was able to do business in my country, earning about BDT 8,000-10,000 per month. Somehow, I have to provide for my family, but it is very difficult. Regardless, I have decided not to go abroad again. There are some people in my village who have had success in migration, but I failed. I was cheated in several ways and now I pass my days in deprivation.

I am not interested in compensation, all I want is work

Mohammad Helal

I am Mohammad Helal and I am 34 years old. I am from Patuakhali. One day, I decided to migrate to Libya. I arrived there just ten months before the uprisings began! In order to get there, I had to spend BDT 275,000. I managed the total amount by borrowing from various sources. I was desperate to arrange the money. My immediate family was able to help with some of the cost. Beyond that, I did not have any relatives from whom I could borrow. My family did own any land so we couldn't get money that way either. I borrowed a major portion of the money from three moneylenders. I borrowed BDT 50,000 each from two moneylenders. I was meant to pay BDT 37,000 as annual interest to one moneylender and had to give forty mounds of paddy annually. I secured another BDT 25,000 with same interest rate for a year. With my income from Libya, I was able to pay back about half of my loans. If I had been able to stay in Libya for four to five years then I would have been able to get a decent saving. However, I had to return home abruptly as the security situation there deteriorated very fast and my life was at risk. One night, my workmates and I were eating dinner, the militia set a large brush fire right outside of us. We all abandoned our food immediately, some of us caught fire and we tried to extinguish the fires by rolling on the floor. When I reached the Dhaka airport, I received food and some money to return home. Once I returned to Bangladesh, I wasn't going back. To this day, I am still traumatized. On top of these, I have to shoulder the responsibility of running a five member family, including a sick father. I am now a rickshawallah. I don't know what my future holds. I have heard that the government will be providing BDT 50,000 in compensation. My moneylenders are keeping a close eye on me. As soon as I get the compensation money, they will pounce on it. I would have benefited more if the government could organize a job for me.

I survived a civil war

Harun Mia

I am Harun Mia. I went to Libya in mid-2009 at the age of twenty-eight. I spent a total of BDT 265,000 to finance my migration. I began working in a Korean construction company, Cosmo, in Nalot, adjacent to Tunisian border. My salary was LYD 180 (around BDT 10,000). As things were

tough in Libya, most of us in Nalot could only get work for half the year. In order to retrieve the money that my family spent for migration, I thought I would stay put there even after the civil war broke out in the country. The rebels came and ransacked the company premises where I was residing. The authorities decided to shift its base. I had belongings with me such as my clothes, blankets, utensils etc. When we were shifting, I wanted to take some of the belongings with me, but the company officials did not allow me to carry anything. After we reached the other side of the border, we had to survive under open sky for more than twenty days and subsequently we were repatriated to Bangladesh. Upon return I am staying with my brother. I am not at all welcome. My sister-in-law wants me to move out as soon as I can, although it is my father's house. I have sold my share of the property to finance my migration to Libya. However I still have my share in the home itself. My fate is uncertain now. I do not know what to do, should I try to go to another country, or should I try to do something in Bangladesh? Who will give me work?

Pretending to be Hindu

Nasiruddin Ahmed

I am Nasiruddin Ahmed and I hail from Feni town. At the age of 27, I sold my father's land and my mother's jewellery to pay for my migration cost to Libya in 2010. I paid an amount of BDT 270,000 to one Mostafa of Micro-export Agency situated in Naya Paltan to process my visa. Initially, Mostafa committed that I would be able to get a job immediately after I paid a major amount of money. However, even after payment of more than a majority of the amount, he dilly-dallied with the date of my departure. When I created pressure one morning, he called me and asked me to go to Dhaka at once to take a flight to Libya that very night. When I reached Dhaka, to my surprise, I found that although the passport bore my photo, the name was of Gopesh Chandra Bhowmik, son of Umesh Chandra Bhowmik. When I enquired about this, Mostafa informed that was the only way I could go to Libya. Otherwise, it would take years. He also helped me memorise the personal details that the passport contained. I was also asked to know the basics of the Hindu faith. Although I was meant to fly that very night, it was delayed by a couple of days. Upon arriving in Libya I was taken to a dormitory where almost all residents were Muslims and many of them were from Bangladesh. To avoid being reported I had to act like a Hindu. I could

neither eat beef, nor could I pray - even on Eid days. I found work, but I did not get my pay regularly. I could work in Libya only for ten months then the civil war disrupted everything. I am an eyewitness of the horrors that took place in Benghazi. We moved to Egyptian border. Gradually we were repatriated to Bangladesh. The Bangladesh Expatriates Welfare and Overseas Employment ministry is providing BDT 50,000 to each returnee. When I was processing my documents, I was told that I will not receive the money as my real name and permanent address does not match with the passport name that I have traveled with.

For the poor, justice evades

Shapan Mia

I am Shapan and I am 25 years old. I am from Chapai Nawabganj in Rajshahi. I went to Libya in 2010. Just before my departure, I was given my travel documents. I noted that the name of the passport holder was Asaduzzaman of Faridpur - which was not my name - although the passport bore my photo. When I brought the matter to the *Dalal*, he assaulted me physically and left me no choice but to migrate with that fake document. The sub-agent's name was Atiq. He was also from Rajshahi working for a Dhaka-based company. Since I did not have enough money, the *Dalal* took possession of my land and promised to give back the land if I did not get a job in Libya. This was all written in a contract. When I arrived in Libya, no one was there at the airport to receive me. I was completely helpless. I had the address of my employer and with the support of some fellow Bangladeshis who I met on the plane, I went there. My *Dalal* didn't assign me directly with an employer, but rather with a labour supplier company. The supplier did not place me in any regular job. I went wherever they told me there was work to be done. Otherwise, I will remain idle. I was so upset that I asked the *Dalal* to bring me back to Bangladesh. But the *Dalal* refused. Due to outbreak of the crisis in Libya, I got a chance to come back to Bangladesh. Immediately after my return, I went to the *Dalal*, but he refused to hand over my former land claiming that, he delivered on his promise to give me a job and I had returned due to the political turmoil. I then went to the Chairman of my village union and demanded that a mediation session be held. But the Chairman did not care and I had no other recourse. They did nothing to help me. I understand that because I am poor, I will not get the justice I deserve. I am now in dire condition.

***Dalal* forged my papers**

Mohammad Amirullah

I am Md. Amirullah and I am from Nedhar in Tangail. In 2013, when I was 18 years old, I wanted to go to Libya for work. In our family, we have four brothers and three sisters. My father and mother died two years ago. All of my elder sisters have married. Among the brothers, I am the eldest. My younger brothers are studying and so I felt a responsibility to bring in some money. Thus, I sought out a *Dalal* who promised to help arrange my migration abroad. I paid him BDT 400,000. I borrowed this money from some business people in my village. However, the *Dalal* was dishonest and he forged a number of my papers. When I was at the airport preparing to leave, an airport investigator found that my documents were fake. Instead of working abroad, I went to jail for one month. After one month, they released me. After that, I still had some debts that I have to deal with. I am repaying these slowly. I am married but I have no children. Right now, I want to learn how to drive. Luckily, I found an opportunity to learn how to drive with RMMRU. I took the training course and it went very well. In the future, I hope to put these skills to use. Maybe one day, I can drive a car for an individual or a company.

I was almost lucky then I lost it

Khairul Islam

I am twenty-four years old and I hail from Rangpur. I went to Libya at the end of 2009. Unfortunately, as soon as I arrived in Libya, my passport was forcefully seized by the labour supply company I was due to work for. Fifty-six of us were left huddled in an abandoned warehouse. My experience in Libya was very bad. For the first year, I was treated like a slave. I was made to work twelve hours and received almost no payment during that period. We were taken to work in the morning and brought back to the warehouse after finishing work. We were treated like detainees. Although various companies that I worked for did pay my wages, I never received it because it was paid directly to the money-grabbing labour-supply company. Non-payment of wages was not just my problem. All fifty-six of us were facing the same situation. One of our mates was able to escape and reported our situation to the Bangladesh mission. Subsequently, the embassy took the initiative and freed us from the cursed warehouse and the chokehold

of the company. The embassy further facilitated my employment at a Kuwaiti construction company named Ramco. This time, I began receiving my wages regularly. However, unfortunately, within five months violence erupted in our area. I watched the horror, looting and plundering of various armed militia factions unroll before me. In May 2011, I was repatriated from there. I had to return to Bangladesh as a pauper.

I had to flee the civil war

Mohammad Minhaz

I am Md. Minhaz and I am from the village of Alangga in Tangail. I am a returnee migrant. In 2009, when I was twenty-four years old, I went to Libya hiring a *Dalal* to help arrange everything. One of my relative had already gone abroad with the help of a *Dalal*. They helped me get in touch with this same *Dalal*. He told me that I would be able to work as a carpenter in construction firm at Libya. He told me that he would need BDT 170,000 to make my migration possible. To collect this sum, I borrowed from my relatives. However, before I could leave, the *Dalal* told me I had to learn carpentry. In Alenga, there was a training center and there I learned carpentry. Once I arrived in Libya, I was disappointed to find that my salary was only BDT 9,000. On the other hand, my accommodations and meals were arranged and paid by the company. I tried to save my earnings, and after a year, I sent BDT 100,000 back home. In 2011, when the war in Libya broke out, I had to return home. The reason I went abroad was to earn more money. However, due to war, this didn't really work out. In Bangladesh, my family owns some land, but not much. I am the eldest among my brothers. My younger brother was studying, but now he's stopped and is unemployed. I was looking for some way to make money after returning to Bangladesh. I heard about an opportunity which would teach me how to drive. The programme was organized by RMMRU. I am proud of myself for learning how to drive. I now have the possibility to work as a driver - either in Bangladesh or abroad.

CHAPTER IV

MIGRATION TO SOUTHEAST ASIA

MALAYSIA

Migrated to flee unjust arrest but it turned out for the better

Rafiqul Mia

I am from Madaripur. When I was in class nine, there was a big fight with our neighbouring village over a football match. Things got completely out of hand, and one of the students from another village was killed. The neighbouring villagers filed cases against many, including those of us who had been playing.

In 2008, when the interim government came into power, they started arresting all of those with cases lodged against them. My father was very worried about my future. If I were put in jail then I would never be able to find a good job. Therefore, he arranged a visa to Malaysia for me. I worked there at a palm plantation, and the work conditions there were very tough.

Within a year of work, I managed to save MYR 1,800 and got a new visa that allowed me to work in the city. For the last 5 years, I have been working as a fruit-juice vendor. My employer treats me like a son, and she trusts me entirely with her business. Last year, she helped me to bring another brother of mine to Malaysia for work. Initially, we found work for him in the construction sector, but later, through a friend, I arranged a better job for him in a coffee shop. Both of us are able to regularly send money home. My father is quite happy with this arrangement, but I sometimes feel sad that I didn't finish my SSC examination.

Upon return *Dalal* deceitfully took all my papers

Mohammad Sayem

I am from the Sharsha village of the Jessore district. I am a carpenter by trade. In 2010, through the help of a local *Dalal*, I migrated to Malaysia spending BDT 40,000. The *Dalal* had promised me work at a furniture factory. He told me that I would have to first travel to Malaysia on a travel

visa. He told me the visa would be converted to a work visa and then subsequently extended once I arrived. I trusted the *Dalal* and agreed to the arrangement. After only three days in Malaysia, I was arrested by the police. Then, I was kept in a detention centre and deported back to Bangladesh. When I contacted the *Dalal* again, I demanded an explanation. He invited me to come to his place and asked me to bring all of my documentation. Little did I realize that it was his plan to steal all the paperwork from me. He lunged at me and then seized the documents. I was furious because now I would be unable to launch any complaint. I had no proof for what had happened and there were no witnesses to the financial transaction so I was completely screwed!

There's no reason to migrate if you can't save

Mohammad Hashem

My story is in black and white. Half of it is bright and the other half is dark. When I went abroad, I began to really appreciate my homeland. In 1989, I migrated to Iraq. There, I began to earn a good income. However, after some time, the war between Iraq and Kuwait broke out. Due to the various crises and the fighting, returning to Bangladesh was very difficult. However, I was lucky enough to return home safely. Once the war in Iraq ended, I learnt that the Iraqi government would pay some compensation. Accordingly, I made an application and I found out through BMET that I would be receiving some compensation. Obtaining the money came with great difficulty. Soon after, I decided that I would migrate again - this time to Malaysia. In 1998, I went as a general labourer. I was told by my employer that I would be paid MYR 30 per day, but they ended up paying me only MYR 17 per day. I came to understand that I was being taken advantage of. There was no possible way to live on this income and send money back home; it just wasn't enough. I felt hopeless, but I didn't know what else I could do.

In time, I got a job as a driver. This job paid me about BDT 8,000 each month. My earnings were never enough to allow me to save even though the whole reason I left Bangladesh was to get ahead and save. My life went on like this in Malaysia until 2008. When I returned to Bangladesh, I contacted the BMET to file a complaint against my recruiter, Unique Eastern Private Limited, which had set me up with the first job. Their negligence caused me great pain and suffering while I was in Malaysia. When people ask

me about my experience, I can't help but remember the pain that I went through. Now I live with my wife and son in my father's house. I want to open a business in Bangladesh; I have no desire to migrate again.

I do not need to migrate any more

Sunil Mandol

My name is Sunil Mandol. I spent six years of my life as a migrant in Malaysia. Before I migrated, I was working in Bangladesh as a lead-machine operator and then as an auto mechanic. In Malaysia, I also worked as a mechanic. After a few years in Malaysia, I was earning BDT 20,000. With these earnings, I was able to take care of myself, send money home and save. If one cannot save money while abroad, there is no point in doing it.

After six years, I returned to Bangladesh. Some of my relatives encouraged me to open my own garage. I had the requisite experience from my time in Malaysia. The work environment and realities there were much better which allowed me to really learn a lot. I succeeded in opening my own garage. Currently, I employ seven to eight. It's no small thing and I am very proud of what I have achieved. The money I am earning now in Bangladesh is enough to make ends meet for me and my family. There is no need, nor do I have any desire, to go abroad again. I want to grow my business and continue to live in Bangladesh. I want to help make Bangladesh a better place.

My husband dreams to help his village community

Jobeda Khatun

In 1999, I got married. I was just thirteen at the time and my husband was only seventeen. One year later, in 2000, my husband went abroad for work in Malaysia. This was during a very difficult financial time for our family. Many days during this period, I would eat only one meal per day.

My husband was working as a day labourer, making between BDT 120-190 per day. His father had left us a very small house to live in, but no agricultural land. His work could often be disrupted by environmental events such as floods, which made our financial situation particularly hard. Times were very hard, and my husband was greatly distressed by our troubles.

One day, one of my uncles visited our home. Some of his extended family,

not related to us, were living and working in Malaysia. He told us that, because of these contacts, he could probably to attain a work visa for my husband.

Thus, my husband was able to go to Malaysia for work. All told, it cost BDT 250,000 to send him there for work, a sum which was raised through the joint effort of his father and another relative. Upon arrival in Malaysia, he was making BDT 37,000 per month. It took two years for us to repay our migration loan, during which we hardly bought or spent anything. During the third year, we purchased seven decimals (0.03 hectares) of homestead land (now valued at BDT 150,000). In 2005, we bought an additional 84 decimals (0.33 hectares) of agricultural land (now valued at BDT 1,176,000). We were also able to build a semi-pucca house.

This past season in 2014, due to the investments made with husband's remittances, I was able to produce an income from agricultural goods of more than BDT 30,000.

Our family, because of my husband's income, has been able to achieve a level of prosperity. We have access to many important things that we did not have before; for example, we are able to go to the hospital when we are sick. Sometime in the next five or six years, my husband would like to return to Bangladesh. He wants to purchase a pond, fill it with fish, and begin an aquaculture (fish-farming) venture. He also hopes to be able to use our prosperous position to benefit our village, and to do good things in our community. As well, repaying our relatives – who helped us in our time of need – with acts of kindness or generosity is a priority for us.

I still hope that one day I will be able to migrate

Mohammad Shimanto

I am Shimanto from the Parkulim village in Magura. My eldest brother had to raise me because both of my parents passed away when I was very young. Still, there were sixteen of us in the household. Despite all odds, I was able to study up to a higher secondary level. In 2006, I paid BDT 100,000 to a recruiting agency called “The Blue Star” so that I could go to Malaysia for work. The agency promised me a job as a security guard which would earn me BDT 18,000. After three months, I secured the visa and passed the required medical tests. At that time, one of my neighbours informed me that the same agency had promised him a job as a security

guard, but then he was placed at a palm oil plantation instead. But, it wasn't enough to stop me from pursuing my dream in Malaysia. I was diagnosed with Hepatitis B during the medical examination. Due to this, I was unable to go through with the migration. After a lot of trouble and effort, I was finally able to recuperate the BDT 100,000 that I had paid. I still hope that one day, I will be able to work abroad.

Nobody ever explained why I wasn't selected

Sadeka

My name is Sadeka and I am from the Chuadanga district. I am a business person, but have not seen much success in my business. I have struggled hard for many years to gain financial stability. Eight months ago, I learnt from my sister that there are opportunities for domestic workers in Malaysia. I went to a District Employment and Manpower Office (DEMO). I submitted a number of documents to them. They helped me register in the BMET database. BMET checked my height and weight. All of the documents were sent to the concerned section of the District Commissioner's Office. Along with others, my name was forwarded, but I was not selected to go. It was a tremendous disappointment for me. When I contacted the assistant director of the DEMO, he confirmed that despite being fully qualified, my application was still denied. Nobody ever explained why I wasn't selected.

Training prior to migration helped

Abdul Khalek

I am from the Bankina village in Tangail district. Like many, my family was stuck in a cycle of poverty. Luckily, I was able to complete my higher-secondary education, but I still struggled to find employment. This caused me great guilt. My parents were upset with me for not finding a job. I didn't know what to do with my life. Many people had changed their lives by going abroad. Unable to secure local employment, I seriously considered this option. I also knew that if I had acquired some specific skills, it would enable me to earn more. With this understanding, I began an apprenticeship alongside a rod-bender. After two years, I submitted some paperwork and got a loan from my relatives in order to pay for my migration costs. In 1998, I migrated to Malaysia. Before I left for Malaysia, I told myself that whatever I wanted to achieve, I would have to do it in the next five years.

Determined, I quickly secured a job as a construction worker in Malaysia. Before I had left Bangladesh, I had opened two bank accounts - one for me and one for the family. I remitted to my family's account which went to the daily needs of the family, but I also sent some of my savings to my own account. In 2006, after eight years abroad, I returned to Bangladesh. One of the first things I began doing when I returned was to lease three abandoned ponds where I began cultivating fish. I engaged someone to begin watching over them. I planted nearly one hundred trees on the same plot as our house and I planted turmeric, ginger, and banana on the land. I leased some barren land from my uncle and started cultivating papaya and other seasonal fruits and vegetables. Within a year, I used the earnings from these ventures to lease two other ponds with which I expanded my fish cultivation. All of these initiatives had a demonstrative effect on my neighbourhood, a number of my neighbours got involved in their own business mirroring my example. In 2008, I built a nice house for myself and I also bought an additional 20 decimals (0.08 hectares) of arable land where I built two more houses. I bought my wife a sewing machine. In the end, I have found great pride and joy in my life and I am pleased with what I have accomplished.

***Dalal* was part of a structure too powerful to take on**

Mohammad Sarif

I am fifteen years old and I am from Bilgram of Teknaf district. In December of 2014, I was a grade seven student of Teknaf Pilot High School. It was at that time that Guru Mia, a *Dalal* from Bunia Ground, approached me and offered me a job in Malaysia. I was seduced and agreed to the offer. They first took me to Shahpariar Island of Sabrang Union. From there, I was brought, along with many others, aboard a trawler boat. There were about three hundred people aboard the ship among which maybe fifteen women. The women were kept in a small compartment, and the men were tightly packed into the hold of the ship. The women were sexually abused. We could hear them screaming from below. No one dared protest or resist these heinous acts committed by our captors. We were eventually rescued from the dense forest of Sankhala province in Thailand, a former base for human-smugglers. We were subsequently repatriated to Bangladesh by air. My experience was horrendous. Despite my anger, we had no recourse for what the *Dalal* had done to me. We soon found out that the *Dalal* was part of a structure too powerful for us to take on.

Dalal's deceit resulted in my imprisonment

Malek

I am from Shahpariar Island near Teknaf. One day, a *Dalal* promised me a job in Malaysia and after listening to all the wonderful things he was saying, I was seduced and fell into his trap. My journey began in December 2014. There were about three hundred people aboard the ship. We sailed along Myanmar and after twenty-eight days, we finally reached Thailand. We were taken off the boat and brought to a camp in the middle of the jungle. We were kept in a large building, like a warehouse, that was continuously guarded. We soon realized that we had become victims of a trafficking scheme. There would be no jobs for us in Malaysia. This was our fate. We begged our captors to release us, but it was of no avail. They treated us in unspeakable ways: violence, torture, sexual abuse. Many had broken limbs from the beatings. The conditions were atrocious. We were only fed dry foods. Several hundred Bangladeshis and Rohingya from Myanmar were interned there. I discovered that the only way out, the only way to survive, was to pay the captors off. We contacted my family and they paid BDT 235,000 to an agent in Teknaf who was working with the captors. Once I was released, I was arrested by the Thai police and taken to prison. I served two months and then I was finally returned to Bangladesh.

An offer too good to be true

Nabi Ahmed

I am from Cox's Bazar in Chittagong division. I used to work along the beaches, taking photos of tourists for some money. The political violence that plagued the country in the run-up to the election in January of 2014 had severely impacted the tourism industry. Our incomes were disappearing. It was at that time that a *Dalal* contacted me and offered me a job in Malaysia. Given my situation, it was hard to resist his offer. He told me there would be no payment required up-front. He said that I could pay him off later with the monthly income I would earn in Malaysia. He even said that after my installments to him were deducted, there would still be income left over to send to my family. But the offer seemed too good to be true, and I told him that I did not want to go along. Two friends of mine, Rafiq of Feni and Mithu of Chittagong, however, wanted to take part. One night, to my surprise, they came and captured me anyway! They took me first to a small

boat and then to a large trawler. There were hundreds of other Bangladeshis and Rohingya. In eight days, we reached Thailand. After arriving, we had to walk a very long distance taking trucks intermittently to reach the camp near Badam-Besar border with Malaysia. Our lives were made into a living hell. We were hungry, thirsty and on top of it all, beaten regularly. My Thai captors gave me a telephone, and I called my brother. I begged him to pay the ransom of BDT 240,000. He sold off all of our land in order to save me. The physical abuse ended with his payment, but I remained detained. In time, the Thai police came and raided the camp. Still, the ordeal was far from over. We were charged with illegal entry and sent to prison. In time, we were deported and returned to Bangladesh.

Imprisonment at sea

Rashed

My name is Rashed and I am from Sirajganj. I studied up to a higher-secondary level, but still I could not find a job. Many others from my area were deciding to migrate to Malaysia. Given this, I decided to take the initiative myself and I contacted a *Dalal* to arrange my migration. The *Dalal* promised me a work visa which would enable me to get a good job with a regular salary. The *Dalal* even said that all the food and accommodations would be borne by the company. The *Dalal* asked for BDT 220,000 for the arrangements. In order to finance this, I was forced to sell my all my land and some other assets. The *Dalal* told me the conditions en route would be like a five-star hotel: a good mattress and other comforts. Instead, we were first taken aboard a large wooden boat. It was at this point that I realized I had been tricked and that I was stuck. There was no going back. My imprisonment began on the sea, then into the jungles of Thailand, all the while deprived of food and water, and denied access to showers. Without cause or reason, we were beaten. One day, not nearly soon enough, the Thai forces came and raided the camp.

So many cheaters both at home and abroad!

Mohammad Jabbar Ali

I am Md. Jabbar Ali, from Jessore. In December 2007, I migrated to Malaysia with the assistance of a recruiting agency. One *Dalal* who worked for the agency told me about job opportunities in Malaysia. I was provided

with a work permit that he said had proper clearance from the BMET.

However, upon arrival in Malaysia, the Immigration Authority of the airport arrested me. They put me in jail and deported me a week later. They told me that the visa I had been provided with was not only a tourist visa, but also an expired tourist visa.

Once I was back in Bangladesh, I contacted the *Dalal* and the recruiting agency, and demanded that they pay me back the BDT 220,000 I had paid to them for the arrangements. Arrangements that landed me in jail. It didn't matter. They didn't care about me and ignored my complaint.

Now, I know that my case – an instance of fraudulence – is best dealt with by complaining to BMET either in-person or through the online process. Because I didn't know this at the time, I didn't know that was what I had to do. Still, I am determined to not give up! I have purchased another ticket to Malaysia with my own savings.

I do not know if my son is dead or alive

Goni Mia

My name is Goni Mia and my son was named Nobi Hossain. We are from Sirajganj, more specifically, we lived in Shahdatpur. The story begins when my son was twenty-seven. We aren't a very wealthy family and so due to this, my son allowed himself to be recruited by a *Dalal*. He wanted to earn money for the family. The plan was to travel to Malaysia by boat. But, he never made it to Malaysia. We were really anxious and worried about his departure, and things took a turn for the worse when, after 17 days, Nobi called us and told us about his torturous experience en route. He had been taken as a hostage aboard the boat and told us that he needed us to send him money by B-Kash to pay them off. He told us they wanted BDT 120,000 or they would kill him. He told us that they had already thrown three other men overboard. They gave us a *Dalal*'s B-Kash account number to facilitate the money transfer. I had no other choice! What was I to do? I began to send them the money in instalments. But it was of no use. Even once the full amount was paid, my son was still not released. I couldn't speak with him even once the payment was completed. I still do not even know if my son is dead or alive.

I paid the ransom but my son did not return

Azad Ahmad

My name is Azad Ahmed and my son is Ahmad Ali. I am a resident of the Thikrir Chor village in the Sirajganj district. Ahmad used to work with me as a day-labourer in the city. Due to our poverty, we did anything we could to earn money. One day in the morning, he said to me “You go ahead or you’ll be late for work.” He said he’d follow behind me a little later. But on that day, he never did show up for work. Later on, a person named Shahdat called me and said that my son would be going to Malaysia. After searching for some time, I found Shahdat in the village and I tried to ask him about the phone call, but he pretended that it had never happened, that he didn’t know anything. After some convincing, Shahdat finally agreed to bring me to a *Dalal*’s house whose name was Faisal. When I asked the whereabouts of my son, Faisal said that if I wanted to have him back, I would have to pay money. I was so taken aback and confused in that moment that I agreed to pay the money. What else could I do? It was my son. Because I was a day-labourer, I had to arrange a loan for the BDT 40,000 demanded. The loan had a very high interest rate. After arranging the money, I was ready to pay them, but they would not let me speak with my son so I did not end up going through with the payment. I still don’t know if my son is alive or not ! I hope one day he comes back to us!

I’m trying to get back to normal life after trauma

Mohammad Sahjahan Mia

I am twenty-six years old. In 2013, I was told about the opportunity to go abroad through my friend’s brother. Within three months, three family members of mine had died. It had been a very very difficult time for me. It was in this context that a broker approached me and tried to get me to migrate abroad. He wanted BDT 250,000 from me, but I only agreed to pay BDT 160,000. He told me that I had to travel to Cox’s Bazar. From there, I would then board a ship and travel to Burma. When we reached Burma, the broker started acting in an unusual way. They stole BDT 5,000 in cash from me and they seized my watch and my ring. There were nearly a hundred of us aboard this one ship.

We began our journey on the sea, and ten days, off the coast of Thailand, we were stopped. We experienced abuse after abuse. Food was served only

once a day and it wasn't nearly enough. I craved meat and hearty foods. I cried and begged for them to provide us with proper nutrition. I was so tired and the abuse was incessant. Each day, at 4:00 pm, they would feed us and give us some water. The conditions were worse than the most desperate beggar. Not only were we deprived of freedom, but of basic human needs. The marks of abuse ran across my body. When we tried to get water ourselves, they beat us again. When we cried, they recorded our voices and sent the footage to our families. They wanted our families to pay BDT 280,000 for each of us.

After two months and thirteen days, my family heard about what was happening to me. They sold their land and assets and prepared the money to transfer. After another three months and ten days, I returned back to Bangladesh. When I returned home, I was very happy to be back and I started to look for work as a driver and get back to my life as best I knew how.

B-kash became the avenue of extortion for the smugglers

Ramiz Ali

I am Ramiz Ali and my little brother is Raju. One day in May 2014, my brother vanished. He never returned home from work. Two months after his disappearance, I received a phone call from an unknown foreign mobile number. The caller demanded that BDT 250,000 be paid to a B-Kash account through a Bangladeshi agent. Otherwise, the caller said that Raju would be tortured. They threatened to kill Raju if I did not pay the money. I didn't have the money, but I couldn't let my little brother be tortured! I had no other options, I had to arrange for a loan. This loan came with a high interest rate because we were not a wealthy family. But even after giving the money to the agent, I was never able to contact my brother. We still don't know what happened to him.

His lunch box came home, but he never did

Asgar Ali

My name is Asgar Ali. I live in the Shahdatpur in Sirajganj district. I work as a weaver and I do what I can to get by. Things aren't easy. One day, my brother didn't come home from work. Somebody had come by with his lunch box and had told me that my brother was going to Malaysia. This was

the first time I had heard anything about that.

After that, we couldn't get any information about my brother and we were unable to contact him. After being gone for 30-40 days, my brother called us from an unknown number and told us that he was captured, and that we had to pay a *Dalal* money or he wouldn't be released. For ransom, the *Dalal* wanted BDT 220,000. According to their demands, we took out a loan with high interest and began to pay the ransom in installments. Despite paying, we never saw or heard from my brother again. We have tried to contact the ransomers several times since, but their numbers are out of service.

My kidnapped husband ended up in jail

Saiful

My name is Rahima Begum and my husband's name is Saiful. Together we have a three year-old son. In our area the only livelihood available to us is weaving. My husband would spend his whole day working in the factory, but earned very little. One day, my husband was leaving for work without his lunchbox. I asked him why he wasn't taking his lunch box with him. He replied that he didn't need it today. That morning, without any word, he disappeared, vanished. We didn't know what had happened to him, but after some time, we guessed that maybe he had migrated to Malaysia with one of the boat traffickers. We could never figure out how he would have gone, who would have helped him get there, or where he would have gotten the money, but we didn't know how else to explain his disappearance. One day, I received a call from an unknown phone number. The caller demanded BDT 220,000 in exchange for my brother, Saiful. I was stunned and said that I would arrange the money. I had no other option than to take loan from some relatives. After a few months had passed, Saiful called and told me he was in jail. I don't know what happened to his captors.

MRPC helped me bring back my deceased husband

Mohammad Hashmot Mia

I am Hasina Begum, and I live in Zinglatoly village of Daudkandi in the Comilla District. In 1997, my husband went to Malaysia to work as a gardener. After working seventeen years there, my husband suddenly died of a stroke in September 2014. While he was sending remittances, our

family was able to manage our living, though not easily or comfortably. However, after my husband's death, we were helpless. We didn't even know how we would be able to return his body home.

Soon after my husband's passing, I attended an Uthan Boithak (courtyard meeting) in my village which was organized by Migrant Rights Protection Committee. There, I learnt about a government programmes which helped repatriate deceased migrants' bodies and provided monetary assistance (up to BDT 330,000) to left-behind family members.

After that, Rasheda Begum, a Zinglatoly MRPC committee member, took me into the DEMO office, where she helped me complete the applications forms for repatriation and financial assistance. As a result, on September 27th, 2014, my husband's body was returned to us in Bangladesh. To my relief in February 2015, I collected a government-assistance cheque worth BDT 300,000 from the DEMO office. The money has helped us, but it will never be possible to forget or ease the loss of my husband's death.

Dalal's power helps them evade prosecution

Nobiul Islam Mallik

I am from the Jamtoli in the Sirajganj district. My son is eighteen years old. Before migrating abroad, he was working as a chauffeur. One day, we suddenly got a phone call from him. He told us that he was in Chittagong and that he would be going abroad. We didn't know exactly how long he would be gone for, nor did we know how it was all arranged. There were some returnee migrants in our village who told me horror stories about migration. One told me that her son had died after going aboard a trawler. They told us their son was denied food and water, and was beat and tortured. These stories made me really afraid for what could be happening to my son. We came to learn through our neighbours that it was probably a broker named Halim who had helped my son migrate. However, they warned me that filing a case against Halim would be futile. We learned that Halim had close contacts in the government and that raising our voices against him would likely bring us more trouble. I am now living with my other children. I worry about what happened to my son, and I miss him greatly. We have managed to continue on with life as best we know how.

I was treated like an animal by human smugglers

Tarequl

I am from Enayetpur in the Saidpur district. I am twenty-two years old. Before I migrated abroad, I was working as a construction worker. In 2013, I was tricked by a man in my village who was working as a migrant broker. One day, the broker, whose name was Bura Mia, told me about the possibility of migrating abroad. He had a close contact with a man whose name was Bodiuzzaman, who claimed to be a powerful person. I figured maybe these connections would facilitate job opportunities. At first, I didn't think that migration would be a good fit for me, but he painted me a beautiful picture, detailing how my life could be transformed if I worked abroad. Hearing these colourful arguments, I gave in and agreed to go.

One day, he told me that I would need to travel to Cox's Bazar. When I arrived there, they informed me that I would need to travel to Teknaf to board a trawler ship. Once I arrived in Teknaf, I was told that we had missed the boat and that we would leave the next day instead. From that point forward, the abuse began. My hands and legs were bound together and I was forced to board a ship the next morning. After many treacherous days at sea, we finally reached Thailand. We were marched through the jungle and then we were left, tied up and immobile for five days. There were about twenty of us there, lying on the ground, hungry, thirsty, and agonizing. They treated us like animals, generally ignoring us, but once in awhile, haphazardly, they would give us something to eat. Even when we were being fed, our hands were bound. The food was just enough to keep us alive. Eventually, a truck came for us. Still bound, we were thrown in the back of the pick-up truck. Some of us were naked or half-dressed. We were starving and we cried from the back of the truck, but it was no use. The abuse we suffered was worse than the deepest pits of hell. I never thought I could endure such torture.

About a week after we were thrown in the truck, the police found the traffickers and we were rescued. We gave them our information and they coordinated with the Bangladeshi embassy. Our families at home needed to pay for our repatriation and once the payment was made we were able to return. When I returned, I learned that the broker Bura Mia, had manipulated my family into transferring BDT 200,000 to him by B-Kash. Even to this day, I cannot stand to even think about the pain and suffering we went through.

My status was irregular but earning was quite high

Mohammad Syed Yusuf

I am Md. Syed Yusuf. I live in Comilla district, Atipara village and I am a returning migrant. My family is made up of myself, two brothers, three sisters, and my parents. We own some land, but the income was not enough to support our family. One of my sisters has been married off, one of my elder brothers works at a kindergarten school, and my other siblings are currently studying. I am the second eldest. After my passing my SSC examination I was unable to continue my studies. I knew I would not find a good job without more school. For my family's wellbeing, as well as my own future, I decided to go abroad for work. A *Dalal* (sub-agent) told me that he would get me a 1 year visa. He said I would be allowed to renew it annually and my salary at work would be BDT 35,000. However, this was not the amount I was to receive. So, in 2011, when I was 20 years old, I went to Malaysia for work. I ended up paying about BDT 240,000 to migrate. My father had to mortgage our land to others to collect this sum. My troubles began right away.

Once I arrived in Malaysia, somebody seized my passport. I then received a paper that stated I could work there for only three months. I never got my passport back. Having few other options, I got a job in a plastic manufactory, making clothes hangers, but I was inexperienced with this kind of work. To make up for this, I observed more skilled workers and learned from them. Still, I earned a very small salary working there, and was unable to save any money to send home to my family. However, after learning a bit of the Malaysian language, I got an opportunity for another job, working in a garage. While working there I was able to send home BDT 40,000-50,000 to my family. I could not send the money directly, however, because my three month visa had expired, making me an irregular migrant. For that reason I had to stay hidden, and could not go out in my free time. I spent 5 years like this. My extra money was sent home to my family with the help of another Bengali worker.

Using this money, my father built a house, and helped my siblings with their education. In 2015 I returned to Bangladesh and got married. My younger sister has passed her HSC examination, and my youngest brother is about to take his SSC examination. My family was dependent on my earnings, but upon my return I found myself unemployed. This is why I was grateful to get a chance to learn how to drive as part of a RMMRU training program.

I worked very hard and, after many examinations, earned an experience certificate, though I did not get a license. If I get a driving license then I will work in my country. If I do not get a job in Bangladesh, I will migrate to Kuwait for work, as I have many contacts there.

SINGAPORE

Don't be a fool like me and spend so much on migration

Mohammad Zahid

My name is Md. Zahid and I am 32 years old. I hail from Bitman village, Eliot Ganj, Comilla. Currently I am working in Singapore. I have eight members in my family. My eldest brother and my second brother lived in Saudi Arabia as migrants, but have now returned and are doing business. I worked for an NGO before leaving the country as a field assistant. I used to earn BDT 7,000 per month, but that was not enough to maintain my family.

In 2015, I asked a middleman from my village to help me find work abroad. I was informed that I needed a certificate to support my migration, and the middleman promised to procure it for me. He charged me BDT 400,000 for it. Later, he charged another BDT 400,000 for medical expense, visa fees, and other supporting documents. On top of all this, I had to spend BDT 50,000 on training and other preparation related to migration. My total migration cost stood at BDT 850,000. It was a huge burden for me to gather all this money. I had to borrow money from my relatives, and go into debt. I had little choice but to pay an interest of BDT 500,000, on top of the BDT 800,000 I had paid already. It took two years and six months to complete the process.

When I arrived in Singapore I worked as a construction worker, my monthly salary was only BDT 30,000. After paying for my day to day expenses the small amount that I could send home was not enough to clear my debt. I was only able to pay off a small amount of this debt, about 1 year's interest in total. My current contract in Singapore is only for two years. I can change this job after the initial contract period. I will have to get a job with a better pay in order to clear my debt. However, if I cannot find better work then I don't know what I will do. The current prospects for employment in the Singapore construction industry are not favourable. A large numbers of people are unable to find new work. I don't know what will happen to me. These are uncertain times for me, and I do not know what future holds. I had a dream that I would go abroad and get a good job to earn more money and be able to support my family and relatives. However, instead I have accrued a large amount of debt. I have no hope in my life.

If you are lucky, it happens quickly

Mallik Mia

I am Mallik Mia of Bancharampur, Kalihati, Tangail. I am a migrant, currently working abroad. My family consists of myself, my brother, my parents, and my grandfather. We have a small amount of farmland and don't grow enough rice to feed us for the year. I also co-owned a restaurant, but that was not enough to provide for my entire family.

In 2014, when I was 27 years old, I spent BDT 575,000 to go to Singapore. My uncle helped me migrate, and said I would work in a shipyard with a salary of SGD 550 per month. To help manage my migration cost, I borrowed BDT 100,000 from Probashi Kallyan Bank, and the rest from relatives and lenders. Some of these loans included interest. Upon arriving I was told that my probationary period would be two months with no pay. After those two months I would receive salary regularly and be able to send money back home.

I have quickly been able to repay all my loans doing this work. My family is doing much better now economically. We have 50 decimals (0.2 hectares) of agricultural land and a cow. My family's future depends on this land. My younger brother is now getting his bachelor's degree in a government college. His wish is to someday work in the government. He is not interested in going to work in a foreign country like I did. I think my migration was very beneficial. My financial success has made my family economically secure.

I am pursuing a legal battle against the *Dalal*

Mohammad Jamal

I am Md. Jamal. I used to work in a hand-weaving factory. My father Innos Ali tried to send me abroad to ensure a better life for our family. Md. Latif, a local *Dalal*, knew that my father was trying to send me abroad. He knew that I had prepared my passport. Md. Latif tried several times to get me to go to Singapore, promising that he would give me a good deal. He convinced me that I would be paid a good salary, would have a good home, and would be treated well once I arrived in Singapore. My father trusted him and so on 13 September 2013, my passport, twelve copies of my picture, and BDT 230,000 were handed over to Latif in the presence of a local witness. After receiving all of these things, Latif promised to send

me to Singapore within three months. However, years passed and I did not go to Singapore. Given the situation, we sought out the village Chairman.

On 23 March 2015, the Chairman, Latif and I came to an agreement. Latif agreed to paid back all of the money (BDT 230,000) within the next couple of months. However, Md. Latif failed to pay the money back as per the agreement. After that, we went to Latif's house and demanded that he pay the money back, but Latif refused and shouted that we had never made a deal in the first place. My father was surprised to see him act in such a way. On the 25 May 2015, my father lodged a written complaint to the Chairman. However, the amount of money that we were claiming exceeded the jurisdiction of the Chairman. Therefore, the Chairman suggested that we go to Court to seek the repayment. With financial help from RMMRU, we have filed a case in the Tangail district court under the Overseas Employment and Migration Act of 2013. My case is currently on-going in the Tangail Court. My lawyer says the legal procedure will take a long time. Everyone blames us; they wonder why we have paid in this way. But can anyone tell me what other options exist ?

Migrant worker turned into recruiter

Mohammad Saidul

I am a resident of Chandra village in Comilla district. I used to work as a labourer at a rice mill. But then, in 1987, I decided to migrate to Saudi Arabia. I stayed in Saudi for only twenty-two days. I didn't have the right legal documents, so the company rejected me and sent home right away. After coming back, I had to return to the rice mill. However, I was determined to try again. The second time, I migrated to Singapore to work as a construction labourer. I worked there almost eleven years. While staying there, I was introduced to a Singaporean labour broker. With his help, I arranged for the migration of about 300 workers from Bangladesh. Eventually, I decided to return home.

Once I had returned, I first started work on a fish project, and I now cultivate fish in my own pond, as well as another 14 leased ponds. After that I got the idea to start a fish food business, and I have now established an enterprise in this area as well. At the same time, I also started a truck and tractor business, which now includes eight pickup vans and a tractor. Everyday, almost twenty-five labourers work with me. I am very fortunate as my businesses have brought me success. The people in my area know me as an efficient and successful businessman.

BRUNEI

Migration brings in risk of extra-marital affair

Rubel

My name is Rubel. I was born in 1983 in the Barisal district; I lived my entire childhood in this village. I am the second-oldest in my family and I have five siblings altogether. My father works as a farmer and my mother does all of the housework. My older brother migrated to Brunei 15 years ago. His wife and his son stays with us. We haven't seen my brother since he migrated to Brunei. His son, who is now in class eleven and he is a good student. My brother sends remittance regularly. We take care of his family with his remittance. We have heard that he has developed relationship with another women in Brunei. That is why he does not come to Bangladesh.

CHAPTER V

MIGRATION TO EAST ASIA

JAPAN

I am one of the top ten in my village

Mohammad Abdul Amin

Many of my neighbours had previously migrated successfully. As a result, my family encouraged me to do the same. I thought it would be a chance to improve the circumstances of our lives. With the support of my family, I began my endeavour, bound for Japan in 1986. I wouldn't return to Bangladesh again until 1999 by which time I would be a changed man. When I did return, I spent a lot of time helping others in my village to migrate to Japan. This has brought me great joy and they are very grateful for my help. I have no regrets for the decisions that I have made in my life. Many members of my community have high regard for the success I have achieved. Moreover, I have received the Shonar Manush award from RMMRU recognizing my contribution to the community's development. My migration demonstrated the merits of good planning and regular remittance. I have also opened a fifteen-bed hospital in my community. I have also constructed a shopping mall with a few shops in it. In addition, I have also bought sixteen ganda of land. Now I am planning to open a plastic factory in the coming years. If my plans pan out, it could create many jobs for my community.

It took me three tries to succeed

Mohammad Selim Mia

I am the resident of Kushiara village in the Comilla district. I am a high-spirited person and I was prepared to work hard. After completing my education, I migrated to Taiwan with the aim of getting job. After arriving, I didn't get enough work and I couldn't afford to live there anymore so I had to return home after only nine months. Once in Bangladesh, I couldn't find any way to work either so I tried to migrate again. This time to Singapore in 1993. I was there almost one year, but I had to return home again as

I was not succeeding. I started a business in Bangladesh after migration failed me twice. After four years of doing business, I again decided to go abroad again. I migrated to Japan in 1998. I worked at a Toyota car plant and watch factory. I returned home after working eight years there. Upon return, I established a fisheries project on my own land. I involved myself with some other projects. Eventually, I realized that Daudkandi was an area with many fish. To transport fish from this place to other places in Bangladesh, I noticed a huge amount of ice was needed. So I saw that there was a need for an ice factory. Accordingly, I bought some land beside the road of a market and established an ice factory. This factory has been most successful. My investments help the other entrepreneurs who are working in the fish business.

Learning the language did the trick

Abdus Salam

I am from the Srinagar village in Munshiganj district. In 1995, I was admitted into college just after passing my SSC exam. Things were so difficult for my family and it was difficult to put up with everyday; I saw my father work unbearably hard, unable to get the family further ahead. As a result, I decided to migrate to Japan to try to bring in some income. I had to spend BDT 1,000,000 to finance the trip; I had to sell some assets, and I also had to take a loan. Because I didn't know the Japanese language, it took me some time after my arrival to get a good job. With time, my Japanese improved and I eventually got a job working as a welder. Initially, I didn't understand the banking systems there so it was difficult to remit money back home formally. As a result, I sent money through informal channels. However, once I understood the language and culture better, I was able to send money through the bank. My family back home is now much better off: my youngest brother has gone to Italy with my savings and the family has also purchased a store on Elephant Road in Dhaka. We have a new home for the family in our native village. In 2008, I returned back home, happy to see my family living together in the new house in Srinagar. Now that I am back in Bangladesh, our income comes primarily from our store in Dhaka and a fishery business that we are also running in Srinagar. I am quite satisfied, and I do not wish to migrate again.

I cannot sleep at night

Chowdhury H.M Monowar

Mine is a story of multiple migrations. I, Chowdhury H.M Monowar. I am now 46 years old. I first migrated to Qatar when I was only twenty-two. After that, I migrated to Malaysia, Saudi Arabia and finally to Japan. My family owned twenty decimals (0.08 hectares) of land and my father and other siblings were all dependent on that land for survival. I thought that my brothers could look after land and I could bring in extra money through migration.

My first migration experience was to Qatar. Unfortunately, things there didn't go so well. The *Dalal* sent me to Qatar on tourist visa so when I arrived, I couldn't get a proper job there. After few months, I was caught by local police, They detained me and then sent me back. I stayed in my village for a couple of years then migrated to Malaysia. I had a friend who said Malaysia would be a good place for migration. This time, I did find job, but the work conditions were very bad. I was abused and beaten by the local Tamils who managed our work. The administration did not pay us any attention even though we complained vocally. I could not take it any longer and decided to come back. After Malaysia, I migrated to Saudi Arabia. I worked there, but again, the conditions were very bad and I felt I had to come back home to Bangladesh.

In 2013, I found an opportunity to migrate to Japan. I found work quickly. I was paid a good wage of BDT 20,000 each month. I was able to send remittance regularly to Bangladesh through informal channel. However, after two years in Japan, I was no longer permitted to stay and so that is why I returned to Bangladesh. Through migration, I was never able to save money or make plans for the future. Now, we live paycheque-to-paycheque. We have a small house with three rooms. It has electricity, a cement floor and a tin roof. The agricultural cultivations earns around BDT 2,000 per month. I have two sons and one daughter. Mahmudul is my elder son and he is physically disabled. My younger son, Khaled, studies in class ten. Bibi Moriam is nine years old and she studies in class three. Along with the cost for their education, I have to spend a lot for my elder sons physical care. No wonder, I am highly burned by debts. I currently owe about BDT 600,000. I cannot sleep at night thinking about all the debts I have to repay!

KOREA

I became a hero from zero

Ruhul Amin

My name is Ruhul Amin. I live in the Digholdi village in Lakshmipur District. When I was young, my father was a rickshaw puller. He was the only person in our family of five who was earning an income.

As a young boy, I had a dream of becoming a rich man one day. But, as I grew older, I realized that getting a job would not be easy for me. I had no relatives who had good jobs who might be able to help me get into their line of work.

Despite all the difficulties facing my family – money shortages and all things associated with it – I came up with a plan. I saw in paper that one can go to Korea if they learnt the Korean language. I decided I would learn the Korean language, and – one day – I would move to Korea. Korean is a very tough language, and I found it very hard. Once I had spent a good deal of time teaching myself the language, I applied to BOESL for a job in Korea. I was quite aware, by this point, that my chances of actually being able to travel to Korea were quite slim. However, I found myself quite fortunate, as my visa application was accepted. Now, my only problem was scrounging up enough money to pay for the visa. I went around to almost everyone I knew – relatives, neighbours, friends – and collected the requisite BDT 350,000 to go to Korea.

My company in Korea turned out to be a very good one. My salary was BDT 150,000, and I also received extra pay for my overtime hours. Because of this, I was able to remit BDT 100,000 per month. Through my remittances, my father no longer has to pull rickshaws, my sister can finish her schooling, and my family has built a new house.

In the future, I will continue to support my family. I dream of returning to my home country, and starting a business.

My company offered me benefits for my hard work

Mohammad Azhar

I live in the Pachbihar village in Tangail. I migrated to Libya in 1998 in order to bring financial stability to my family. I had to sell some of my land, and borrow some money from my relatives in order to migrate. As per the contract of my migration, I got a job in Libya and I received a regular salary. I saved part of my earnings each month, and repaid the loans I owed to my relatives. After some time, being happy with my work, my employer assigned me to a senior position within my office. I worked in Libya for five years. It helped me to mitigate my family's demands, and enabled me to save BDT 1,000,000. Using this money, I purchased thirty three decimals (121 sq. meters) of land. I also renovated my home in my village.

For my second migration effort, I migrated to South Korea, again using a local recruiting agent. Before I left, I enrolled myself in a Korean-language course at a training centre in Tangail district. In South Korea, I got a job as a company supervisor. I did an honest job, working hard. Within a short time, my salary increased, because my employers saw the effort I put in. My company also offered me other benefits. In partnership with them, I brought some additional workers from my village to South Korea. My salary was BDT 100,000 per month. I was able to remit a good portion of that money to home. After my tenure in South Korea, I extended my house again, and purchased a private car. Now, I am planning to set up a CNG filling station, near Bissho Road in Tangail. If I can establish this station, I will be able to employ many local people from my village.

Migration taught me, how to concentrate on one thing

Mohammad Mustaque Islam

I am a resident of Mirzapur in the Tangail district. In 1980, through a recruiting agent, I secured a job with the engineering department of Hyundai, a Korean multinational corporation. The company arranged for my food and accommodation. They paid me a good salary which allowed me to remit regularly through the bank. I worked with Hyundai for three years and then I returned home to Bangladesh.

After some years at home, I migrated again - this time to Saudi Arabia, but working for another Korean company. My skills with the Korean language

helped me to secure this position. It paid me a good salary and they took good care of me. Again, it allowed me to remit back home and after seven years, I returned home. Now that I am back in Bangladesh, I plan to start a business. I have bought just over 60 decimals (0.24 hectares) of land in Mirzapur Bazar neighbourhood, which cost me about BDT 900,000. The price has since appreciated to BDT 10,000,000. I invested in land not only because of my emotional attachment to it, but also because the return from land is the highest. From no other businesses would my investment have appreciated so much. Of course, I have invested in other ventures as well. I have opened a mobile showroom and become a dealer for Grameen Phone in Mirzapur. I am also the sole dealer of Otobi Furniture in all of Mirzapur. My businesses are doing very well. My time abroad is important to me not only because it provides me with good income, but also because it taught me how to concentrate on one thing and how to be a leader. I have now become a successful entrepreneur in my own country.

CHAPTER VI

MIGRATION TO SOUTH ASIA

INDIA

I am quite satisfied with my life in Delhi

Daliya

My name is Daliya. Chotto Garal Jhara Dinhat in Kuchbihar district is my hometown. My husband and I were living there with his parents and his extended family. Initially, we could manage our food from our fields. However, when my husband's other brother got married and all of us were having children, it was impossible. One day, a man came saying that he had work for a young husband and wife. At that time, there was no work available for women in our village. We took up his offer which involved leaving behind my daughter who was only three and leaving for New Delhi in India.

Once we arrived in Delhi, in 2001, we got to know one of our neighbours who helped organize our stay in a 8 foot by 10 foot shanty near petrol pump. The walls of the houses were made of packing boxes attached to a bamboo frame. Polythene was used to cover the roof and sides. Our *thikadar* employed my husband in rag picking and I started doing part-time domestic work. We were paying RP 500 each month for rent. I was working at six different houses. My day started early from around 6:30am. I washed dirty plates, pots and pans, prepared breakfast in one house then at another house, I swept and mopped rooms, and then washed clothes. I would finish around 11am then I would go to my own house to prepare food. Around 4:00 pm, I would start working again. I was earning RP 3,000 per month and my husband was earning around RP 2,500. One of our major problems was the police raid. Earlier, we were living in a different place. One day, the police came and said we were being evicted. They burnt our shanties to the ground.

After coming here I gave birth to another girl. I also sent her back to our village in Bangladesh. The elder one is now going to school and the younger one will soon start. Although there is fear of arrest and I am away from my

children, I prefer staying in Delhi. My mother looks after the children and I do my best to send money for their books and clothes.

Employers treat us well but they do not trust us

Poriman Bibi

My husband and I migrated to Delhi five years ago, in 2000. A number of our villagers used to live in Delhi so when the couple who lived next door came back to Bangladesh on vacation, they shared with us the different types of work available for men and women such as domestic work, rag picking, helpers on buses, hotel boy etc. Hearing this, my husband approached them asking if we would be able to join them in Delhi. They shared information with us and eventually, we were able to go. The journey from Bangladesh to Delhi involved all kinds of transportation: rickshaws, buses and trains! Our neighbour helped us to find work when we arrived. I began working at four houses performing the same types of jobs such as washing, sweeping and mopping. I worked seven days each week and earned RP 2,400 per month. My husband worked as a cycle mechanic and he was earning RP 2,500 per month. He also washed cars on the weekend. We have moved to a few different places over the years. A year ago, we were living in the Horizon slums, but it was suddenly demolished by the authorities. After that, we moved into the Horizon quarter. The rent of our place is now RP 1,000 per month. I don't earn enough to pay rent and send remittances back home.

I haven't had any experiences with sexual harassment. Since we do not stay at the employer's home, the likelihood of such harassment is minimized. Due to the scarcity of domestic workers, if I feel that someone in the household is acting suspicious then I can just stop working in that house. However, often the employers don't trust us. In one incident, there was money missing from a house I was working at and they took me to police. I was only released from the police after my husband paid a hefty bribe to the authorities.

They burnt our shanties to the ground

Khushi

I migrated to India nine years ago, in 1996. Originally from Comilla, I was happily married to a man from the neighbouring village. We have two sons together, but my husband always wanted to have a daughter. A fellow villager told us that if we tied the knot during the pilgrimage of Khaza Nazimuddin in Azmir then we would get the luck necessary to have a daughter, so we travelled to Azmir, bribing the border security forces and getting help from a *Dalal*.

We came back, but we were not blessed with a daughter. My husband's mood deteriorated and his attitude changed. He started drinking alcohol, and we ended up losing our land because of his addiction. At one point, my husband became so mad that he drove me out of the house, keeping my two boys from me. During our Azmir trip, I made some friends with a few other Bangladeshis who had been there for awhile. Since I did not have any other way of sustaining myself, I returned to Azmir. After a year, I heard about work opportunities in Delhi from some other Bangladeshis who had gone to work there. I acted on these opportunities and now, I am working in different houses in Vasant Kunj, an upper-class neighbourhood of Delhi. I work in five houses and earn RP 2,500 per month. It's hard to get by and survive on these earnings. I can't afford new clothes. During Diwali, I usually I receive some clothes and I try to make due with them. But, I am not physically well: I have a chronic gastric illness and it is difficult for me to get treatment. Moreover, I was recently injured during a police raid on our shanty. They came to evict us. I desperately wanted to collect my belongings, but the police wasted no time. They set the shanties on fire and then beat me with their sticks.

We do not need to remit as my kids are here

Renu Bala

I am Renu Bala Barmon. Seven years ago, in 1998, I migrated along with my husband to Delhi from our home in Khulna district. I was hardly twenty-two when we first migrated. One of my uncles had been living in Delhi and so one day, he came back to our village on vacation. At that point, we decided to go along with him on his way back. It cost around BDT 1,000 per head to reach Delhi. My uncle organized a job for my husband and eventually,

I also found work as cleaner. We have two children who I initially I left back home, but three years ago they joined me in Delhi. The four of us now live together under the same roof. At first, we lived in the Horizon slum, but it was demolished by the local authorities a few months ago. Then we moved in to Horijon quarter. It is much better than the Horizon slum. The size of our room is ten feet by ten feet. We are paying RP 1,200 per month. Six other families are also reside in our quarter. I work in four houses and my work duties are almost the same in every house: cooking, washing and cleaning. I never get time-off for holidays or vacation. My husband works as a bus driver. I earn RP 2,500 per month and my husband earns RP 3,000 per month. Earlier, I was remitting a bit of money, but once my children joined me, I could not remit anymore as I don't earn enough to have extra money. I am free to seek other work if I choose, but we are able to get by and survive with what we earn now.

Although I enjoy the city life I live in constant fear of police

Morjina

My husband and I migrated to Delhi three years ago with a fellow villager. We are originally from Barisal. It cost BDT 1,000 each to migrate. We decided to migrate because we were not doing well in our village. My husband was the only one earning money. There were hardly any jobs for women available in our village. A fellow villager encouraged us to migrate. He said that he would be able to organize a job for both of us. He said my husband would be able to get a rag picking job and I could work as a domestic worker. This neighbour of ours had a connection with a man from Delhi who was looking for workers. We said that we were interested and that we would go along for the job. In order to perform the rag picking job, my husband will be given a bicycle. Once we reached Delhi, our employer helped us get settled in a slum near a petrol pump. Although I was living with my husband, I often felt afraid. I heard we would be evicted from the slum soon. Once I saw the police raid a slum nearby. They picked up a few of my neighbours from the slum with suspicions that they were of Bangladeshi origin. The police were often cruel. They knew that my neighbours weren't Indian and didn't treat them well - even though they had a proper work ID and ration card. My husband became quite abusive towards me after awhile.

MALDIVES

Migration brings great fortune

Mohammad Abdur Rabbani

I am Md. Abdur Rabbani. I live in Kushiara village, Daudkandi, Comilla. I am a 49 year old returnee migrant. Before migrating I owned a small business. My earnings were too small for me to provide for my wife and son. For that reason, I decided to go work abroad, with the hope that it would allow me to better provide for my family. I first went to the Maldives in 1994, at the age of 27. My migration cost was BDT 40,000. I had to sell my house and borrow from my relatives in order to collect this sum. In the Maldives I worked at a store, making \$130 per month. Thankfully, my living expenses were covered by my employer. That is how I was able to send home almost my entire salary. As a result, within two years, I was able to clear all my debts. However, my dream was to get an even a better job. That's why, while I was working in the store, I also learned how to cook with the help of a friend. Later on, with the help of that friend, I secured a job in a five-star hotel. At this new job I made \$300 per month! All my living expenses were, once again, covered by my employer, so I was still able to send my whole salary to my family.

I worked at that resort for twelve years, but returned home in 2016. With all the money that I sent home my family was able to build a new three-story building in my village. My eldest daughter is married. My eldest son has received the highest secondary certificate, and is now working in the garment industry as a supervisor. I bought a CNG run three-wheeler for my youngest son, and he is working as a driver. My youngest daughter is currently studying in Grade 9. I invested in a fisheries project in my village. Currently I am passing my time in relaxation, not working on any big project. If I stay in my country permanently, perhaps then I will think about starting something. On the other hand, I am still in contact with the resort I worked at in the Maldives. If I wish I could go back to that job, and am thinking about doing that, but I have not decided.

I am pursuing legal suit against the middleman

Mohammad Shikder Hossain

My name is Md. Shikder Hossain. I come from Bilgardina village, Tangail, and I am a 32 year old returnee migrant. Although my father was a poor man, he was not interested in sending me abroad to work. I, however, wanted to work abroad. With this in mind I met a local middleman. He made me more interested in going abroad. I introduced this man to my father, and he managed to persuade my father to let me migrate for work. My father agreed to give the middleman BDT 277,000 in return for securing me a job at a hotel in the Maldives. The salary was to be BDT 30,000 per month, on top of free accommodation, medical, and visa. We paid the middleman in front of a number of villagers on 15th of June, 2014. He took my money, my passport, and passport photocopies. The middleman assured me that the visa would be genuine and I would face no problems. A few days later, I was sent to the Maldives. However, upon my arrival I did not get the job I was promised. Instead, another middleman in the Maldives asked for an additional sum of BDT 200,000 to facilitate my return to Bangladesh. I informed my father about this and he contacted the middleman back in Bangladesh, who agreed to deal with this issue. The middleman also signed a bond on a stamped document of BDT 200, promising to resolve the issue, but he did nothing.

With no other options, I was sent home in early July. My father and I went to confront the middleman in our village, and he again promised to handle it, by either sending me back to the Maldives, or returning the money we gave him. Several days passed, but our money was still not returned, and I was not sent back to the Maldives. We contacted the middleman once more and he said he could not return our money to us. My father was speechless. Eventually, to deal with this, we contacted RPDP, a partner of RMMRU, lodging a case against the middleman. The case is currently ongoing.

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