

Migration and Education

In the beginning of human civilization, migration was made for survival but abundant food changed this survival need. Therefore, with the passage of time, various other benefits were attached to migration like economic betterment, social improvement and educational opportunities etc. However, socio-economic concerns still remained the central factors. The difference in skills value became a dominant factor of migration. Education or skills is the currency of migration these days. Education and skills' modernization is also a major factor in migration. Pakistan is a human surplus country. Skilled, semi-skilled and un-skilled workers migrated from Pakistan. Skills migration for better value was witnessed as the doctors migrated to Saudi Arabia but at the same time, they migrated to USA for better wages and then opportunities to improve their own education skills in the medical field and provide better education facilities to their future generations. Other factors that support migration are geographical, religious and language affinity alongwith better economic opportunities. The talent hunt is also a factor. However, in all the cases, educational opportunities for the migrants and their future generations also remained a critical factor.

Migrant empowerment, rights and access to education:

Migration is a source of economic empowerment and a step towards socio-economic growth. Education is not only the currency of the migration but is a major source of difference in socio-economic development and empowerment of the migrants. If we have a glance at different categories of migrants from Pakistan, the skilled migrants got the most of benefits in term of empowerment, rights and even access to education for themselves and their children. Majority of Pakistani workforce i.e., 95% of them migrates to Gulf region and again most of them are unskilled. Still the migration helped the migrants to improve their socio-economic status and ensured better access to education or skills for their children. In Gulf region, workers who move their families along are either better paid or have their small business set up to sustain their families. Most of the workers move alone and remit their incomes back home to support their families. These remittances help to enhances access to education for their children and socio-economic uplift of their families. In Gulf countries, schooling is provided to the children of migrants' upto higher secondary level and thereafter these children either move back to Pakistan for higher education or further migrate to the developed countries of the world like USA, Canada, UK or other West European countries for better education facilities. In addition to this, Pakistani schools are also set up the Middle Eastern countries like Saudi Arabia, Dubai etc to augment Pakistani workers' children access to education.

But the limited income of Pakistani workers working in Middle Eastern and Gulf region inhibit their children's access to quality education. This area needs to be looked

into seriously that how to make and enhance access to better education for the children of less income migrants in the Gulf region. Government of Pakistan has taken various initiatives for the social-economic development of Overseas Pakistanis. Government of Pakistan has established various educational institutions for providing better education to the children of migrants where not only fee concession is provided but preferred admission is ensured through reservation of seats. Government of Pakistan is also trying to enhance the education facilities for the migrants through vocational institutions being run by the Overseas Pakistanis Foundation which look after the social well being of the migrants and their families. Pakistan is planning to involve the diaspora in the economic development of the country especially education, health and small infrastructure projects through recognition, transparent use of their funds and ownership mechanism. Pakistan is also planning to establish Pakistan Centre of Excellence in collaboration with the Pakistani diaspora professionals who have international standing and recognition.

Qualification recognition:

Every year thousand of Pakistani students migrate from Pakistan to different countries of the world for the purpose of higher education in the developed countries and normally they do not face any problem to recognize their qualification in destination countries as standardized mechanism of Higher Education Commission (HEC) is in place in Pakistan to maintain or verify the standard of Pakistani degrees/certificates. On the other hand, some institutions in Pakistan are following the Western pattern of education like “O” and “A” levels. Their exams are conducted by the Oxford or Cambridge universities. Therefore, these qualifications are recognized automatically.

In addition to above, Pakistani students also go through some prerequisite educational tests and formalities required by the universities/institutions of the destination countries. However, it has also been observed that a large number of fake educational institutions of the Western destination countries were involved to exploit the Pakistani students. It is appreciable that in the near past, strict action has to been taken by the UK government against fake educational institutions and registration of large number of students by such institutions was cancelled. Same action is required by the other destination countries to address the issue of exploitation of the students of the developing /poor countries. The Higher Education Commission of Pakistan exchange good practices with such kind of institutions of developed / destination countries.

This recognition facility is still limited for higher education qualifications skills for employment in the developed countries. It needs to be addressed at both the curriculum level and subsequently at the certification level. It will have dual benefits. The skilled human will get better opportunities and their capacity to integrate in the destination countries is better as compared to the uneducated or less educated migrants.

Provision of employment opportunities to students:

Opportunities for migrants or students visas are very important and without this kind of support in destination countries, it is quite difficult for the students of underdeveloped countries and developing countries to continue their education in a peaceful manner. All students are not from very well off families and these employment opportunities provide them leverage to continue their education. Recently, certain restrictions with reference to employment of foreign students have been observed particularly by UK government which required to be addressed in the larger interest of the students of poor countries. The higher education qualification definitely contributes to improve socio-economic status (SES) not only in destination countries but in countries of origin also and they enable the students compete in a better manner but it depends on the policies of the countries of origin and fairly available opportunities in destination countries.

South-South migration and recognition of educational Qualification:

Normally there is a limited focus on South –South migration due to various securities and other barriers. The economic difference in the South-South is less and thus it provides fewer opportunities for the skilled human resource. It is not belittling the South-South potential but at present the conditions are not conducive for this kind of migration. A system of recognition of the educational qualification of each other qualification exists in some south Asian countries. Presently, the students of Sri-Lanka, Bangladesh, Nepal and Maldives are studying in Pakistan and some Pakistani students are also getting their education in these countries. The Pakistanis medical students after completion of their education in other countries can get recognition of their educational qualification after passing the examination of Pakistan Medical and Dental Council (PMDC) and same is the case with Pakistani Engineers who can get the recognition of their degrees through Pakistani Engineering Council (PEC). There is still no standardized bilateral recognition system of education qualification at primary, vocational and tertiary levels which required to be addressed by signing bilateral agreements.

Model to retain and attract talent back home:

Higher Education Commission in Pakistan has introduced placement of Pakistani migrant professionals in various disciplines in educational institutions. It helped in improving the skills in the related fields of the trainees or students but this system has got less supportive now. Donor agencies were also contributing in this area by providing funds for the placement of professionals. It needs to be augmented. On the other hand, there is China model of attracting the talent back home but it requires booming economy and surplus funds which is not the case with Pakistan at present.

Countries of destination and International Organization Support:

Higher Education Commission (HEC) introduced this placement of professionals in Pakistan with the assistance of donor countries and international organizations. It was a success but these placements were even repulsed in some parts of the country. The social contribution of the professionals to their countries of origin is a critical area. With the placement of these professionals in the countries of origin through short leaves or intervals can help to enhance the skills of professionals working in the area on one hand and we need to evolve a system to recognize of their enhanced skills through a certification on the other hand. We need to evolve agreeable output milestones for their future placement or continuation of their placement. It will help to enhance cooperation instead of repulsion among the professionals. International organizations are also exporting some skills and then certification mechanism make them attractive like Integrated Management for Neonatal and Childhood Illnesses (IMNCI) conducted by WHO.

Way forward:

Placement of professionals and other education specialist in their countries of origin will be useful to enhance learning opportunities for students/professionals in countries of origin. In addition to this, International organizations must help the countries of origin in the development of curriculum for professional and vocational institutions along with evolving a certification system so that their qualification should be recognized internationally. It will increase their skills value and fetch them good economic returns which is a critical factor in their empowerment. The Global code of practice on external recruitment of Health personnel provides a mechanism to countries of origin to manage /attain their human resource in the health Sector in an appropriate manner. Support may also be extended to develop international code of practice in other professional fields like IT, Engineering, business management etc so that internationally acceptable standards are obtained and skills mobility can be facilitated. South-South and North-South recognition of skills through bi-lateral and multi-lateral agreements needs to be encouraged. It will help in better integration of migrants in the host communities and decrease rift among various societies could be decreased.