**Press Release**

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Vulnerable Less-skilled In-Country Returnee Migrants & MSMEs Need more right of way Support

In-country returnee migrants are among the most vulnerable communities amid COVID-19 in the country, observed Ferdaus Ara Begum, CEO, BUILD. She said that around 4.5 lacs external migrants have returned to the country amid the pandemic, somehow might have some savings, while in-Country migrants are more vulnerable and almost totally job-less. She was speaking in a virtual dialogue on Enhancing Opportunities for In-country Returnee Migrants and MSMEs: A Case of Southwest Bangladesh on September 29, 2021 organized by Business Initiative Leading Development (BUILD) in collaboration with PROKAS, British Council and Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO), UK. While there are programs for overseas returnee migrants, in-country migrants are often under the radar in terms of dedicated stimulus support. She also shed lights on the BUILD’s study on the domestic in-country returnee migrants in Mongla-Bagerhat region.

The objectives of the dialogue were to share the findings of the BUILD’s survey about in-country returnee migrants from Southwest Bangladesh with relevant stakeholders and to understand their views and to discuss and deliberate on potential courses of action for improving the situation.

Sharifa Khan, Secretary (Industry and Energy Division), Planning Commission as the Chief Guest of the dialogue said that new employment opportunity is a major factor of in-country migration in the country. She referred to Reintegration of Returnee Migrants program of the government of BDT 427 crore to provide skill based training and financial support to the returnee migrants in FY 2020-21. She said that the vulnerable in-returnee migrants can be included in the program. She also referred to the rigorous countrywide programs of the training under Bangladesh Industrial Technical Assistance Center (BITAC) which can facilitate the unemployed male and female people in the country. She said that government has announced several programs under financial support and skill development programs for the marginal inhabitants and other targeted groups. She said that the internal and external affected migrants can communicate with the Wage Earners' Welfare Board (WEWB) to receive support. She also raised aspect of opportunities of migration and requested to come up with specific proposals so that they can be reached properly.

Sheikh Abdur Rahaman, Mayor, Mongla Port Municipality said that capacity building program is required for the returnee migrants to ensure better utilization of finance from banks, NGOs and government organizations. He said that government has rigorous safety net programs for the rural and marginal low income people. Strong monitoring of proper utilization of fund is also necessary, he added. He requested a branch of Bank Asia in Mongla for smooth disbursement of different allowances including Freedom Fighter Allowance in the region announced by the government.

Md. Jaker Hossain, GM, SMESPD, Bangladesh Bank said that BDT 15,386 crore has been disbursed from the BDT 20,000 core stimulus package so far. BDT 759 crore has been disbursed to the women entrepreneurs from the fund. He referred to the Small-Scale Employment Creation Project with ADB to be launched soon where the marginal rural, unemployed youth and migrating people will be the target recipients to provide immediate support for social protection and job protection. He also referred to the special CSR initiatives from the banks where 50% of the fund will be provided to the recipients in Rajshahi and Khulna regions. He also shed light on credit guarantee scheme through which collateral free loan up to BDT 25 lac financing will be expedited.

Earlier Tahmid Zami, Additional Research Director, BUILD shared the keynote presentation on Enhancing Opportunities for In-country Returnee Migrants and MSMEs: A Case of Southwest Bangladesh. He emphasized on the lost jobs of the domestic returnee migrants in the city areas which resulted in their return to their home towns or villages. He also said that there is a lack of ready jobs and welfare support systems in the town or rural areas for their employment. Referring to the BUILD’s survey on Stakeholders in the Southwest Region, he showed that one-third returnee migrants have become unemployed. Most women workers are now unemployed and majority faced more than 60% loss of income due to job loss.

S Humayun Kabir, Vice President, Bangladesh Frozen Food Exporters’ Association said that many fish processing industries in Khulna faced shutdown due to COVID-19, the export of frozen fish has been halved which had been 40-50 metric ton per year before the pandemic..

M Khairul Bashar, Joint Director, ASA said that twenty million jobs are provided in MSMEs in the country. To reach marginal level people with low income with more finance, it is required to allocate over BDT 2,000 crore for the country’s NGOs.

Rubel Pervez, RSC Manager, BRAC Migration Programme, Khulna said that ease of documentation and conditionalities need to be ensured to reach more finance to the vulnerable in-country and external returnee migrants.

Emphasizing on the experience of grassroot level while formulating policies, Md Abul Basar, IBP Manager, Climate Finance and Climate-Induced Migration, PROKAS Programme focused on blended financing in the southwest region and urged the Government to create more opportunities for the climate migrants.

Sincerely yours,

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