

**International Conference on “Institutionalizing Regional
Approaches to Migration Management in South Asia”**

Summary Report

25th November 2011

Hotel Taj Samudra, Colombo, Sri Lanka

Organized by the Institute of Policy Studies (IPS) and the Friedrich Ebert Stiftung (FES)

Introduction

The Institute of Policy Studies of Sri Lanka (IPS) together with the Friedrich Ebert Stiftung (FES), Sri Lanka, organized an International Conference on “Institutionalizing Regional Approaches to Migration Management in South Asia”, in Colombo, on the 25th of November, 2011. Bettina Meier, Resident Representative of FES, Colombo opened the Conference by making the Welcome Address. Introductory Remarks were made by Dr. Saman Kelegama, the Executive Director of the IPS. It was followed by the address of the Guest of Honour, Mr. Richard Danziger, Chief of Mission, IOM, Country Office in Sri Lanka. Mr. Dilan Perera, Honorable Minister to the Ministry of Foreign Employment Promotion and Welfare, who was the Chief Guest of the event, also addressed the gathering.

Bettina Meier, in her welcome address, stated that, remittances have gained a huge importance in the economies of sending countries in the South Asian region. The contribution of remittance to the Sri Lankan economy is also more significant. There are human right violations of migrant workers and therefore, migration management is related to social justice. She further pointed out that the government tries to enhance the protection of migrant workers and the South Asian Migration Commission (SAMC) is one of such mechanisms. She ended up her welcome speech with an explanation as to the objective of the conference this time. This time the conference was organized to discuss the role of existing regional consultative forums in managing migration in South Asia such as the Colombo Process (CP) and Abu Dhabi Dialogue and also to define the role of the SAMC for harnessing the gains of migration in the region.

Dr. Saman Kelegama, in his introductory remarks, stated that while on one hand, remittances have gained a huge importance in the economies of sending countries through micro and macro level benefits, there are obstacles such as labour exploitation and safety for maximising these benefits. He further highlighted that in the management of migration, destination countries have more power compared to the individual sending countries. On the other hand, there is no regional framework to look after the issues related to migration in South Asia. Migration related policies are on an ad-hoc basis and there is no long-term solution for migration related issues. A multilateral framework can be useful in several ways in the management of migration such as designing improved migration policy, agreement with destination and sending countries, stimulating resources to protect migrant workers, developing regional agendas and campaigning about rights of migrant workers etc. Inter-state social dialogues are important in this context and a common approach is needed like in ASEAN. SAARC can be the leading role in the South Asian region.

Mr. Richard Danziger in his speech also clearly mentioned that migration and social justice is interrelated as movement of human being is a multi-dimensional phenomenon. However, he identified the unavailability of a united regime to manage migration as the main gap in this field. States can regulate human mobility, but there are difficulties in world cooperation. He identified the governance of the governance, governance of the regimes and governance of the collaborations as the major challenges with regard to the migration management in South Asia in the 21st century.

Honourable Minister Mr. Dilan Perera also stressed the necessity of migration management in the South Asian region. He pointed out that although there are 12 labour sending countries in the region and also around 48 per cent of the world remittances are received by South Asia, there is no international body to look at the migration related issues in the region. He further stated that synergy should be developed between labour sending and receiving countries. Different activities related to migration management are scattered and the most important thing is to integrate these scattered activities for better management. Mr. Nihal Rodrigo in his speech also stated that Migration should be managed as all levels including national, regional, international and global level. SAARC should be the leading institutional framework in this regard but it has not taken any step to manage migration other than preventing trafficking. But he highlighted that now it is high time for SAARC to engage in migration management. He further stated that top-down approaches are not easy for migration management and there should be an official mechanism. In addition, he pointed out that public partnership is very important to manage migration in the region.

SESSION I: TAKING STOCK OF THE SOUTH ASIA MIGRATION COMMISSION & THE OUTCOME OF THE RAMPHAL COMMISSION

The first session of the conference was chaired by Dr. Dushni Weerakoon, Deputy Director, IPS. Yuko Hamada, Senior Regional Labour Migration/Migration and Development Specialist, IOM and Sabaah Rab, Senior Research Associate, Bangladesh Enterprise Institute (BEI) made two presentations. Sridhar Khatri, Executive Director, South Asia Centre for Policy Studies (SACEPS), Nepal and D. Narayana, Professor, Research Unit on International Migration, Centre for Development Studies (CDS), India were the two discussants of the session.

Ms. Hamada in her presentation affirmed the needs for Regional Consultative Process (RCP) to manage international migration. She briefed about the characteristics of South Asian migration and pointed out the feminization of migration and effects of climate change on migration. She added that almost half of the migrant workers are females and the majority of women migrant workers from South Asia are from Bangladesh, Nepal and Sri Lanka. Further, irregular migration and trafficking are also considered to be risks of migration. She pointed out that collaboration on labour migration management and relevant policies need to be strengthened. There are major RCPs in Asia such as CP, ADD etc. South Asia Migration Commission (SAMC) has formulated the framework for a coherent and comprehensive response to the issues around migration that is generally applicable to countries in South Asia. Ms. Hamada raised some suggestions from the previous SAMC forum; addressing the concerns of the region's migration and specifically labour migration, identifying the gaps in existing migration policies in member states with linkage to other relevant issues, policy advocacy to foster collaboration and to establish a common methodology to collect migration data. Further, she pointed out some recommendations from the previous meeting as a way forward for the commission; defining clear positioning and TOR of SAMC, and composition of the commission, to establish source of funding and steering committee, action plan and implementation monitoring process and also web portal for networking and advocacy.

Ms. Sabaah Rab discussed about the role of the Ramphal Commission on migration and development. The Ramphal Commission's overarching aim is to study relevant issues of particular interest to the Commonwealth, and to propose practical policies which are mutually beneficial to all 54 Commonwealth member states. The Commission is composed of an elite selection of seven distinguished personalities from the Commonwealth. The first report of the Ramphal Commission on "Managing Migration in Today's Commonwealth-action to reconnect historical links", was prepared by Dr. Alan Gamlen, International Migration Institute, University of Oxford. This report proposes that the Commonwealth should reconnect over the issue of migration. The key recommendations are: building migration management capacity in Commonwealth member states, streamline migration policies, help migrants to share their successes with their origin and destination communities, and to enhance international cooperation over migration. The second report prepared by Professor Elizebeth Thomas-Hope, University of the West Indies focuses on environmentally induced migration and the outmigration of skilled persons at rates disproportionate to the returns from them. The third report was prepared by Professor Graeme Hugo, Professor of Geography, The University of Adelaide. This report reinforces the recommendations in the two previous reports. The third and the final report was presented at the Commonwealth Heads of Government meeting in Perth, Australia, in October 2011, under the theme "Building National Resilience, Building Global Resilience" and the importance of managing migration effectively was reaffirmed. The heads at the meeting called for stronger international cooperation to manage migration effectively in countries of origin, transit and destination, called for cooperation in the fight against irregular migration, in this context the link between migration and development was articulated, and encouraged participation in the Global Forum on Migration and Development, in 2012.

Prof. Khatri started the discussion congratulating the IPS and FES for keeping the momentum of SAMC alive since it was established a couple of years back. He pointed out that there were three major outcomes of the last year's meeting. The first was that of bringing experts to the meeting and sharing best practices from the region. Further, he added that the ASEAN Declaration on Protection and Promotion of Rights of Migrant Workers is a comprehensive document that could benefit the migrant workers, if followed in South Asia. The second achievement was to draw lessons from the preliminary work of the Ramphal Commission to operationalize the SAMC. These include defining work areas, outlining policy objectives, determining timeline and identifying composition of members. The third achievement was that of amplifying some of the key issues in moving the work of the SAMC forward. Then he summarized some of the key recommendations of the last meeting as follows.

Objectives of SAMC are to promote the full potential and dignity of migrant workers, adopt comprehensive migration policies, address cases of abuse and violence, outline responsibilities of states to protect the migrant workers and facilitate data sharing to enhance policies and programmes. Scope of the activities which tailor the objectives of SAMC include; support and

cooperation of both sending and receiving countries to SAMC, an information system to collect country level migration data with a common methodology, South Asian Migration Survey that will document the contribution of migrants in both the sending and receiving countries, Commission to come up with an alternative system to prevent the exploitation of migrant workers and also one of the important points which was raised at the previous meeting was for SAMC to play a major advocacy role in advancing the interest of the migrant workers.

Prof. Khatri recommended a number of steps to realize the work of the Commission. All the feedback from the last meeting and the current meeting needs to be placed systematically within the five specific mandates, to establish a secretariat within IPS and creating a network of expert groups.

Professor Narayana adding to the discussion, emphasized the points raised by the two presenters. He highlighted on migration management, accurate data, streamlining policies, and managing low level skill migration. He also pointed out that success stories will help migration management. He explained about the limited data at village level. Prof. Narayana further explained the necessity of systematic data analysis such as the Kerala study for proper management. He proposed the research institutes to develop a data base on migrant information.

In the floor discussion, the role of government in implementing the migration management policies was highlighted. It was mentioned that welfare of the migrants has not been addressed in most of the sending countries. At the household level, there is no proper management of remittances and they are unproductively utilized. The need to reintegrate the migrants into the labour force was affirmed at the discussion.

SESSION II - THE ROLE OF EXISTING REGIONAL COOPERATIVES IN MIGRATION MANAGEMENT

The second session of the day was chaired by **High Commissioner Prasad Kariyawasam**, High Commissioner of Sri Lanka, New Delhi, while the speakers of the session were **Mr. L.K. Ruhunage**, Consultant for Migration/Foreign Employment Promotion and Welfare, and **Mr. Richard Danziger**, Chief of Mission, IOM - Sri Lanka. The discussants were **Ms. Yuko Hamada**, Senior Regional Labour Migration/Migration and Development Specialist, IOM - Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific, **Mr. Ganesh Gurung**, Sociologist, Nepal Institute of Development Studies (NIDS), Nepal, and **Dr. Indrajit Coomaraswamy**, former Director of Economic Affairs, Commonwealth Secretariat.

The Chair commenced the session by highlighting the importance of a "rights-based approach" as opposed to a "rules-based approach" in protecting the rights of migrant workers. He stated that international migration is a concept treated cautiously by receiving States and viewed as impinging upon their sovereignty. He pointed out that at present, all States advocate a rules-based approach, and that despite the expanding mandates and recommendations of the IOM and

source countries put forward to help Governments in managing migration, there was a reluctance to use a rights-based approach. However, he stressed that this was required to protect migrants, and pointed out that the core issue was how to get states to adopt such an approach. He also brought to attention the fact that the United Nations does not handle core migration issues, and hence the importance of explicitly defining the role of South Asian Governments in the management and protection of migrants. He highlighted the need to create political will within and among South Asian States in moving forward in this regard.

Mr. L.K. Ruhunage started his presentation by giving a brief introduction to the ADD, which is a regional consultative process covering overseas employment and contractual labour for countries of origin in Asia. He stated that the ADD brings together labour suppliers (Colombo Process countries) and labour demanders (Gulf Cooperation Council countries) and thus facilitates regional cooperation between senders and receivers of migrants. The objectives of the ADD include promoting the welfare and well-being of migrant workers, the development of both origin and destination countries through labour mobility, and the fostering of greater inter-governmental cooperation and collaboration, with the active support of international and regional partners. Mr. Ruhunage pointed out that the ADD placed specific emphasis on temporary contractual workers, by adding the word 'temporary' to the existing wording under the CP. He drew attention to some important recommendations proposed by the ADD such as enhancing knowledge in labour market trends, remittance policies and skill profiles of temporary contractual workers, developing a framework to measure the entire cycle of the migration process, improving the integrity of the recruitment system and safety of returnees and preventing illegal recruitment practices.

He also highlighted some of the recent developments that have taken place after the ADD came into being:

- The abolition of the "sponsorship system" in Bahrain in 2009 by incorporating a visa process to Government authorities, where the labour market regulatory authority is to bear responsibility of sponsored migrants. He said that Kuwait announced its willingness to abolish the Kafala system in 2010, although abolishment has not taken place yet. Saudi Arabia has also shown interest in this regard, but as of now no concrete policy announcement has been made. However, he pointed out that this policy did not cover domestic workers.
- Signing of MOUs between GCC countries and sending countries. Qatar and Bahrain have finalized MOUs, while Kuwait has proposed one.
- GCC dissemination of information on issuing visas with online access in Bahrain, Qatar and Kuwait.
- Arrangement of salary payments through banks initiated by UAE. Under this arrangement, the salary can be deposited in the bank to be withdrawn when necessary and establishes proof of payments being made.
- Introduction of a unified service contract on minimum wages between the UAE, Kuwait and Lebanon.

Despite these developments, Mr. Ruhunage stressed that there still remain many issues for sending countries which need to be addressed:

- Social protection for females - with the exception of Jordan and Lebanon, no security policies have been implemented.
- Welfare of migrants still rests with the sending country, even in situations where workers are harassed by employers in receiving countries. This issue needs to be taken up by receiving countries. A good example is the shelter houses in Saudi Arabia which houses runaway females.
- Malpractices of recruitment agencies.
- Low wages - not being paid well in comparison to nationals. For example, Kuwait gave a 50 per cent pay rise to their nationals only.
- Barriers in accessing legal systems of receiving country governments (language problems).
- Accommodation problems.
- Outsourcing recruitment of migrant workers (Malaysia).

Mr. Ruhunage concluded by stating that there is no ratification of laws from the GCC countries in relation to the ADD, and as a result the ADD is dying a natural death.

Mr. Richard Danziger, began his discussion by giving a brief introduction to regional consultative processes and its impact on migration including agenda setting and issue definition, consensus building and position convergence, and changes in policy, law and practice. He then gave an overview of the CP and its evolution, which includes 11 countries in Asia, with seven destination country observers as of 2011. So far, four ministerial consultations have been held in Colombo (2003), Manila (2004), Bali (2005) and Dhaka (2011) and two other RCPs have started as a part of recommendations from ministerial consultations, namely the Asia-EU Dialogue (2008 and 2011) and the ADD (2008 and the next to be held in 2012). The theme of the latest ministerial consultation in Dhaka was "Migration with Dignity", where a constructive dialogue took place within Member States and with others and involved fine-tuning of the operational modalities of the CP, adopting of the Dhaka Declaration and agreement on greater collaboration, and regular meetings. The Dhaka Declaration (2011) involves promoting rights, welfare and dignity of migrants, capacity building of member states, preparing emergency responses and enhancing cooperation and dialogue. Mr. Danziger pointed out that this consultation highlighted the dearth of effective measures to protect migrants, rich sharing of ideas and approaches. He also emphasized the importance of the CP stating that the CP is the only RCP focussing on labour migration in Asia and is a viable and dynamic RCP involving countries of origin, transit and destination. Achievements of the CP include the sharing of best practices through studies and regional events, joint training, cross-sharing and learning, capacity building of labour attachés of governments, the setting up and training on a "Market Research Unit" and "Migrant Resource Centre", and information campaigns.

Mr. Danziger next presented the findings of four studies related to health and migration carried out by the IOM, which drew attention to some adverse impacts of migration on families left behind. With regard to social protection issues, 31 per cent of families left behind were single-parent families, where the average age of the care-giver was 54 years. Disturbingly, the malnutrition level of children of migrant families was 25 per cent compared to the national level of 17 per cent. Moreover, even after 2 years of return, many migrants have not recovered from their experiences and most migrants are compelled to go back again to pay back debts. He thus

said that despite the claims of benefits of remittances at the macro level with it being the largest foreign currency earner for Sri Lanka, at the micro level the picture is far from positive. In conclusion, he stressed the need for moving beyond the protection of migrants in destination countries to also protecting families left behind.

Dr. Coomaraswamy started his discussion by saying that he fully endorses the call for a rights-based approach and the need for multi and plurilateral standards setting. He stated that Track II approaches would be useful in advocacy and consensus building activities. He pointed out that while the CP has the potential to assist in developing a more holistic approach, the process at present tends to give priority to welfare when in the midst of the contract. This should have a broader look to include training and assistance for migrants upon return to develop sustainable livelihoods. The kind of support could be in training in activities, inputs (access to technology), financing and marketing (getting hooked on to supply chains).

Dr. Coomaraswamy also stressed the importance of considering securitizing future remittance flows to help in financing, as done in many countries such as Mexico. He said that the CP could be an ideal platform to exchange views on the feasibility of carrying out this process in South Asia. He also brought to attention the possibilities of engaging the Diaspora in developing countries. For example, a significant factor is the role of non-resident Indians in establishing the IT sector in India. The CP could be used to study the Diaspora in South Asian countries and look at ways of involving permanent migrants in the whole process. Another important point put forward by Dr. Coomaraswamy was related to the problem of "Brain Drain" - the transfer of capital from origin to resident. He said that it is important to see how the "burden of training" can be shared, so that the cost of training is partly borne by countries that are benefitting. With regard to protection of workers, he said that the region-wide problem of unofficial agencies needs to be tackled. He said that there is a strong nexus between shadow agencies and politicians and that this nexus has to be addressed effectively to improve the protection of migrants.

The next discussant, Mr. Ganesh Gurung, gave a Nepalese point of view on the issues at hand. He said that Nepal considers Sri Lanka as a good model for migration management. He also stated that migration is an important element in South Asia due to problems of unemployment and poverty, and that South Asian countries are remittance-based economies with remittances being the second largest contributor to the GDP in Nepal. Mr. Gurung was of the view that CP reforms were not as effective as expected - Nepalese migration has not increased while the cost of migration has increased by 40 per cent. He said that the proposed South Asia Migration Commission would be important in minimizing risks and maximizing benefits of migration. SAARC is a very slow moving process compared to ASEAN, and the SAARC Secretariat is not adequately equipped to take up migration issues, which is not on the official agenda of SAARC. Thus, member countries will have to take up these issues. Mr. Gurung pointed out that the Prime Minister of Bangladesh had spoken of migration issues in the latest SAARC Summit, which is a positive development in this regard. He further stated that a South Asia Migration Commission (SAMC) is not needed, and suggested the establishment of a Working Group instead, to map out funding possibilities and work within a given timeframe. In such a case, he said that the Track II process can be adopted by Track I.

Ms. Yuko Hamada presented her views next. She began by discussing the challenges of international cooperation including:

- Complex inter-state phenomenon - globalization and integration on non-trade issues
- Governance - limitation of legal migration and irregular migration
- Economic development - lack of data and policy formulation

She then presented migration cooperation initiatives at the multilateral, regional and bilateral levels:

Multilateral cooperation:

- Global Commission on International Migration
- High Level Dialogue on Migration and Development - 2005 General Assembly Resolution
- Global Forum on Migration and Development - international and multilateral dialogue between governments (July 2007)

Regional Consultative Processes - Common characteristics:

- focused exclusively on migration issues
- often initiated by a conference on a particular theme
- thematically organized or geographically based, or both
- informal and non-binding dialogue and information exchange

There are currently over 14 major RCPs globally addressing migration issues, out of which 4 pertain to Asia-Pacific. Advantages of RCPs include:

- Promote a "habit of cooperation"
- facilitate development of networks
- Set up thematic and regional context
- Contribute to networking
- Tackle migration from a regional approach
- Enhance awareness of the value of dialogue

Disadvantages:

- Difficulties in moving into action
- non-binding
- weak reinforcement

Bilateral cooperation and other dialogues include cooperation between the Governments of Thailand and Korea, the ASEAN declaration on the protection and promotion of rights of migrant workers (2007), Asia-Pacific Conference (2007), and task forces.

In moving forward, Ms. Hamada stressed the need of increasing dialogue and actions, expanding participation of stakeholders and increasing intra-regional dialogues.

The floor was then opened for discussion. The necessity of support for returnees was highlighted. Another issue brought up was the concern that countries were not receiving all remittances due - some were lost on the way, due to disproportionate commissions in exchange rates and several documents required within the banking system. The chair was of the view that money earned by migrants belonged to them and that governments could not interfere in this matter. Another participant brought attention to the concept of International Social Security Protection (ISSP) -

where insurance is provided to employees subject to harassment - which is due to come into place in January 2012, and can be an important concept to be promoted within the South Asia Commission. Korean bilateral agreements are excellent arrangements, where they hold exams and recruit international workers, which should be followed by other countries as well. Another suggestion that came up was the importance of liberalizing Mode 4 under trade in services, which would provide an opportunity for safe migration.

The need for migrants to follow formal systems as opposed to informal ones was another issue discussed. Informal systems pave the way for terrorism and governments should get actively involved in eradicating informal systems and in using formal systems to reduce bank charges. The fact that the SAMC lacks a clear definition was also brought up. It was suggested that its members, mandate and value it can add to existing initiatives and should be clearly outlined before deciding on tasks and timelines.

The chair responded by saying that the SMAC, as an intergovernmental organization is not easily achievable, but can add value to other existing processes if it can be a Track II process / lobby group coming up with alternative policies. He said that a Track II lobby group could be especially useful as it involves the highest common denominator and can thus be more effective as opposed to an intergovernmental organization with the lowest common denominator. Mr. Richard Danziger seconded this proposal. Mr. Gurung spoke about the "Hawala system" where a private system like email is innovated to obtain money immediately, which is the cheapest money transfer in the world. Such a system could be explored under the SAMC. Ms. Hamada also reiterated the need to come up with innovative banking techniques to make formal systems attractive to migrants. The financial literacy of migrants is an important issue in this respect. She said that migrants need to be aware of their rights at every stage of the process - from pre-departure until return. Finally, the role of organizations such as the IOM, SAARC and SAMC in providing training to migrants was highlighted. At present, IOM has a training commission which is very comprehensive. This should be certified and conducted effectively. Institutional relationships are important as a vehicle to provide policy prescriptions to governments.

SESSION III – WAY FORWARD FOR THE SAMC – A PANEL DISCUSSION

The final session of the day was in the form of a panel discussion. The panel discussion was moderated by **Prof. Sridhar Khatri** and the panellists included **Mr. Mohamed Faisal**, PhD Student, Victoria University of Wellington, New Zealand; **Mr. Zafar Mueen Nasar**, Chief of Research & Dean of Business Studies, Pakistan Institute of Development Economics (PIDE), Pakistan; **Ms. Sabaah Rab**, Senior Research Associate, Bangladesh Enterprise Institute (BEI); **Ms. Roshini Jayaweera**, Research Officer, IPS; **Mr. Shantha Kulasekera**, Head, Migration Management, IOM, Sri Lanka; and **Prof. D. Narayana**, Professor, Research Unit on International Migration, Centre for Development Studies (CDS), India.

Prof. Khatri stated that it is important to put the valuable insights that were put forward by the participants during this event into a single package. He said that this session would serve to propose concrete suggestions that could be implemented within the next 6 months. He said that

the SAMC should be an organization that would make a difference, and emphasized the importance of multilateral and plurilateral standard setting.

Mohamed Faisal spoke from a Maldivian point of view which is a labour-importing country. He said that in the Maldives, migration management is primarily geared towards dealing with irregular migrants. He said that a major problem was the lack of awareness among migrants about their own rights. He also stressed that migration management should be holistic and focus on all aspects including well-being and education. Speaking about the free movement of people among countries, he said that this is not favourable in the Maldives due to its small size and tensions arising between migrants and the local population and also the pressure put on exchange rates as a result of increased migration. Mr. Faisal lamented on the lack of concrete steps taken by countries in remedying problems of regular migration. He said that there is a strong nexus between politicians and agencies which is a big problem. He suggested the building of networks and providing advocacy for migrants. Research capacities need to be developed with access to information and data - an issue that could be taken up by the SAMC. He said that the significance of the SAMC will depend on how much influence it can create on governments in terms of problems such as irregular migration and corruption.

The next to present his ideas was Mr. Zafar Mueen Nasar, Chief of Research & Dean of Business Studies, Pakistan Institute of Development Economics (PIDE), Pakistan. He began by highlighting the importance of the SAMC for poor families in protecting their rights. He said that rules of migration are increasing daily, hence the importance of addressing rights as well. It is also essential to take into account consumption expenditure such as health and education expenses borne by migrants and to share information of bad experiences with countries of destination. He also stressed the need to make migration important at the political level, with a political will to create the SAMC. Strong research input is needed in making migration management effective at both the origin and destination countries, and the SAMC can play a vital role in this regard. Moving forward in operationalizing the SAMC, a clear vision, mission, objectives, structure, motto, finances, strategies and milestones need to be established. The concept of "Migration with Dignity" is important in defining the vision and mission. With regard to the structure, a choice has to be made between an independent chairman or membership of member states and international organizations (IOM, ILO, FES) or SAARC. The establishment of a research wing with responsibility to network with member institutions, data and information and develop research material for negotiation at SAARC level was also recommended. With regard to financial resources, institutions including the World Bank, ILO, IMF can help, but the long-term vision should be to develop its own finance plan and move towards self-sufficiency. Finally, the SAARC Human Resource Development centre could be utilized for the training of migrant workers.

Sabaah Rab, Senior Research Associate, Bangladesh Enterprise Institute next spoke on 3 points that the SAMC should keep in mind in moving forward. The first was the need to enable countries of origin to have more leverage than destination countries on migration management issues. Secondly, she stressed the need to protect opportunities for low-skilled labour. She said that there was a tendency to be discriminatory in favour of skilled workers, which needs to be reversed. Third, she argued for the concrete implementation of committed agreements within states. An example in this regard is the EU Mobility partnerships.

Roshini Jayaweera pointed out that the current literature on migration primarily focuses on economic aspects such as the brain-drain, whereas the social aspect has been neglected, which is important given the human and social elements of migration. She stressed the need to pay more attention to social aspects of migration, especially in the South Asian context, as half of migrant workers are female and are unskilled, groups that are more vulnerable to harassment. She stated that policy makers should focus on social protection of workers, particularly old age security and health issues of families left-behind and diseases that could be transmitted by migrant workers. Speaking about the economic impact of remittances, she said that a study conducted by IPS found no evidence of the productive use of remittances. She highlighted the need of reintegrating returnee migrants into both the economic and social streams of the economy.

In this context, she said that the SAMC has an important role to play. She proposed the formation of a Working Group that could meet regularly with a sound action plan including:

- Information availability and accessibility
- Means of improving skill levels of migrant workers

She stated that a good starting point in this regard would be the writing of a systematic working paper.

Mr. Shantha Kulasekera started his discussion by saying that the main issue to be addressed is on how to make the SAMC relevant in the context of existing initiatives. He said that in order to make the SAMC more relevant, the scope of discussion should be broadened to include both inbound and outbound migration (immigration and emigration). He also said that government participation in the migration process is not satisfactory at present, with migration not being featured in policy documents, such as the United Nations-Sri Lanka strategic documents. Migration should be integrated into national development planning. He further stated that migration involves a number of cross-cutting areas such as migration and security and return migration, migration rights and data collection. In 2008, a proposal was initiated to develop a migration data centre under the Department of Census and Statistics, Sri Lanka, but this has proved to be a cumbersome process due to lack of comprehensive data. In looking to the future, Mr. Kulasekera stressed the need to define the scope of the SAMC in a way that would attract the interest of governments, and to look at possibilities of developing the SAMC as an intermediate entity, in-between intergovernmental organizations and regional organizations/consultative processes or a Track 1.5 process.

Prof. D. Narayana, highlighted the need for defining the scope, relevance and importance of the SAMC, given that all South Asian countries already have functioning Ministries of External Affairs in their respective countries. He suggested that the SAMC could fill in a vacuum by functioning as an advocacy institution and as a voice of migrants. He said that the SAMC could be tied to Track II with a strong research base. In particular, he advocated 4 main steps to be taken by the SAMC in this respect:

- Compilation of information and data (on MOUs) which could help in learning from past experience. For instance, there are numerous bilateral agreements on HR Mobility,

Diaspora, pension schemes etc. signed between countries, but the scope, objectives, differences etc. of these agreements are not known.

- Work closely with research centres and develop ideas.
- Conduct research studies to fill the major data vacuum, for example lack of a clear idea of costs for different categories of migrants and transit persons over years. The SAMC can be instrumental in carrying out a "South Asia Migration Survey" to fill in such data gaps.
- The development of strategy papers with a comparative focus - at present all South Asian countries compete in the market for unskilled migrants. However, skilled workers need not compete in unskilled markets, and there is a need look at what difference countries should focus on based on demand and supply factors.

The floor was then open for discussion. From the floor discussion the following points were highlighted.

- The recently established South Asia Forum (SAF) is now accepted as a means of cooperation within SAARC, and the best strategy for the SAMC is to move in line with the SAF - especially in giving a 1.5 dimension - and make a representation to the forum.
- Appoint a project director for the SAMC, who has experience in building institutions and in working with working groups and stakeholders, as the first vital step.
- Develop a comprehensive website for the SAMC, inclusive of the proceedings on the 3 conferences held so far, migration profiles and South Asian Migration Survey results.
- Establish the SAMC with a representative from each member state and obtain observer status in the CP and move on while maintaining the 1.5 track status.
- The SAMC should not attempt to get involved in binding agreements, but function as a research and advocacy body - the recognition of research inputs would in turn enable policy influence.

Based on these points highlighted, the chair outlined specific steps to be taken in moving forward and designing a mechanism to make outcomes productive and result-oriented:

1. IPS should play the lead role as coordinator of the overall activities of the SAMC.
2. IPS should prepare a document with objectives, activities and recommendations that would enable the synthesizing of all inputs and activities and identification of priorities.
3. The commission needs a high profile of personalities through the establishment of a network of institutions such as the IPS, CDS, PIT.
4. Establish a Working Group and meet within a four-month timeframe to study the document prepared by IPS and look at work to be carried out in the next 3 years. The working group could consist of 12 members (with connections to the government) from all networking institutions. The working group should define its work clearly not only in terms of research, but also in terms of designing an advocacy role.
5. Convert ideas into action through advocacy and research. In this regard, organize a 1.5 day meeting to sort out issues.
6. Create a user-friendly and dynamic website connecting all network institutions in South Asian countries, which is the best and cheapest way of reaching out.

7. Generate resources to materialize ideas:
 - Set up a unit within IPS
 - Prepare a report including proposed work, activities, structure and plans
 - Get people to network and sort-out issues (through the working group)
 - A rough budget can be suggested by the working group
 - Look at possible donors in moving these ideas forward

In conclusion, the chair stated that a clear idea of work to be done should be ready within the next 6 months.