

Migrant Livelihood and Vulnerable Groups

Roundtable conducted on Thursday, 28thth January 2021 at 11:00 am-01:00 pm IST

Host Organization: Caux **Country:** Japan

Number of attendees: 149

Number of Countries: 16

Moderators

1. Karon Shaiva - Chief Impact Officer & Managing Director of Idobro Impact Solutions and Managing Trustee of RISE Infinity Foundation,

Experts:

1. Neill Wilkins, Head of Migrant Workers Programme - at Institute for Human Rights and Business
2. Sumitha Shaanthini Kishna, Director - Our Journey
3. Mclaud Emmanuel - International Justice Mission
4. Max K., President with IOM Group

Summary:

The Roundtables at RISE World Summit are the core activity to encourage collaboration around the challenges the world faces. Subject matter experts enable breakthrough interactions to identify outcomes for post-event joint efforts and alliances, knowledge assets, and more for collective impact. More information on RISE Summit can be found at <https://risesummit.in/>

This was the First Round Table to kick start the unique 36-hour Virtual Relay Conference. It started in Japan, rightly known as the 'Land of the Rising Sun'. **Karon Shaiva**, the Chief Impact Officer of Idobro began the session by introducing the different experts on the panel joining from all around the world. South Asian Countries. Caux Round Table Japan is hosting a Round table on vulnerable workers, and planning to take this opportunity to collect information and to exchange views on the situation of vulnerable workers, which will be utilized for the JICA (Japan International Cooperation Agency)'s survey, as a part of RISE World Summit 2021, inviting organizations who support vulnerable workers around the world affected by COVID-19 especially within the supply chain of Japanese companies., focusing 22 countries and 10 industries

Introduction:

Ms. Karon Shiva, the host of the meeting, started the session by introducing the topic to the attendees, following which she invited **Mr. Michio Harada**, the moderator for the session, to express his views on the same. The discussion was primarily focused on identifying different migrant workers and vulnerable groups, the major issues and challenges faced by them, and also the possible solutions to these challenges. The session also sought to look closely at the different regions across the world to identify and understand the people belonging to these vulnerable groups.

Challenges:

Mr. Michio Harada initiated the session by talking about his tenure in Mumbai, India. He spoke about the extent to which the country has been affected by the pandemic. He also addressed the topic 'how COVID-19, has affected the daily lives of people' and how it will continue to do so post-pandemic. He also expressed his concerns for the migrant workers and vulnerable groups and went on to say that the Japanese government is actively trying to better the conditions of this group.



The session was further moderated by **Ms. Karon Shaiva** and **Mr. Hiroshi Ishida**, who invited the rest of the rest of the panel members and attendees to discuss the conditions of the migrant workers in their respective regions. **Prof. Abhilash Nambudiri** spoke about the attitude of the local people to the immigrant population, he stated that there exists a 'we versus them' mentality, where the local people view these people as outsiders. However, the utility showcased by the migrant groups - the amount of work they perform in the community, often overrides this slightly negative attitude people showcase towards these vulnerable groups. When asked to discuss the same. **Mr. Neil Wilkins**, Head

of Immigrant Workers, IHRD, said that based on statistics, there are more than 164 million immigrant workers in the world. The majority of these workers, who belong to the low-wage, skilled or unskilled category face discrimination at their workplace. It is important to understand that this group plays an integral role in driving the economy and that they bring in huge amounts of money.

Ms. Sumitha Shaanthini from Malaysia described them as 'undocumented people'. According to her, the vulnerable group of migrants is those who work as a domestic help at the employer's residence or in the oil palm plantations.

Mr. Maximilian Pottler categorized the refugees across different countries. According to him, in Malaysia, Thailand, and Laos, the informal workers and the refugee population represent these vulnerable groups. In South Africa, it is the construction workers and workers from the mining sector that becomes a part of this group. In the case of Brazil and Syria, the refugees yet again become a prominent part of these vulnerable groups.

The vulnerable groups in Malaysia, especially the domestic help, are exploited because there is a gap between the government & the employers. Yet another vulnerable group in Malaysia is the oil palm plantation workers in the rural areas. These people have no means for communication; they can't reach out to their embassy from these remote locations.

In Bangladesh, the vulnerable groups can be classified into five categories. First, the voluntary migrants from the rural parts of the country, who work in textile and other related industries. Second is the domestic help, the majority of them being women. The third category is the unemployed educated youth who has been severely affected by the COVID-19 crisis. Fourth, is the refugees from Pakistan

known as the Biharis. They belong to a community that mainly works as hairdressers, embroiders, and so on. These people who were displaced from their homelands are deprived of all rights and there is a significant limitation to reach out to them in the situation of the pandemic. The fifth and most vulnerable category is formed by the Indo refugees in the Rohingya camp.

The discussion then shifted to broader issues like who constitutes the vulnerable groups and what makes them so? How can the limitations set on these groups be resolved? The panelists and attendees talked about how bringing these groups under the consideration of the government, providing them with food security, educating them about their rights as citizens, raising funds, and providing them with financial advice, training, and increasing their awareness can help resolve the issues to a certain limit. The government needs to work with the NGOs, divide their work appropriately and consider adopting a holistic and integrated approach to tackle the challenges faced by these disadvantaged groups.

Mr. Mclaud Emmanuel stated that bonded labor and human trafficking as the greatest challenges to be addressed across all regions. These issues cannot be resolved unless they are approached in an integrated manner. Integrating the activities of the NGOs as well as that of the government (both political and legal system) can bring a change in the conditions of these vulnerable groups. **Amit Dutta**, Director, Human & Social Services, KPMG, went on to say that it was time people went beyond traditional solutions; Social Entrepreneurship and Financial literacy have become integral to the upliftment of these communities.

Girija Deshpande said that it is important to make these communities self-sufficient, that we should promote these people to go back to their roots and earn a stable livelihood in their villages. 'Reverse Migration', is a concept that is gaining popularity these days, and it is something that governments and NGOs could look into. Upskilling these workers, with special attention to women, and facilitating their development in villages can to an extent help these communities flourish and become self-sufficient.

Ms. Karon and Mr. Hiroshi concluded the fruitful discussion by saying that this is just the beginning - now people have a fair idea about the prevalent issues faced by these migrant and vulnerable groups, the RISE Summit will provide a platform to deliberate on this issue and form beneficial relationships which will help tackle these challenges in the future.



Capabilities

During the pandemic, a rise in the reverse migration of workers was observed. Most migrants moved back to their natives. This could increase the capabilities in rural areas. Agriculture, local crafts, and artisans can be encouraged. **Ms. Girija Deshpande** of the Rotary Club, Mumbai; threw light on innovation in the agricultural sector through Alternative Farming. She worked with the villagers of Pali in Gujarat who would move to the cities for job opportunities once the farming season was over. The sand in the rural area was tested to see what crop could be produced off-season. It was found that lemon and guava could be grown and hence there was no need for the workers to shift to cities. Drip irrigation facilities were provided by Borosil in this area. During the pandemic workers in Pali were trained using Zoom conferencing on 1 cell phone for the whole class. This truly highlighted how Innovation can be

achieved by going back to the roots.

Each country has its definition of Vulnerable Groups.

Mr. Maximilian Pottler from the International Organization for Migration mentioned that in addition to the countries mentioned before, Turkey is the destination for refugees from Syria who are employed in hazelnut farming. Brazil and Columbia see migrants from Venezuela. Mexico is seen as a transit country for migrant workers moving to North America, South Africa has migrants from many other African countries, and so on. It's important to identify and support these vulnerable groups.

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The workers were trained to question their employers about why they held their passports, how overtime is calculated, and other such unfair practices. The results of this training were soon evident as the number of complaints by migrant workers reduced from 5000 to 1000.

Sumitha Shaanthini Kishna, Director - Our Journey
Migrant Livelihood and Vulnerable Groups
at RISE World Summit 2021

Collaborations

While discussing collaborations, **Ms. Sumitha** spoke about her organization's efforts in increasing awareness among migrant workers and vulnerable groups in Malaysia. As most of the migrants were from the Philippines; a Post-Arrivals Orientation for migrant workers was conducted in collaboration with the Philippines embassy. It consisted of a 1-day training program about rights and communication with employers. The workers were trained to question their employers about why they held their passports, how overtime is calculated, and other such unfair practices. The results of this training were soon evident as the number of complaints by migrant workers reduced from 5000 to 1000.

Dr. Simi Mishra from Delhi worked with migrants from

Pakistan. The challenge was how to get a livelihood for unskilled workers. She formed a small group of 60 workers. These individuals had land, agriculture, or embroidery work back in Pakistan; but in India they had nothing. She used the Small Scale Social Entrepreneurship Model for self employment using the agricultural or embroidery skills of these 60 workers. It is often observed that start-ups like these thrive only till the NGO is actively involved in the enterprise, after which it slowly dwindles. However, the Social Entrepreneurship model ensured that the enterprise was sustainable. By self-employment using their skills, the workers were able to sustain themselves even after the NGO withdrew.

Mr. Amit Dutta, a director at KPMG spoke about their collaborative efforts with the World Bank to protect the rights of women in West Bengal. The Household Economy Approach was adopted which focused not just on the male migrant workers, but also their partners and families back home. They worked to ensure food, healthcare, and education were provided to the families of the migrants.

Way forward

There were few ideas suggested which could help companies collaborate with governments and NGOs to bring about solutions to the problems of these vulnerable groups.

- Responsible Recruitment of migrant workers. It was observed that recruitment fees charged by agents leave workers in huge debt.
- Companies need to map out supply chains, understand the workers and the correct business partners for recruitment activities.
- Different Multinationals that hire similarly skilled migrant workers could form a forum to ensure fair practices during the recruitment process.
- There must be engagement with civil society through NGOs who can represent migrant workers effectively.

- And lastly Further engagement with governments to work collectively for the welfare of vulnerable groups.

Thank you and Closing note

Ms. Karon and **Mr. Hiroshi** concluded the fruitful discussion by saying that this is just the beginning - now people have a fair idea about the prevalent issues faced by these migrant and vulnerable groups, the RISE Summit will provide a platform to deliberate on this issue and form beneficial relationships which will help tackle these challenges in the future.

Note:

For a more detailed understanding of the session outcomes, kindly access a complete recording at <https://youtube.com/channel/UC2UI5Nf1yN0E5hifaSVOpEw>

A LinkedIn group has been created by RISE World Summit Team to foster collaboration between participants. <https://www.linkedin.com/groups/12494977>

More information on RISE Summit can be found at <https://risesummit.in>