The reintegration programme for Bangladeshi returnees

Anita J Wadud

When evacuated Bangladeshi migrants arrived home, the government, civil society, international organisations and the private sector cooperated to help them.

In 2011, during the first three weeks of March, 36,594 Bangladeshi migrants fled the violence in Libya and returned to Bangladesh. Returnees were greeted at the airport by IOM staff who provided assistance with registration and immigration processing and immediate medical attention – round the clock, seven days a week for the entire period. The government provided each returnee with food and water on arrival, registered all returnees, gave 1,000 taka (approximately US$12) for onward transport and arranged for shuttle bus services to the main bus and train terminals in the city. Despite the logistical nightmare, constant liaison between IOM Dhaka, IOM field missions in Tunisia and Egypt and the government resulted in a fairly systematic processing of all returnees.

While most were exhausted, they were nonetheless happy to have returned safely and were eager to see their families. However, they have returned to large debts and have left behind possessions and months’ worth of unpaid salary in Libya. Many had large suitcases filled with whatever they could carry but many others returned only with the clothes they were wearing and perhaps a blanket.

As soon as the majority of the Bangladeshi migrants had returned safely to Bangladesh, talks about reintegration programmes began. The government, civil society, international organisations and even the private sector held meetings to discuss ways in which over 35,000 international organisations and even the private sector programmes began. The government agreed held meetings to discuss ways in which over 35,000

The reintegration programme was implemented in several stages. Firstly, through an extensive outreach campaign the returnees were informed of the programme and what documents they would need, including the need for a personal bank account. A comprehensive database of all returnees was developed by IOM from the registration conducted by the Bureau of Manpower Employment and Training at the airport. A call centre was set up and its numbers disseminated through print and electronic media and texts to returnees’ phone numbers obtained at the airport. Each returnee used the call centre to make an appointment. Then the Verification Centre went into operation for in-person verification with all relevant documents. This was the last step in the exhaustive process of identification of actual returnees before the cash grant of 50,000 taka was transferred directly to their accounts.

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Local hosting and transnational identity

Katherine E Hoffman

Tunisian people, rather than their government, led the response to the humanitarian crisis when Libyans started their own revolt and people starting fleeing across the border.

In February and March 2011, Tunisians were managing the fallout from their own revolution. Governmental institutions were on hold, and security and policing were absent in south-eastern Tunisia, the area closest to Libya’s western border. Informal but highly effective community efforts in Tunisia, outside the auspices of national and international institutions, played a crucial role in ensuring the safe passage and accommodation of hundreds of thousands of people fleeing Libya. Initially, as groups of migrant workers crossed into Tunisia en route to the airport on the Tunisian island of Djerba, Tunisian villagers organised cooking crews, with men cooking together in community centres and women cooking separately in their homes. They took this food to the airport as third-country nationals waited for flights home paid for by the international community.

No sooner had these migrant workers left than Libyan families began streaming across the border in search of a safe haven – and ended up staying for five to eight months. One man on Djerba asked rhetorically, “We helped the Egyptians, we helped the Chinese, we helped the Bangladeshis. So when the Libyans came to stay, how could we not help them too?” Another said: “We were busy with the Tunisian revolution. We were dealing with our own problems and then the Libyan problem came. A friend called from Ras Jdir at the border. He said there were masses of hungry people, at