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Piyasiri Wickramasekara

Global Migration Policy Associates
Geneva, Switzerland

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Arndt-Corden Department of Economics
Crawford School of Public Policy
ANU College of Asia and the Pacific

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Mainstreaming migration in development agendas: assessment of South Asian countries

by

Piyasiri Wickramasekara
Global Migration Policy Associates
11 Avenue de La Paix
CH-1202 Geneva
Switzerland

Abstract

There has been increased emphasis on the linkages between international migration and development at international, regional and national levels in the past two decades. This recognition of migration as a developmental tool has generated calls for mainstreaming migration in development with some origin countries making specific attempts at incorporating migration concerns into their development agendas. Yet this approach is being promoted in a context where there is still inadequate understanding of the precise linkages between migration and development. The paper reviews the situation in South Asia with respect to mainstreaming arguments. It first reviews the analytical issues involved in mainstreaming including definitions and mechanisms proposed. Next the main linkages identified between migration and development – remittances, return migration and diasporas – are discussed in relation to country experiences in South Asia. Some contradictions in the mainstreaming discourse are highlighted followed by some conclusions and policy implications.

Key words: Development, South Asia, labour migration, mainstreaming migration

JEL Codes: F22, F24, J61, O15 , O53

Mainstreaming migration in development agendas: Assessment of South Asian countries

Introduction

There is increased emphasis on the linkages between international migration and development at international, regional and national levels. The phenomenal rise in global remittances has acted an obvious trigger in this respect with remittances about three times higher than overseas development aid at the global level. This recognition of migration as a developmental tool at the global and regional levels has generated calls for mainstreaming migration in development (GCIM, 2005; GFMD, 2012; GFMD Swden, 2014; GMG, 2010; ILO, 2006; IOM, 2008; UNDP, 2009; United Nations, 2006; 2013a). This is also reflected in the current discourse on the components of the Post–2015 Development Agenda (GMG, 2013). This debate has percolated down to the national level as well with countries making specific attempts at incorporating migration concerns into their development agendas. Yet this approach is being promoted in a context where there is still inadequate understanding of the precise linkages between migration and development. The objective of this paper is to review the situation in south Asia with respect to mainstreaming arguments. The paper first reviews the analytical issues involved in mainstreaming including definitions and mechanisms proposed. Next the main linkages identified between migration and development – remittances, return migration and diasporas – are discussed in relation to country experiences in South Asia. The next section raises some contradictions in the mainstreaming discourse. The paper ends with highlighting some conclusions and the way forward.

1. Emerging consensus on the need for mainstreaming migration in development agendas

In the early days, migration was regarded as a reflection of development failure. It sometimes seems that migration stakeholders are from one planet – and development stakeholders from an altogether different one. They see migration very differently. By contrast, too many development stakeholders perceive the act of migration as a sign of failure. In their eyes, if development policies succeed, then people should not need to migrate” (Sutherland, 2013). The Global Commission on International Migration made a strong case for according priority to including migration in economic growth and development efforts at all levels. One of its six Principles of Action is “Reinforcing economic and developmental impact” of international migration which is elaborated as follows:

The role that migrants play in promoting development and poverty reduction in countries of origin, as well as the contribution they make towards the prosperity of destination countries, should be recognized and reinforced. International migration should become an integral part of national, regional and global strategies for economic growth, in both the developing and developed world (GCIM, 2005: 4).

The ILO Multilateral Framework on Labour Migration (MFLM) refers to this linkage in its Principle 15: “The contribution of labour migration to employment, economic growth, development and the alleviation of poverty should be recognized and maximized for the benefit of both origin and destination countries” (ILO, 2006: 29).

Its Guideline 15.1 adds: “integrating and mainstreaming labour migration in national employment, labour market and development policy” (ILO, 2006: 29).

The UN Secretary–General’s Report for the UN High Level Dialogue on International Migration and Development 2006, stated: “There is a need to build capacity and promote research to evaluate policy interventions in both countries of origin and destination and to facilitate the mainstreaming of migration considerations into strategic development frameworks” (United Nations, 2006: 21).

The UNDP Human Development Report 2009 on migration also included “Making mobility an integral part of national development strategies” as a core component of its package of proposals (UNDP, 2009: 95).

The report of the 2012 meeting of the Global Forum on Migration & Development (GFMD) called for promoting: “continued planning and implementation of migration and development mainstreaming processes ... by governments in all regions and with the support of relevant international and national actors” (GFMD, 2012: 35).

The Declaration of the UN High Level Dialogue on International Migration and Development 2013 mentions: “Recognize the need to strengthen synergies between international migration and development at the global, regional and national levels” (United Nations, 2013b: 2).

2. Analytical notes

2.1 Definitions

The term ‘mainstreaming’ has been used extensively in relation to gender, but its use in relation to migration is more recent. This reflects the relatively recent emergence of interest in the migration and development nexus. Other related terms used in this context are ‘integrating’ or ‘factoring’ migration into development planning (Lucas, 2008; GFMD, 2012).

Writers on mainstreaming of migration rarely define what they mean by mainstreaming. A good example is the 2005 IOM publication on “*Mainstreaming migration into development policy agendas*” (IOM, 2005a), which does not contain a definition of the term. The GMG Handbook on Mainstreaming Migration into Development Planning defines migration mainstreaming as “*the process of assessing the implications of migration for any action or goals planned in a development and poverty reduction strategy*” (GMG, 2010: 16). But there is a problem with this definition because ‘the process of assessing the implications’ by itself does not constitute mainstreaming. Assessment only contributes to understanding of whether migration has been mainstreamed. Actual mainstreaming should go beyond that to include migration as a cross-cutting issue in all relevant policies and programmes. In other words, mainstreaming indicates a ‘whole of government approach’ rather than piecemeal actions by different agencies and ministries. The concept of mainstreaming is therefore, closely linked to the issue of promoting policy coherence and coordination across concerned government ministries and agencies to promote development benefits of migration.

2.2 Mainstreaming approaches

The GMG Handbook on mainstreaming (GMG 2013) attempts to conceptualise the impact of international migration in terms of three kinds of transfers ‘the 3Ts’: i) the transfer of people – migration itself; ii) the transfer of know-how and knowledge; and, iii) the transfer of financial assets (remittances). This conceptualisation is however, too simple and inappropriate to understand the complex interactions between human mobility and development. The term ‘transfer’ could imply one way flows, but mobility cannot be described simply as the transfer of people between countries.

The migration–development discourse normally focusses on three areas: migrant remittances; return migration and related return of skills and know how; and diaspora engagement for home country development. Yes it is important to move beyond this in understanding the complex relation between migration and development. This requires a clear definition of what is meant by development. Development now focuses on freedom, choices and capabilities of people. It is crucially dependent on realization of human rights of all persons including migrants (Wickramasekara, 2009a). Thus, migrant rights are central any mainstreaming exercise (Wickramasekara, 2009a). The GMG Handbook correctly recognizes this: “... it is vital that migrants’ human rights are placed at the centre of any

migration mainstreaming exercise. Migrants cannot be treated like any other resource to be deployed at the will of the government, but must be recognized as individuals with rights that must be respected and protected” (GMG, 2010: 5). However, the ‘3Ts’ or transfer concept in the Handbook mentioned above, is not consistent with this approach.

The main usefulness of the mainstreaming approach is the recognition of the need for coordination of different agencies and ministries, and to consider implications of different policies and strategies and their interaction in the formulation of policies related to migration and development. There is lack of coordination and coherence between macro and sectoral policies relating to development, trade, labour and finance and migration, which is common to many developing countries as the Global Commission on International Migration has pointed out (GCIM 2005). Sutherland even suggested that migration policy makers and development planners may seem to work in different planets (Sutherland, 2013).

Within a country, a number of ministries and agencies deal with migration including security ministries and similarly state policies in regard to finance, planning, trade, and aid, among others, have a bearing on migration. Melde and Ionescu (2010: 27) argue: “Home and destination countries should mainstream migration respectively into existing development strategies such as National Development Plans, Poverty Reduction Strategy paper (PRSP), Sector Wide Approaches (SWAPs), National Adaptation Plans of Action concerning climate change (NAP As), country and local employment strategies and into their donor, aid and development strategies (mainstreaming policy role)”.

Policy coherence is increasingly promoted as an aspect of good governance. In many South Asian countries there is little coordination among these institutions. But this point should not be pressed too far because there are equally if not more important issues affecting development which are of a cross cutting nature. For example gender, employment, and climate adaptation and disaster reduction strategies are more important mainstream issues generally reflected in the broader development agendas (IMF, 2013; UN Women, 2011).

The GMG Handbook (2010) has elaborated a number of steps to mainstream migration into development agenda at the national level. This is based on the assumption that the country concerned has identified migration as a high priority in the overall national context, and that they have the resources to carry out such an exercise.

2.3 What tools can be used for mainstreaming migration?

There are a number of tools that a country may use to highlight migration issues in its development agendas. The South Asian situation in relation to these tools is discussed in Section 9.

- *National development plans and PRSPs*
These are the main tools to integrate migration concerns into development agendas although few countries adhere to formal centralised planning now. The development plans are mostly indicative plans (Lucas, 2008). The PRSPs are no longer popular tools except perhaps in Bangladesh and most African countries.
- *National employment and human resource development strategies*
The country of origin may have a surplus of low skilled persons who face unemployment problems while skilled workers may be in short supply. This is the case in most South Asian countries.
- *National Millennium Development Goals (MDGs)*
The original MDG framework did not include migration explicitly while it has obviously contributed towards the achievement of some goals such as poverty reduction, gender equality, creation of global partnerships for development (IOM, 2005b).

- *A national labour migration policy*
This also can be a tool for integrating migration into development issues although its effectiveness depends on the extent to which is accepted and considered by other relevant stakeholders, particularly development policy planners.
- *Cooperation agreements/statements with international organizations*
International organizations operating at national level also identify priority areas of common interest based on their respective agendas. One example is the United Nations Development Assistance Framework (UNDAF) which represents a strategic programme framework for the UN Country Team consisting of different agencies. It describes the collective response of the UNCT to the priorities identified in the national development framework.¹ Migration can be a component of UNDAF depending on the country context.

Another example is the Decent work country programmes (DWCPs) which represent medium term action plans of cooperation between the International Labour Organization and the national government. If DWCPs identify migration and employment as a priority issue, it may be included in priority cooperation areas for ILO support.

The International organization for Migration (IOM) is an intergovernmental agency which has been actively promoting mainstreaming approaches (IOM, 2005a). It has been working in Bangladesh jointly with the UN Development Programme (UNDP) in pilot testing the practical application of the GMG handbook on mainstreaming migration in national development strategies.² The IOM also has promoted 'Migration Profiles' of countries as a tool for mainstreaming,³ but there is little evidence of their usefulness.

However, it not clear whether these agency cooperation programmes have much impact on influencing development policies at the macro level.

- At the institutional level:
A dedicated ministry for migration
In several South Asian countries, special ministries have been created to administer labour migration. But these dedicated Ministries do not usually form part of the main Cabinet ministries, and therefore, may not carry much weight.

Inter-Ministerial Committees on Migration

Inter-ministerial committees representing concerned ministries have also been established to ensure policy coordination and coherence as in the case of Sri Lanka.

3. Migration profile of South Asia

3.1 Status of migration

Table 1 shows the key migration indicators for South Asia which can to some extent indicate the context for mainstreaming migration into country-specific development agendas. India has 5.4 million immigrants while Pakistan hosts 4.1 million. These numbers may represent the outcome of historical processes over time. For example, the free movement of persons and labour between India and Nepal based on the 1950 Friendship Treaty may explain part of the Nepalese immigrant numbers in India. The Afghan conflict has induced millions of Afghans to flee into Pakistan as refugees. Despite the return of a large number to Afghanistan, around 3 million still remain in Pakistan (Wickramasekara & Baruah, 2013). Thus, both India and Pakistan basically represent net immigration countries.

¹See UNDAF guidance materials provided by the UN Development Group:

http://www.undg.org/content/programming_reference_guide_%28undaf%29/common_country_programming_processes_-_undaf/undaf_guidance_materials

² <http://www.gfmd.org/pfp/calls/428>

³ See <http://www.gfmd.org/pfp/policy-tools/migration-profiles>

The migrant outflow figures reflect only those officially recorded and may underestimate the actual movements depending on the extent of undocumented flows. This is clearly the case for India where the recorded outflow figures relate only to those needing emigration clearance – usually low skilled persons going to destinations such as the Middle East where protection issues are important. Nonetheless the highest absolute flows occur from India, Bangladesh and Pakistan. Migrant remittances are a better indicator of the role of migration in the economy, and Nepal stands out in this respect with remittances accounting for almost a quarter of the GDP. Bangladesh and Sri Lanka also have remittances between 9–10 per cent of GDP. While India receives the largest volume of remittances, it forms only 3.7 per cent of GDP in India.

Table 1: South Asia: Migration Indicators

Country	Outflow of workers (annual) 2010–12 average	Immigrant Stock (000s) – 2013	Emigrant Stock (000s) – 2010	Remittances US\$ million – 2013	Remittances as % of GDP – 2013 *
Bangladesh	519,670	1,397	5,380	15,053	10.7
India	671,774	5,338	11,358	71,000	3.7
Nepal	346,158	971	982	6,229	28.8
Pakistan	486,128	4,081	4,677	17,058	6.2
Sri Lanka	268,681	325	1847	7,202	9.6

Source: Updated from Wickramasekara (2011a), using UN Population Division 2013 migrant stock data and World Bank remittance data; Emigrant stock from World Bank Fact book on Remittances 2011; * World Bank data does not indicate the applicable year but it probably refers to 2012.

Two of the South Asian countries – Bangladesh and Nepal – are least developed countries in the UN classification (LDCs) based on the criteria of per capita income, human assets and economic vulnerability, and Maldives graduated out of LDC status in 2011 only (Melde & Ionescu, 2010; UNCTAD, 2012).

3.2 Main features of South Asian labour migration

Unlike South–East Asia, South Asian migration has been mainly directed to the Middle East labour market except in the case of Nepal (Wickramasekara, 2011a). The initial trigger was the oil price boom in 1973 which created a large demand following massive construction projects. The subsequent decline in oil prices, and the end of the construction boom changed the character of migration to more service oriented sectors. A major change has been the emergence of Malaysia as a substantive market for some South Asian countries, particularly Bangladesh and Nepal. There are also small numbers now migrating from South Asian countries to the Republic of Korea under the Employment Permit System (EPS) launched in 2006.

Temporary migration of labour

Most South Asian migration represents temporary migration on fixed term contracts. It is also a type of circular migration system which has stood the test of time over more than three decades, but it continues to be characterized by serious deficits in decent work including migrant rights. Permanent or settler migration from South Asia still takes place on a limited scale to Australia, New Zealand, the United Kingdom, and the United States, among others.

Predominance of semi–skilled and low–skilled migrant workers

Most migrant workers from South Asia to Middle East and other Asian destinations are low–skilled or semi–skilled, such as construction workers and female domestic workers. This phenomenon is a major cause of protection and vulnerability in both origin and destination countries.

Large numbers of migrants in informal and irregular status

There is also incidence of “irregular migration” – commonly referred to as “illegal”, “undocumented”, or “clandestine” migration which can range from simple border crossings to organized trafficking and smuggling though there are no estimates of the numbers. The incidence of irregular migration is probably high in India and Pakistan, largely due to cross-border movements from Bangladesh into India and from Afghanistan into Pakistan, and continuing trafficking of women and children across the border from Bangladesh and Nepal into India.

Growing importance of female migration

Another observed tendency has been the increasing share of female workers migrating on their own for overseas employment. The bulk of them migrate for low-wage occupations, such as domestic work. In South Asia, the share of female migration is high only in Sri Lanka, where currently about 50 per cent of migrants are female. Indian authorities however, do not provide any breakdown of emigration on the basis of gender.

A thriving recruitment industry

The share of public employment services in overseas placements has fallen drastically in all countries, paving the way for a thriving industry of intermediaries in both origin and destination countries. Some are large firms with a good reputation, while many are unregistered small enterprises or individual subagents. While the role of this industry in expanding opportunities for employment abroad has to be recognized, it is well documented that the recruitment industry has been responsible for high migration costs and various malpractices which seriously erode the development benefits of labour migration.

3.3 Trends in outflow of migrant workers from selected South Asian countries

Table 2 shows the trends in outflow of migrant workers from South Asian countries. These numbers relate only to officially recorded numbers of migrant workers going through regular channels, and underestimate actual flows as noted above. In the case of Nepal, the figures do not include migration to India, which is mostly undocumented although legal. In the case of India, the bulk of the skilled workers going abroad are not captured in these figures.

Table 2: Annual outflows of migrant workers (officially reported)

Years	Bangladesh	India	Nepal*	Pakistan	Sri Lanka
1990	103,814	139,861	83,020	115,520	42,625
1995	187,543	415,334	121,595	122,620	172,489
2000	222,686	243,182	35,543	110,136	182,188
2005	252,702	548,853	183,682	143,329	231,290
2008	875,055	848,601	249,051	431,842	236,574
2009	465,351	610,272	219,965	404,568	247,119
2010	383,150	641,356	294,094	364,685	266,445
2011	568,062	626,565	354,716	456,893	262,960
2012	607,798	747,401	384,665	638,587	282,331
2013	409,253	816,655	453,834	622,714	293,105
2014	420,612		521,878	629,658	

Note: * Figures for Nepal are reported for 12 months running from July of one year to June of the following year. E.g. Data for 2012 refers to July 2011 to June 2012.

Sources: Compiled by the author based on national sources. (Wickramasekara, 2014; Wickramasekara, 2011a); MOLE (2013).

Nevertheless, the figures show large increase in outflow in recent years for all major South Asian countries except Sri Lanka (Table 2). It is difficult to find an explanation for the sudden jump from 381,515 in 2006 to 832,609 in 2007 in Bangladesh. Despite a setback in 2009 and 2010, the numbers have increased to some extent in Bangladesh. Pakistan has also registered an appreciable increase in outflows in the last two years (2011–12). In India, the increase is more gradually spread over several years. It is interesting to note that the annual outflows from Nepal have increased in recent years, while Sri Lanka outflows have stabilized around 250,000. Nepal's latest emigration figures now even exceed those from Bangladesh.

There is no information on net migration (outflows minus returns for any given year) for any of the countries in the absence of systematic monitoring of annual return migration.

4. Assessment of integrating migration issues into development agendas

At the outset it is important to raise the issue of how mainstreaming of migration in development been interpreted in South Asian countries. Is there formal recognition of the need for mainstreaming at the national level? A review of the situation indicates some scenarios as shown in Table 3.

Table 3: Pattern of mainstreaming migration in development agendas or plans in South Asia

1	Clear mention in official development plans, PRSPs, but there is no integrated approach.	Afghanistan, Bangladesh, and Nepal
2	No formal recognition in development plans and PRSPs, etc., but there are public pronouncements or acknowledgement of importance of migration for the economy by the government.	Pakistan
3	No general acknowledgment of role of migration as a whole in the development agenda, but recognizes specific components (diaspora, remittances)	India (mainstreaming overseas Indian community).

4.1 Bangladesh

In the case of Bangladesh there is high level commitment to mainstreaming of migration as the following statement by the Minister responsible for migration:

We acknowledge the role of migration as a contributor to the socio-economic development of Bangladesh, and we must continue our efforts to mainstream migration into the development processes.

Khandker Mosharraf Hossain, Minister, Ministry of Expatriates' Welfare and Overseas Employment (MEWOE) (UNBconnect, 2013).

According to a senior MEWOE official, the overseas employment sector has been declared as a thrust sector of the Economy of Bangladesh, and it is considered ' the development alternative to the economy of Bangladesh' (Islam, 2012). This is because of the pivotal role it plays in creating employment of about 600,000 to 700,000 for the workforce.

Melde and Ionescu (2010) include Bangladesh among the few LDCs that have successfully included migration into their PRSPs.

The 2005 Bangladeshi PRSP provides a good example of how migration issues can be mainstreamed in the development plan. Internal migration, impacts of remittances on development and inter-regional migration are identified as significant elements that contribute to understanding changes in development and poverty reduction trends (Melde & Ionescu, 2010: 24)

This conclusion is based on a number of initiatives mentioned in the 2005 PRSP document for providing services for migrants, as part of the development strategy.

The latest Bangladesh PRSP for 2013 does not use the term mainstreaming' in relation to international migration. The PRSP makes clear that the main focus of the Plan is to mainstream "Poverty–Environment–Climate Nexus" in national planning process (IMF, 2013). Yet it recognizes the role of migration in creating employment opportunities, reducing inter–regional disparities, raising the economic status of women and the role of remittances. It adds: "An additional comforting factor is the continued prospects for labor migration abroad in the range of 400–500 thousand workers per year that translates into permanent labor absorption of some 100 thousand workers" (IMF, 2007: 78).

The 2013 PRSP proposes several measures to improve the development impact of migration and remittances:

- a. Diversify migration from focus on low skilled workers to well-trained skilled and semi-skilled workers;
- b. Improve access of workers from poorer and lagging regions to migration opportunities: this is because there is a significant correlation between district level poverty head count rates and the share of expatriate workers;
- c. Promote overseas employment for women;
- d. Undertake entrepreneurship development programmes and mechanisms for return migrants.

A review of recent policy documents of Bangladesh including the Sixth Five Year Plan/PRSP by Rahman (2013) concluded that a comprehensive migration-mainstreaming approach was missing since most plans and policies were not guided by holistic migration plans and activities being largely composed of ad-hoc based activities and priorities.

The Decent Work Country Programmes (DWCP 2006–09 (ILO, 2008) and the current DWCP 2012–15) both have included migration as an important component. The 2006–09 DWCP stated:

A well–managed labour migration policy is an important employment promotion tool. Promoting regular forms of labour migration through cooperation between sending and receiving countries based on sound labour migration policies, respect for migrant workers' rights, and effective legal frameworks are important ingredients of success in this respect (ILO, 2008: 4).

The country programme priority 3 of the 2012–15 DWCP is: "Extending social protection to the workers and their families, including migrant workers", with a related outcome of "Management system of migration strengthened". Yet there is no evidence whether the DWCPs are considered by development policy makers.

The draft Overseas Employment Policy (MEWOE 2013)⁴ however, refers to the mainstreaming role more directly. A major component of the policy framework is: "*Integrating migration in national development and planning framework, through establishing greater policy coherence between migration and other with economic, social and labour policies*". It also calls for the development of a national employment policy to place labour migration in the overall employment policy context (MEWOE, 2013: 31).

4.2 India

In the case of India, the 12th Five Year Plan document does not make any reference to international labour migration although there are a few references to internal migration (National Planning Commission India, 2013). The India Millennium Development Goals (MDG) Report 2011 refers mainly to internal migration (CSO India, undated). Similarly the Decent Work Country Programme (DWCP) for India (ILO, 2010) has a few references only to internal migration.

⁴ The final policy document to be submitted to Parliament may be different to some extent, but it is not accessible at present.

However, the establishment of the Ministry of Overseas Indian Affairs in 2004 signified an acknowledgement of one important facet of the migration–development linkage which is mainstreaming the overseas Indian diaspora community in India’s development. As the MOIA mission statement clarifies:

India’s engagement with its overseas community has been mainstreamed with the establishment of MOIA. Its Mission is to establish a robust and vibrant institutional framework to facilitate and support mutually beneficial networks with and among Overseas Indians to maximise the development impact for India and enable overseas Indians to invest in and benefit from the opportunities in India (MOIA, 2013: 8).

Since migration is particularly important for certain States such as Kerala rather than the overall economy it is important to look at policies in Kerala. The draft Kerala Perspective Plan 2030 contains a separate chapter on Diaspora and Migration Policy (Government of Kerala, 2013). It is clear that the focus in the plan is also to mainstream the diaspora and in-migrants.⁵

The proposed strategy is to mainstream the three categories of migrants: NRKs⁶, return emigrants, and in-migrants, in the development agenda by creating an enabling environment into which the migrants are effectively integrated and able to make significant contribution to the development of the country. The main thrust is therefore, to harness the diaspora (including return migrants) and in-migrants as a resource for development (Government of Kerala, 2013: 758).

4.3 Nepal

Nepal has recognized the importance of migration because it is the country with the largest share of remittances in GDP. The 2003 PRSP for Nepal and the Tenth Plan squarely addressed the importance of migration to the country, drawing specific attention to the key role that remittances have played in the economy (ILO, 2002; Lucas, 2008). Enhancing foreign employment was stated to be objective under the labour sector to be achieved through skill development, support services and labour agreements with destination countries. Balkumar stated: “Any poverty strategy in Nepal is bound to be more successful with a strong component of migration policy integrated with it.” (Bal Kumar, 2003: 23). The Bangladesh statement to the 2012 GFMD reiterates the role of migration to the national economy of Nepal:

For a country like Nepal, where remittances from migration represents around 25 percent of GDP at present, and around 1500 youths leave the country for foreign employment every day, labour migration is an issue of high importance and urgency (Thapa, 2013).

Yet Nepal’s 2007 PRSP progress report (IMF, 2007) has only two references to overseas migration and one reference to remittances. It does not refer to any strategy of enhancing foreign employment. The report noted that the large scale migration of educated youths posed a serious threat to human resources available in the country. The two references to internal migration were also largely negative referring to pressure of mass migration on urban utilities. It makes only eight references to remittances, and notes in two contexts that remittances have led to reduction in poverty.

The Decent Work Country Programme for Nepal, 2008–2012, has incorporated labour migration under the overarching Country programme Objective: “To generate productive employment, guaranteeing equal employment opportunities for all, based on a floor of social protection and the full participation of the social partners through strengthening their capacity for social dialogue” (ILO, 2011).

The Government of Nepal has elaborated its migration policy in the document, Foreign Employment Policy 2068 (Government of Nepal, 2012). Its goal is to: “Ensure safe, organized, respected and reliable foreign employment to contribute on poverty reduction along with sustainable economic and social development through economic and non-economic benefits of foreign employment” (Government of Nepal, 2012: 4).

⁵ In-migrants refer to internal migrants from other Indian states coming to Kerala.

⁶ NRKs=Non-Resident Keralites

The Nepal Human Development Report (National Planning Commission Nepal, 2014: 73) states: “The long-term implications of labour migration notwithstanding, it is likely to remain a dominant feature of the Nepali economy for at least another decade or more, attracting a significant proportion of youth”.

4.4 Pakistan

Pakistan’s PRSPs have not accorded any priority to migration. Lucas (2008) made a strong observation in relation to the first PRSP of 2004 (Government of Pakistan, 2004):

For a country with very large numbers of emigrants and return migration, high dependence on remittances, potential costs from a high brain-drain rate, and also with a large immigrant population, the extent of incorporation of migration issues in these documents remains quite circumscribed. Indeed, the words migration, remittance and refugee appear not at all in the PRSP, which seems quite remarkable (Lucas, 2008: 24–25).

Pakistan’s second generation Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper – 2010 PRSP II – has only three brief references to internal migration, and none to international migration or foreign employment (Government of Pakistan & IMF, 2010). It is difficult to justify especially when the only single reference to migrant remittances mentions that: “Remittances play a significant role in poverty reduction in Pakistan, and have the potential to do substantially more” (Government of Pakistan & IMF, 2010: 263).

The statement by the Government of Pakistan to the 2013 UN High Level Dialogue on International Migration and Development did not make any specific reference to mainstreaming, but highlighted the need for more intense international cooperation and collaboration on international migration and development nexus (S. A. Khan, 2013).

4.5 Sri Lanka

The 2002 PRSP recognized the role of overseas employment in poverty reduction. It contained a section on mainstreaming poverty reduction into the promotion of overseas employment as part of labour market reform under the broad area of reforming structural policy to support pro-poor growth. The PRSP noted:

Expatriate employment is one of the main avenues for increasing incomes for nearly 700,000 Sri Lankans, the majority of whom are women from low-income families. Overseas employment generates official foreign remittances of more than US\$1 billion per annum. The Government strategy in this area is aimed at promoting foreign employment while protecting migrant workers from abuse (Government of Sri Lanka, 2002).

It proposed to achieve this goal through a series of measures including reorganization of the Sri Lanka Bureau of Foreign Employment, promoting skills training for prospective migrants, entering into bilateral agreements with governments of destination countries, introducing programmes for better protection of migrants and improving migrant worker housing, insurance and credit schemes (Government of Sri Lanka, 2002)

Migration was identified as an important development issue in the ‘Mahinda Chintana: Vision for the Future’ – the country’s ten-year development horizon plan formulated in 2005 (Government of Sri Lanka, 2005). The chapter on labour and employment was titled “Towards a Flexible and Globally Employable Workforce”. The focus of policy for the labour migration sector was “ensuring skilled, safe migration” (Government of Sri Lanka, 2005: 179). The objectives were to ensure the development and welfare of migrant workers and their families, and to ensure that returnee migrant workers are able to enter into productive economic activity on their return to Sri Lanka. The updated Development Plan in 2010 however, had no separate chapter on labour and employment, and also had no discussion on the role of migration (Government of Sri Lanka, 2010). The only reference was on the need to protect female migrant workers from economic and sexual exploitation.

The creation of a separate Ministry on Foreign Employment Promotion and Welfare in 2007 signified a turning point in government thinking, and emphasis given to foreign employment issues. One initiative of the Ministry – the Sri Lanka National Labour Migration Policy (MFEPW, 2008) – made a clear statement on mainstreaming: “it is essential that labour migration is integrated and mainstreamed in national development, decent work, labour market and poverty reduction policies to underscore the role of migration in Sri Lanka's development. This will be a coordinated effort with other national and international agencies and department to ensure that labour migration is incorporated into all relevant policy frameworks” (MFEPW, 2008: VI).

Migration also formed an important component of the Decent Work Country Programme and the National Youth Policy. Most recently, the National Human Resources and Employment Policy of Sri Lanka considered foreign employment as an integral part of the policy document. While noting the inadequate concern on migration and development, it stated that: “Due recognition is not given to migrant workers as resources for development” (Government of Sri Lanka, 2012: 33). It added:

The focus of national policy in the foreign employment sector is aimed at “ensuring skilled, safe migration”. The long term policy of the government would be to create decent jobs for Sri Lankans at home and promoting migration by choice rather than by poverty and need (Government of Sri Lanka, 2012: 34)

5. Role of remittances in the migration–development nexus

5.1 Subregional overview

Remittances are obviously the most tangible aspect of labour migration for all the countries with India receiving the largest volume of remittances within south Asia and also globally, while for other countries it is more important in terms of the contribution to the GDP. Bangladesh, India, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka have all experienced large increases in financial remittance flows in recent years.

Yet remittances also consist of social remittances meaning skills, ideas values and knowledge transmitted by migrants abroad and those returning. While these cannot be quantified, they nevertheless contribute substantially to home country development.

A review of remittances to South Asia by a World Bank team in 2005 remarked: “*The increase in remittance volumes has renewed academic and public policy interest in their potential to reduce poverty and economic vulnerability, improve family welfare, and stimulate local economic development in the face of much lower, and sometimes temperamental FDI flows*” (Maimbo, 2005: ii).

In 2013 the five South Asian countries reviewed here received an estimated \$113 billion in officially recorded remittances (as defined by the World Bank) from its migrant workers across the globe (Table 4). It shows more than a threefold expansion from 33 billion in 2005. This does not include remittances sent through informal channels which are quite common in South Asia. The bulk of remittances in Afghanistan come through informal channels. For Nepal it has been estimated that 40 per cent of the remittances come through informal channels (cited in Adhikary 2013). Thus the total amount of remittances may be much higher (World Bank, 2011). It is interesting to note that total remittances have continuously risen despite the onset of the global financial and economic crisis in 2008.

5.2 Country notes on remittances

The 2013 Bangladesh PRSP described the Inflow of foreign remittances as “the single most important informal safety net program in Bangladesh” (IMF, 2013: 178) contributing to poverty reduction in Bangladesh since the 1990s. The remittances received in fiscal year 2009 was “11.15% to the GDP which is 6 times higher than the ODA and 13 times higher than the FDI” (IMF, 2013: 178). The PRSP

noted that remittances were very unevenly distributed between various districts given the high concentration of migrants from some divisions. For instance Chittagong and Dhaka divisions account for about 78 per cent of total migrant workers. Since the “The flow of remittance earnings is amongst the most potent way for improving the local economy” (IMF 2013: 185), the PRSP proposed a number of measures to increase migration from lagging districts as noted above as well.

Table 4: Inflow of Remittances (in US dollar millions)

	Bangladesh	India	Nepal	Pakistan	Sri Lanka
2,000	1,969	12,845	112	1,080	1,163
2,001	2,100	14,229	147	1,460	1,190
2,002	2,860	15,707	678	3,550	1,312
2,003	3,192	21,015	771	3,961	1,434
2,004	3,582	18,753	823	3,942	1,586
2,005	4,642	22,125	1,212	4,280	1,976
2,006	5,667	28,334	1,453	5,121	2,167
2,007	7,262	37,217	1,734	5,998	2,507
2,008	9,223	49,977	2,727	7,039	2,925
2,009	10,739	49,204	2,985	8,717	3,337
2,010	11,282	53,480	3,469	9,690	4,123
2,011	12,960	62,499	4,217	12,263	5,153
2,012	14,236	68,821	4,793	14,006	6,000
2,013	13,857	69,970	5,552	14,626	6,422
2014e	15,053	71,000	6,229	17,058	7,202
Remittances as a share of GDP in 2013 (%)					
	10.70%	3.70%	28.80%	6.20%	9.60%

Note: Total remittances defined as the sum of compensation of employees, workers’ remittances and migrant transfers. 2014e – estimated.

Source: The World Bank Migration and Remittance dataset, October 2014, Prospects Group.

Raihan and Tasneem (2013) argue that remittances are not generally used for productive investment in Bangladesh. But it contradicts the findings of Raihan (2013) who highlighted the positive multiplier impact of remittances on GDP, sectoral production and employment (Table 5).

For India, migrant remittances constitute the major tangible impact of overseas migration at the overall economy level, much higher than overseas development aid and foreign direct investment (FDI) flows. The numbers migrating are too small a proportion in relation to the total labour force. A survey of remittance-receiving households by the Reserve Bank of India found that 31 per cent of total foreign remittances came from the Gulf countries, 29.4 per cent from North America, and 19.5 per cent from Europe (cited in Rajan 2013). A recent study on the macroeconomic impact of remittances on the Indian economy has come to highly optimistic conclusions on their impact on households and the economy (Singh & Hari, 2013). Rajan (2013) however, found that a major impact of emigration and remittances was on house construction and quality of housing in the State of Kerala.

The Perspective Plan document of the Kerala government observed that while remittances had a good impact on consumption, growth and the current account balance, they had constrained “the long term growth prospects by creating a resource-curse like situation (Dutch disease) in Kerala” (Government of Kerala, 2013: 758). It added that remittances had adversely impacted on reducing the work incentive and entrepreneurship of recipients in the economy.

**Table 5: Impact of a 10% rise in remittances
(based on Social Accounting Matrix 2007)**

	% change from base level	
GDP	1.26	
Household Consumption	2.05	
Sectoral Production		
Agriculture	1.76	
Industry	1.19	
Services	1.06	
Employment		
	Low skilled	High skilled
Agriculture	1.94	1.85
Industry	0.83	0.81
Service	1.32	1.19
Total	1.55	1.3

Source: Compiled from (Raihan, 2013)

Remittances in Nepal have increased more than four times since 2005, reaching 6.5 billion dollars and 29 per cent of the GDP by 2013 – the highest share in Asia. The Nepal Remitters Association (NRA) has estimated that about 40 per cent of the remittances still enter Nepal through informal channels (cited in Adhikary 2013), and therefore, the GDP share could possibly exceed one-third. The three Nepal Living Standard Survey Reports have recorded a significant increase in the proportion of households receiving remittances (23.4 per cent in 1993/94 to 31.9 per cent in 2003/04 and 55.8 per cent in 2010/11). Using the NLSS data, a World Bank study concluded that poverty would have only declined by 4.8 per cent instead of the observed 10.9 percentage point if the amount of remittances had remained constant between 1995–96 and 2003–04 (cited in (Adhikari, 2009)). He adds that remittances have also served as the main source to balance the current account deficit and sustain the balance of payments situation in Nepal.

While there are debates on the use of remittances for development and productive purposes, Adhikary (2013) concludes that most studies support the view that they have been used primarily to build human capital – through improving food security, health and education, in addition to loan repayment. Investments in land, housing or business was found to be less frequent. He however, points out that the inflow of remittances may have widened income inequalities in Nepal with the economically more well-off being among the greatest beneficiaries of these remittances.

Pakistan has according high priority to facilitating remittances and channeling them more into formal financial institutions. The Pakistan Remittance Initiative (PRI) is a joint initiative launched by State Bank of Pakistan, Ministry of Overseas Pakistanis and Ministry of Finance aimed at providing an ownership structure in Pakistan for remittance facilitation. It has led to the improvement of the remittance infrastructure, increasing the share of formal remittances and offering a wider range of products for remitters. A Pakistan study however, makes some negative observations on the potential of migrant remittances for development at the macro level: “As it is, most of the remittance flows in

Pakistan have been spent in covering for the ballooning current account deficit. This leaves fewer amounts for other expenditures such as education and health. Moreover, with corruption ripe in the country, it is difficult to expect an appropriate use of funds, including those from remittances" (Khan & Ahmed, 2013: 18).

In the case of Sri Lanka, Jayaweera (2013) mentions three contributions of migrant remittances at the macro level to the Sri Lankan economy: promoting macroeconomic stability, contribution to national savings, and labour market effects. But she has highlighted as labour market effects are the general impacts of emigration on employment, wages and skills, and not those specifically related to remittances.

The Sri Lanka National Human Resources and Employment Policy (2012) made the following recommendation on mainstreaming remittances: "With a view to managing the nexus between migration and development more effectively, improved systems in remittances management will be instituted. Providing due recognition to returnees will help in achieving this objective (Government of Sri Lanka, 2012: 34).

6. Return migration and mainstreaming

6.1 Role of return migration

All South Asian countries recognize the importance of return migration although there is hardly any reliable information on the number and profile of returnees. Return after a fixed contract ranging from one to three years is the norm for temporary migrant workers from South Asia to the Middle East and other Asian countries.

What is important for development is sustainable return which can be defined as a situation where the migrant has returned with sufficient resources so that he/she has no reason to migrate again for a long period. This is obviously the case of highly skilled professionals who have returned to China, India, Ireland, the Republic of Korea and Taiwan (China). They have started high tech companies or businesses, or joint ventures. Sustainable return depends on the pattern and timing of return movements. The period of abroad should be long enough to acquire skills and capital (financial and social), and return should be effected well before the end of productive life (not for retirement). .

Skilled workers who migrate under permanent migration schemes may return for short periods initially or some may return permanently after a number of years. India is a success story where skilled migrants with financial, human and social capital have returned and promoted investments and growth as clearly observed in the Bangalore. Some State Governments in India have promoted these returns and investment ventures by providing special incentives. The successful experience of a parallel Silicon Valley in Bangalore in India shows that it is spontaneous returns that have sustainable impacts. Highly skilled Indians have returned with financial, human and social capital and transformed the local IT industry (Wickramasekara, 2009b).

However, for most other migrant workers in South Asia, especially low skilled workers who migrate under fixed term contracts to the Middle East or other Asian destinations, return migration is an integral part of the migration cycle. These workers usually migrate without their families. Their contribution to development cannot be easily estimated, but they are believed to be the main source of remittances which bolster the balance of payments and foreign exchange reserves of many countries. Some of these returning workers also invest in real estate and other areas which may contribute to national development to some extent. But a good number may not have been able to improve their economic situation on a sustainable basis after meeting migration costs (Wickramasekara, 2011b).

Afghanistan in particular has experienced large returns of refugees from neighbouring countries of Iran and Pakistan with close to six million persons returning from abroad since 2002 (Wickramasekara & Baruah, 2013). It has placed tremendous strains on the re-absorption capacity of the Afghan economy given modest growth trends.

Rajan (2013) has estimated the number of Kerala emigrants who returned and living in Kerala in 2011 to be 1.15 million. He also found that the presence of an emigrant or return emigrant has indeed made a very positive impact on the quality of life of a household. But he has not discussed the impact they have had on local development or investments.

For Pakistan, Khan and Ahmad (2013) are pessimistic about prospects for return migration to contribute towards development given extremely low economic opportunities and lack of basic services. They argue that migrants may not want to return under those circumstances, but do not provide any solid evidence to support the view. But this argument may also apply to skilled Pakistanis or those who have migrated permanently to Western countries. The authors hardly emphasise return of low skilled migrants from Gulf countries who comprise the bulk of recent migration.

All South Asian countries recognize the importance of return migrants, and have usually launched programmes for reintegration of returning workers, and some limited interventions for promotion of entrepreneurship among them. However such ventures have not shown a high degree of success because the overall economic environment may not be suitable for investments. Moreover, low skilled and high skilled workers experience different challenges in reintegration. A Sri Lankan study on reintegration of returnees found that a significant proportion of returnees remained underemployed or unemployed. Moreover only a small proportion of returnees had acquired useful or marketable skills during their employment overseas, and had made productive investments (ILO, 2013).

Skilled diaspora return programmes are now increasingly focussing on temporary as opposed to long-term return. The UNDP and IOM have implemented limited programmes such as TOKTEN (Transfer of Knowledge Through Expatriate Nationals), and Return of Qualified Nationals programmes to bring back skilled persons for short periods to developing countries including Afghanistan, India and Sri Lanka. The Government of India established INRIST (Interface for NRI Scientists and Technologists) Centre in 1990 to operationalise the TOKTEN programme in India. However, neither the TOKTEN nor the INRIST programme was very successful in India (Khadria 2009: 117). The IOM initiated the Return of Qualified Afghans (RQA) programme to Afghanistan in December 2001 to tap into the expertise of qualified Afghans living abroad and to engage them in the reconstruction process. The RQA programme focused on the return of qualified Afghan nationals scattered worldwide, who are motivated to contribute their skills for the benefit of the reconstruction process on a short- or long-term basis. Through the end of 2011, IOM recruited and assisted in the return of more than 900 Afghan experts from 31 countries through different RQA components. These individuals took up work in 33 ministries, governmental institutions, NGOs, and international organizations operating in Afghanistan (Wickramasekara & Baruah, 2013).

6.2 Return of skills or brain circulation

One contradiction in the migration-development discourse is the issue of brain drain. South Asia, particularly, India, has been one of the major sources of skilled workers at the global level. However, the skill outflow as a share of the stock of the skilled labour force inside the country is quite low. In Indian policy circles, the perception of skilled migration is one of brain circulation and brain banks abroad. The view is that these skills are not permanently lost to the country as seen in recent return migration of the highly skilled and diaspora contributions (Khadria, 2002). The net impact of brain drain depends on a number of feedback effects in the forms of remittance flows, returns, skill transfers and investments (Lowell & Findlay, 2002; Wickramasekara, 2003).

The Approach Paper to the Thirteenth Plan, 2013/14 to 2015/16 of Nepal (National Planning Commission, 2013) posited that the trend of brain drain and emigration for foreign employment had created a shortage of human resources for development within the country. It called for human resource development to focus on the sectors compatible with the changed needs of country and capable of competing in the international market, which seems somewhat contradictory.

In Sri Lanka the Government policy now is on promotion of “safe, skilled migration”, and to reduce the share of low skilled workers (MFEPW, 2008; Government of Sri Lanka, 2012)). Yet there is substantial permanent migration of health workers and engineers to developed countries from Sri Lanka. Jayaweera (2013) refers to the shortage of health workers at the national level due to brain drain. The Pakistan National Emigration Policy (Government of Pakistan, 2009) also adopts a similar approach. Adhikary (2009, 2013) does not refer to brain drain among negative consequences of migration in Nepal while Khatri (2007) also does not mention brain drain in his discussion of South Asian migration. The implicit consensus seems to be that it is important to send skilled workers abroad rather than low skilled workers given the numerous protection problems and low wages associated with the latter. This view is also influenced by the lack of rewarding opportunities for skilled workers inside the countries, and the positive views about the contributions of diaspora communities abroad. Thus the predominant view seems to be one of brain circulation rather than brain drain in the context of South Asia.

7. Role of diasporas

I have dealt extensively with definitions of the diaspora in detail in a previous paper (Wickramasekara, 2009b). Section 7 has partly discussed contributions of diaspora returnees. A common problem is the absence of reliable diaspora estimates, and South Asia is no exception. The estimates of the diasporas of South Asian countries vary widely with 21 million estimated for India followed by seven million for Pakistan.

For purposes of comparability, I have used the estimates of the OECD global diaspora profiles ((OECD, 2012) in Table 6. These show the numbers in OECD destinations, but they seem to vastly underestimate the numbers particularly for India given that some major migration corridors such as that between India and GCC countries are not included. The estimates range from 62,000 from Nepal to 2.8 million for India for the year, 2005–06. What is more important is that the bulk are in the 25–64 age group, and also skilled. The share of the low educated range from 17 to 38 per cent. The brain drain rate seems very high for Sri Lanka at 34.2 per cent compared to other South Asian countries which range from three to six per cent. OECD (2012) does not explain this deviation, but mentions that island economies generally have high brain drain rates. In the absence of detailed information on estimation methods, it is not possible to judge the reliability of the estimate.

Table 6 shows the diversity of the South Asian diaspora with both substantive shares of low skilled and high skilled persons. Khadria’s pioneering study on knowledge workers and their second generation effects was a trailblazer in diaspora contributions in the context of India and South Asia (Khadria, 1999).

For Bangladesh, the Overseas Employment Policy statement clearly recognised the relevance of the diaspora for national policy as follows (MEWOE 2006: 2):

All the Bangladeshis, male and female migrant workers who are presently working abroad on contractual jobs, the permanent and temporary residents who already are foreign citizens or willing to embrace foreign citizenship but keeping close relationship and participating in the socio-economic activities of the home country, commonly termed as Diaspora, shall fall under the scope of this policy.

There are about 1.5 million people in Bangladeshi diaspora in UK and USA, Greece, Italy, Canada, Australia, and other countries according to the Refugee and Migratory Movements Research Unit

(RMMRU) of Dhaka University. Long-term or diaspora migrants particularly in the UK and USA, make important contributions, especially in terms of remittances and investments.

	OECD Destinations 2005–06				
	Bangladesh	India	Nepal	Pakistan	Sri Lanka
Population 15+					
Emigrant population (thousands)	398.5	2,775.2	62.1	843.1	433.2
Recent emigrants (thousands)	86.8	780.1	31.7	190.0	81.0
15–24 (%)	14.2	9.8	21.0	13.7	14.5
25–64 (%)	80.1	79.1	78.1	79.7	78.3
65+ (%)	5.7	11.1	0.9	6.6	7.2
Low-educated (%)	37.7	16.6	17.5	34.5	29.2
Highly-educated (%)	37.8	63.3	46.9	39.3	34.2
Total emigration rates (%)	0.4	0.4	0.4	0.8	2.9
Emigration rates of the highly-educated (%)	3.7	4.2	6.2	5.7	34.2

Source: compiled from OECD (2012).

Following a recommendation of the High Level Committee on the Diasporas, the Government of India established a new ministry in 2004, the Ministry of Non-Resident Indians' Affairs, later renamed as the Ministry of Overseas Indian Affairs (MOIA), thus giving high priority to engagement of the diaspora.

The High Level Committee on the Indian diaspora estimated the total Indian diaspora globally at about 20 million which included persons of Indian origin (PIOs) and overseas Indians (Government of India, 2001). The Ministry of Overseas Indian Affairs has revised this estimate to 21.9 million consisting of 10 million Non-Resident Indians and 11.9 million persons of Indian origin as of May, 2012.⁷ The MOIA also reports that there are 291 Indian Associations abroad.⁸

The Indian diaspora also has been influential in promoting major economic reforms in India which facilitated its integration with the global economy. The Government has launched several initiatives to mainstream diasporas including diaspora youth programmes, annual high level diaspora forums, establishment of the Overseas Indian Facilitation Centre, and setting up a Prime Ministers' Global Advisory Council of People of Indian Origin to draw upon the experience and knowledge of eminent people of Indian origin in diverse fields from across the world.⁹

At the state level, a good practice is the Department of Non-Resident Keralites Affairs (NORKA) to safeguard the interests of Non-Resident Keralites (the Kerala diaspora) set up by the Government of Kerala in 1996. "Norka-Roots" was established as the field agency of the Department of NORKA, in 2002 which acts as an interface between the Non-Resident Keralites and the Government of Kerala. It serves as a forum for addressing the NRKs' problems and reintegrating migrant returnees (Rajan 2013).

Lucas (2008) estimated that Nepal's diaspora amounted to some 4.4 per cent of the domestic population in 2000 with the bulk of them estimated to be in India (63 per cent), and another quarter in Pakistan. OECD (2012) reported that 62,1000 persons of Nepalese origin were found in OECD

⁷ Information drawn from [http://moia.gov.in/writereaddata/pdf/NRISPIOS-Data\(15-06-12\)new.pdf](http://moia.gov.in/writereaddata/pdf/NRISPIOS-Data(15-06-12)new.pdf) (accessed 10 October 2013).

⁸ Information drawn from http://moia.gov.in/pdf/Lis_of_Overseas_Indian_Associations.pdf (accessed 10 October 2013).

⁹ <http://moia.gov.in/services.aspx?id1=284&idp=284&mainid=196> (Accessed 10 October 2013).

destinations in 2005–06. Low skilled persons formed 17.5 per cent of the total while 47 per cent were highly skilled persons. The emigration rate of the highly skilled was 6.2 per cent. The Non-Resident Nepali (NRN) Association was formed at the first global conference in 2003 and the network now has 38 national chapters all over the world, and has also brought direct financial investment and charities to Nepal.¹⁰

Like in the case of India, there are two categories – Persons of Nepalese Origin who are citizens of other countries and Non-Resident Nepalese who maintain their citizenship but live abroad except in SAARC (South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation) countries. Thus more than one million Nepalese who live in India will not be considered part of the Nepalese diaspora officially. Yet they constitute the ‘near’ diaspora for all practical purposes. Using the official Nepalese definition, the Nepali diaspora population has been estimated at about 1.7 million people ((Adhikary, 2009). Although Adhikary estimated about 40,000 to be in developed countries, the OECD (2012) found the number in OECD destinations to be 62,100 in 2005/06.

Partly as a response to lobbying by the Nepalese diaspora, the Government promulgated the Non-Resident Nepali Act, 2008 and Non-Resident Nepali Rules, 2009. The Government of Nepal has recognized NRNs and sought their participation for two reasons:

- “To motivate Non-Resident Nepalis to take part in all round advancement of Nepal and enhance their attachment towards Nepal; and
- To encourage their investment in Nepal.”¹¹

The Act and Rules has allowed NRNs to own property and repatriate deposits and assets according to the same rules applied to foreign investors.

The Approach Paper to the Thirteen Plan has only one reference to diasporas: “Economic diplomacy and Nepalese Diasporas will be mobilized to establish Nepal as Tourists’ attractive destination” (Government of Nepal, 2012: 80).

Bohra–Mishra (2011) “... in order to maximise the positive effects of migration, the Nepalese government needs to make it possible for migrants to contribute towards productive and sustainable development activities that focus on infrastructure development and employment creation.....In the absence of such initiatives, migrants mostly engage in philanthropic investments rather than in sustainable development activities” (Bohra–Mishra, 2011: 1536). Adhikary (2013) also found that support for welfare and philanthropic activities was small and scattered. This is because Government of Nepal lacks credible initiatives to foster and sustain effective linkages with the migrant population abroad.

The Government of Pakistan has had its diaspora in mind for a long time as seen from institutions targeting overseas Pakistanis: the Overseas Pakistan’s Division (OPD) and the Overseas Pakistanis Foundation, and later the Ministry of Overseas Pakistanis. The OPD functioned for a long time under Ministry of Labour, Manpower, and Overseas Pakistanis. It was made autonomous and absorbed into the Ministry of Overseas Pakistanis in 2008. The Ministry of Overseas Pakistanis and Human Resource Development (OPHRD) was established joining two ministries in 2013. OPHRD has estimated the total number of Overseas Pakistan at 6.3 million at the end of 2010 (Table 7). The largest group is in the Middle East followed by Europe and the Americas.

¹⁰ <http://www.nepalitimes.com/issue/373/Nation/14168>

¹¹ Website of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Government of Nepal, <http://www.mofa.gov.np/en/nrn-34.html>, Accessed 28 October 2013

Table 7: Number of Overseas Pakistanis living /working /studying in different regions/ countries of the world up to 31 December 2010

Region	Number
Africa	115,508
Americas	1,206,297
Asia and the Far East	199,945
Australia and New Zealand	35,000
Europe	1,773,413
Middle East	2,991,108
Total	6,321,271

Source: Ministry of Overseas Pakistanis and Human Resource Development

Pakistan has also recognized the diaspora potential in the National Emigration Policy by defining “Effective Integration of Diaspora Resources” as Priority Area 7 of the Policy (Government of Pakistan, 2009). It expects the diasporas in different countries to form together with local academia and businesses “development forums, which will help to ‘better projecting Pakistan, seeking greater foreign investment, increasing opportunities of employment for Pakistanis.’

To promote the welfare of overseas Pakistanis and ensure their participation in national development, the Overseas Pakistanis Advisory Council (OPAC) was constituted in August, 2001. In June 2012, the Prime Minister approved the revival and reactivation of OPAC with a number of objectives including advising the Government on matters affecting Overseas Pakistanis, promote export of manpower, encourage and organize productive investment in Pakistan by Overseas Pakistanis, and to publicize abroad the investment and commercial opportunities in Pakistan including tourism.

The Ministry of Overseas Pakistanis drafted a National Policy for Overseas Pakistanis for maximizing welfare and empowerment of Pakistani diaspora working in different countries in the world.¹² It has been approved by the Government end of May 2013.¹³ The policy has offered the Overseas Pakistanis an opportunity to become partners in development – instead of just recipients. It supports welfare schemes for Overseas Pakistanis, a contributory pension schemes, and the establishment of an overseas Pakistani facilitation centre to cover investment facilitation, knowledge networking and business partnerships. These show that Pakistan is serious about mainstreaming diaspora engagement for home development. Surprisingly a recent book on Pakistan and its diasporas has hardly any reference to development contributions of the diaspora (Bolognani & Lyon, 2011).

Bangladesh, Pakistan and Sri Lanka have introduced dual citizenship for their citizens settled abroad. Sri Lanka introduced the dual citizenship scheme in 1987, and over 4,000 persons had been granted the facility until 2011 when it was suspended temporarily to introduce more stringent criteria for screening. India has introduced a compromise solution in issuing a Person of Indian Origin (PIO) card (1996) and Overseas Citizenship of India (OCI) – a lifelong visa – since 2005, which provides recognition like Indian. The Indian Parliament has subsequently approved voting rights for non-resident Indians in elections with the Lok Sabha adopting the Representation of the People (Amendment) Bill, 2010.¹⁴ Nepal has also not permitted dual citizenship arrangements up to now.

¹²ILO Office Islamabad, First ever National Policy for Overseas Pakistanis, Press Release 20 February 2013. http://www.ilo.org/islamabad/info/public/pr/WCMS_205280/lang--en/index.htm (seen 13 October 2013).

¹³ <http://www.dawn.com/news/1014769/khoso-approves-policy-for-overseas-pakistanis>

¹⁴ The Hindu, November 24, 2010, Govt. issues notification for NRI voting rights. <http://www.thehindu.com/news/national/govt-issues-notification-for-nri-voting-rights/article910849.ece> (accessed 10 October 2013).

OECD (2012) reported 433,200 Sri Lankans to be residing in OECD destinations during 2005–06. The shares of low educated and highly educated persons were 34 per cent and 29 per cent respectively. As noted above, the emigration rate of the highly educated reported by the OECD (2012) seems too high in relation to other South Asian countries. In Sri Lanka, there is not much evidence of the positive contributions of the diaspora community although the response during the time of the Tsunami was very encouraging. The potential of the diaspora option was been made much complex by the former conflict situation in Sri Lanka with Tamil diaspora groups actively providing means to sustain the conflict (Bandarage, 2010). Following the successful campaign against the insurgency, the Sri Lankan President made repeated appeals for the diaspora to return and make contributions for reconstruction and development of the country (Jayaweera, 2013) (Wickramasekara 2009b). Yet there has been hardly any positive response from the Tamil diasporas in Western countries up to now who continue to take a confrontationist stand (Bandarage, 2010). A Sri Lanka country study on mainstreaming has highlighted potential contributions by the diaspora in general terms, but has not provided any supporting evidence (Jayaweera, 2013). For instance it mentions that the “Sri Lankan diaspora can play an important role in terms of helping potential migrant workers search for employment opportunities, and avoiding risks and other adverse effects of migration” (Jayaweera, 2013), but there is no record of such diaspora initiatives.

The 2012 National Human Resources and Employment Policy recognized the valuable role of the diaspora and proposed the following:

Policies will be developed to use the Sri Lankan expatriates overseas as a valuable human resource for development. Many of these expatriates are found to be willing to serve the home country on short-term or long-term assignments. Significant benefits can be achieved to promote the country's development by formulating systems to facilitate such use of expatriates' services (Government of Sri Lanka, 2012: 34).

It proposed developing measures to create an environment to promote the participation of diaspora in activities where local expertise and skills were in short supply. At the same time, it recognised that measures to recognise the skills the returning migrants will yield significant developmental benefits.

At the same time, the mainstreaming approach needs to address a number of issues that can arise in diaspora engagement in most regions including South Asia. This is because there is generally a big gap between ‘promise’ and ‘delivery’ in diaspora engagement. There are often divisions in the diaspora based on rivalry, political affiliations, priorities, community of origin in the home country, ethnicity, skill profiles, and migration status, among others. This can create mistrust between home governments and diaspora groups. Diaspora contributions are often weakened when diaspora members are subject to brain waste, lack of qualification recognition and discrimination and xenophobia. There is also duplication in diaspora activities with several trying to do the same thing. There is also weak capacity in origin country institutions to interface with the diaspora, and Afghanistan, Nepal and Sri Lanka are good examples where post-conflict situations have complicated the issue of cooperation with the diaspora. The embassies of most developing countries are weak in reaching out to the diaspora. Kuznetsov (2006) has rightly pointed out that home countries often underestimate the resources (human & financial) needed to keep diaspora networks active. Volunteerism has strict limits in this sense. Many countries including those in Asia have seen the unsustainability of donor-funded initiatives with hardly any local ownership. Rigid visa policies of destination countries also pose serious obstacles to the engagement of diaspora. Ineffective monitoring and follow up mechanisms is another problem often observed in diaspora initiatives. The origin countries need to address these issues in their attempts to mainstream the diaspora.

8. Summary assessment of efforts for mainstreaming of migration

While the above discussion highlighted on the main linkages of the migration–development which needs focus in mainstreaming exercises, they are often inter-related and therefore need to be integrated in a mainstreaming exercise. There are cross-cutting issues running through all

mainstreaming exercises: respect for migrant rights, commitment by both origin and destination countries, gender sensitivity, social dialogue, and perception of migration as only one component of a broader development, decent work and poverty alleviation agenda.

The UN Secretary-General's Eight-Point Agenda on making migration work for development provides a good framework for integrating the above factors for a mainstreaming exercise since they focus on migrant rights and the shared responsibility of both origin and destination countries.

**Box 1: Making migration work:
an eight-point agenda for action**

1. Protect the human rights of all migrants
2. Reduce the costs of labour migration
3. Eliminate migrant exploitation, including human trafficking
4. Address the plight of stranded migrants
5. Improve public perceptions of migrants
6. Integrate migration into the development agenda
7. Strengthen the migration evidence base
8. Enhance migration partnerships and cooperation

UN Secretary-General's Report for UN High Level Dialogue on
International Migration and Development (United Nations, 2013a).

On this basis, the issue may be raised of the standing of various South Asian countries in the mainstream agenda.

Table 8 summarises the situation in regard to tools for mainstreaming identified in section 3.3.

A dedicated or separate ministry for migration is found in Bangladesh, India, Pakistan and Sri Lanka. All these ministries deal only with emigration while immigration is handled by ministries of home affairs. In Pakistan the responsible ministry has changed a number of times in recent years. Originally it was a subject dealt with by the Ministry of Labour. The Ministry of Overseas Pakistanis and the Ministry of Human Resource Development have been merged in July 2013 to form the Ministry of Overseas Pakistanis and Human Resource Development, and the major institutions dealing with overseas employment including the Bureau of Emigration have been brought under the same ministry. Overseas employment was the mandate of the Ministry of Labour in Sri Lanka for a long time, but a dedicated ministry took over the functions in 2007 – the Ministry of Foreign Employment Promotion and Welfare. Later it was abolished and the Ministry of External Affairs looked after the issue. In November 2010, a dedicated Ministry – the Ministry of Foreign Employment Promotion and Welfare – was created. It was on the recommendation of the High Level Panel on the Indian Diasporas that India established the Ministry of Overseas Indian Affairs in 2004.

While a dedicated Ministry offers advantages in terms of exclusive focus on the issue of migration, it may not carry the same weight as a mainstream ministry like labour, foreign affairs or the home ministry. Moreover the establishment of a separate overseas employment ministry breaks the natural link between national labour and employment issues (handled by ministries of labour) and overseas employment. Some frictions have occurred between dedicated migration ministries and labour ministries in South Asian countries according to the author's observations.

Table 8: Tools for mainstreaming

Tools	Bangladesh	India	Nepal	Pakistan	Sri Lanka
Dedicated Ministry	Ministry of Expatriate Welfare & Overseas Employment	Ministry of Overseas Indian Affairs (MOIA)	No. Ministry of Labour and Employment: Department of Foreign Employment (DoFE)	Ministry of Overseas Pakistanis & Human Resource Development	Ministry of Foreign Employment Promotion and Welfare
National Labour Migration/Emigration Policy	Overseas Employment Policy – 2006; Draft Overseas Employment (Revised) Policy 2013		Foreign Employment Policy 2068 (2011)	National Emigration Policy (not adopted)	National Labour Migration Policy (2008)
National Steering Committee on migration	No	No	No	No	Yes.
National development policies and plans	Sixth Five Year Plan	Kerala State govt. Perspective Plan	10 th Plan; 3-Year Interim Plan; Approach to 13 th Plan		Mahinda Chintana: Vision for the Future, 2005.
National employment policy					X
PRSP	2013 PRSP		2003 PRSP	2010 PRSP	2002 PRSP
Decent Work Country Programmes	✓		✓		✓
Migration profiles & extended profiles – promoted by IOM					✓
National Action Plan on M-D (GMG Handbook)	being developed on pilot basis.				

Source: compiled by author.

A national labour migration policy is a tool for mainstreaming migration although its effectiveness depends on the extent to which is accepted and implemented all relevant stakeholders. Sri Lanka has pioneered the development of a comprehensive national labour migration policy through a tripartite plus consultative process drawing upon the ILO Multilateral Framework on Labour Migration (MFEPW, 2008). Bangladesh is finalizing the drafting of a new overseas employment policy (MEWOE, 2013). Pakistan's national emigration policy is yet to be formally adopted (ILO, undated).

National development plans and PRSPs are much more important tools for mainstreaming as discussed in Section 5. The Bangladesh 2013 PRSP, which is also its Sixth Five Year Plan, has recognized the role of overseas migration in employment generation, its potential for reduction of regional disparities and poverty reduction as noted above. Rahman (2013) has reviewed the extent to which migration mainstreaming has been followed in the Sixth Five Year Plan and made a number of recommendations for the forthcoming Seventh Five Year Plan.

Although IOM has been promoting “Extended Migration Profiles” a tool for mainstreaming, there is no evidence that they have increased capacity of national institutions in improving the evidence based in the author’s view. Such profiles have been prepared mostly by consultants, and not by national statistical offices. In any case, it is only Sri Lanka which has produced a migration profile among the South Asian countries (IPS, 2013), but its value added is not clear.

Decent work country programmes (DWCPs) in some South Asian countries have included migration as a major issue. The Decent Work Country Programmes – DWCP 2006–09 (ILO, 2008) and the current DWCP 2012–15 (ILO 2012)) both have included migration as an important component. Both Nepal and Sri Lanka have also incorporated migration as part of the country priorities or outcomes while India and Pakistan have not considered migration among the country priorities.

Table 9 attempts a somewhat crude characterization of the main features of the migration–development nexus in South Asia based on the previous discussion. While all countries have recognized the role of remittances, activities in specific remittance policies and other areas are limited.

Table 9: Extent of development orientation of migration programmes

	Bangladesh	India	Nepal	Pakistan	Sri Lanka
Recognition of role of remittances	High	High	High	High	High
Targeted remittance policies	Limited	Medium	Limited	Medium	Limited
Brain drain concerns	Low	Low	Low	Low	Low
Brain circulation	Limited	High	Limited	Limited	Limited
Diaspora engagement policies	Weak	Strong	Weak	Medium	Weak
Return /reintegration programmes	Limited	Limited	Limited	Limited	Medium
Migrant rights in law, policy and practice	Medium	Weak	Weak	Weak	Medium
Dual citizenship	Yes	PIO & OCI cards*	No.	Yes.	Yes, but suspended now.

Source: compiled by author.

Note: * PIO card – Person of Indian Origin card (since 1999); OCI – Overseas Citizen of India card (since 2005).

In sum, there is limited mainstreaming in relation to the main components of the linkages of the migration–development nexus. This table should be reviewed with the status of tools for mainstreaming highlighted in Table 8. Bangladesh could be described as ahead of other South Asian countries in terms of tools of mainstreaming in view of ratification of ICMW, incorporation of migration in the latest PRSP, launching a pilot project on dedicated ministry, dedicated migration policy and act being developed. The ‘whole of government approach’ is not strong in any of the countries.

10. Cautionary notes on the mainstreaming discourse

A major problem with the mainstreaming approach is that it assumes that there is a strong link between international migration and development. However, there is still inadequate understanding of the precise links between the two. Some even question whether migration can contribute to development (Ellerman, 2005; Garza, 2008; Castles and Wise, 2007). The mainstreaming approach is also based on a narrow concept of development ignoring its wider political and social dimensions.

While a major pillar of the justification of the mainstreaming approach is the role of remittances, there is debate on their development-inducing impact. Ellerman highlights some risks associated with remittances: “First remittances may increase dependency further: Remittances may deepen the rut leading to more migration because the remittances show that ‘migration works’, they finance other family members’ trips, and they show what the neighbours have to do to ‘keep up with the Joneses” (Ellerman, 2005: 619). Remittances also increase income inequality because only certain households have access to them. Emigration is also accompanied by brain drain although rent tendency has been to highlight the circulation aspects. While the bulk of South Asian migrants to the GCC region are low skilled workers, there are also substantial flows of skilled and technical workers. The exit of the best and the brightest also leads to less innovation and also to “decreased voice or, in more general terms, decreased pressure to break through the barriers to structural change” (Ellerman, 2005: 620). There is less pressure for governments to promote decent work and job opportunities at home when migration acts a safety valve to local unemployment.

International migration cannot address long run problems of development since it cannot by itself make countries deal with structural problems affecting development. In some countries such as the Philippines, there is concern that migration and remittances have made policy planners complacent in tackling fundamental development problems in the home country and led to a “dependency syndrome”. The long-run solutions to lack of development and poverty and unemployment have to be sought within the countries themselves. While the recent tendency has been to play down brain drain concerns in terms, selective admission policies exacerbate loss of skills which are critical for innovation and technology in poor countries. Except for India, there is not much evidence to show a major development impact through diaspora involvement.

Another issue not addressed in the mainstreaming debate is the applicable time horizon for mainstreaming exercises. Since migration is not a long run solution to development as pointed out above, it may have to be framed in a medium term perspective. There is a conspicuous absence of discussion of this issue in the literature, and the GMG (2010) Handbook offers no guidelines in this respect.

There is a basic contradiction in the migration–development discourse which also affects the mainstream argument. There are increasing barriers to mobility in countries of destination (COD) – both in the West as well as in the South (Wickramasekara, 2009a). The UK is a good example where South Asian migration has fallen drastically in recent years with the preference given to European Union migrants. The increasing visa restriction affecting student and professional migration through the 5-tier system has led to a sharp decline of Asian professionals including health workers (Wickramasekara, 2014). From the Gulf the best example is the Nitaqat programme of Saudi Arabia

which has rendered many migrants from South Asia irregular because they were no longer working for the original sponsor or kafala. This was not due to a fault of their own, but due to the problems of the kafala system and free visas – a rentier system (Economist, 2013). Similarly the recent emphasis on temporary and circular migration programmes by countries of destination (COD) does not seem to a development-friendly or sustainable solution (Wickramasekara, 2011).

A major problem with the mainstreaming approach is that it focusses on international migration whereas the major form of migratory movement which contributes to poverty is internal migration. Globally internal migrants have been estimated at 740 million by the UNDP compared to 214 million international migrants in 2010 (UNDP 2009). The annual migration of close to 150 million rural people in China is a good example. In India, internal migration has been estimated at 42 million (UNDP 2009) while officially reported emigration is only around 0.7 million (Table 2). In terms of sheer numbers and the impact on poverty, such rural to urban migration may have more far-reaching impacts. Thus mainstreaming of international migration only may not have the desired impact.

The mainstreaming recommendation is mainly made for countries of origin, but for a real impact, it cannot succeed without corresponding support and obligations of countries of destination. This is because a number of factors important for mainstreaming of migration into development agendas such legal opportunities for expanding labour migration, return of migrants in conditions of dignity and security, reducing cost of remittance transfers, mobility of diasporas through circulation-friendly visa policies, and mapping of diasporas all depend on the cooperation of destination countries.

11. Conclusions

The main message conveyed by the mainstreaming discourse is that of promoting policy coherence and coordination in migration matters at all levels. While few would question this, blind application of mainstreaming of migration without taking into account country specific situations is unlikely to lead to expected results.

The above analysis shows that most South Asian countries recognized the importance of the migration–development nexus, but differed widely in the extent to which this has been incorporated related concerns. Thus mainstreaming is by no means a foregone conclusion in the context of South Asian countries.

While international organizations, development forums and some researchers promote the idea of mainstreaming of migration into development agendas, the extent to which this can be practised at the country level depends on specific situation of the countries. For instance, it may not be a priority for a large economy like India where the main tangible impacts of migration are engagement of overseas Indians and managing the flow of remittances. South Asian countries more dependent on migration will pursue policies for expanding labour migration and remittances and protection of migrant workers. Policy coherence and coordination are not easy to achieve when labour migration is handled by small and low key ministries which have limited influence on mainstream development agendas.

Out of the countries reviewed, Nepal probably needs to strengthen the migration–development linkages most, but it is Bangladesh that seems to be proceeding with policy emphasis and a pilot project as well. It is too early to judge how successful this donor- and international organization-driven initiative may turn out to be. Afghanistan also needs to formalise migratory movements from current irregular and informal movements, but hardly has any capacity towards this end.

The Pakistan situation is more ambivalent – the lack of political stability and the frequent institutional changes do not lead to consistent policies and practices. Sri Lanka is in a middle position given emphasis its continuing emphasis on both promotion and protection agendas.

This calls for more research and debate before prescriptions on mainstreaming migration are to be widely adopted in the South Asian context.

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