



South Asia Work in Freedom Transnational Evaluation (SWiFT)

Summary

The South Asia Work in Freedom Transnational Evaluation (SWiFT) is a five-year programme of research and evaluation funded by the UK Department of International Development (DFID/UKAID). SWiFT assesses and informs the International Labour Organisation's (ILO) DFID-funded "Work in Freedom" (WiF) multi-country intervention to minimise women's vulnerability to labour trafficking in South Asia and the Middle East. Researchers from the Gender, Violence and Health Centre (GVHC) of the London School of Hygiene & Tropical Medicine (LSHTM) are leading the research and evaluation of WiF activities in collaboration with specialist research institutes in Bangladesh, India and Nepal.

Scope and rationale

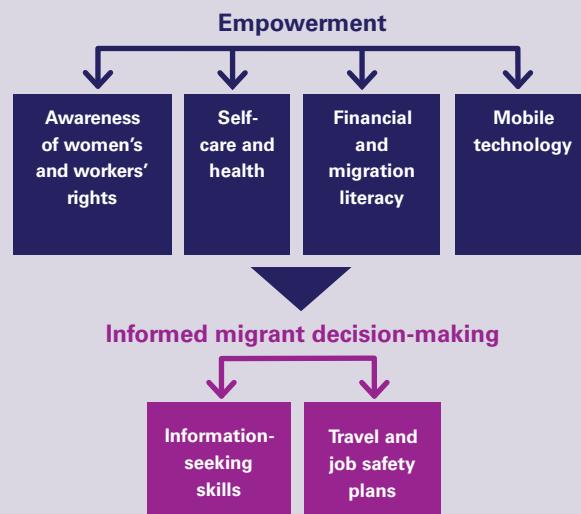
There has been considerable investment in programmes to reduce labour trafficking and address its consequences. However, there is little robust evidence to inform the design and implementation of interventions in this field.

SWiFT is timely and unique. Using a number of research methods, SWiFT follows a large-scale, multi-country trafficking intervention from conception to implementation. Evidence from this work provides a rigorous assessment of the Work in Freedom programme logic, assumptions and activities. Findings are designed to inform policy and practice, provide insights into the magnitude and characteristics of labour trafficking in the study sites and identify promising approaches to reduce workers' vulnerability.

Research questions

- What puts migrant workers, particularly women, at risk of being exploited? How do these risks vary within and between the study sites?
- What strategies can individuals use to protect themselves from being exploited? For whom and in what circumstances are these strategies most and least successful?
- How does the WiF intervention influence participants' vulnerability to trafficking and opportunities for safe migration and decent labour?
- How does the implementation context facilitate or undermine the WiF programme's effectiveness and impacts?

SWiFT evaluates the assumptions and activities of WiF's programmes to empower and inform women migrant workers



WOMEN CHOOSING TO MIGRATE FOR WORK
ARE EMPOWERED AND INFORMED TO FIND
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Work in Freedom

SWiFT evaluates elements of the Work in Freedom programme (WiF). Designed and led by the ILO, WiF aims to prevent labour trafficking by enhancing women's autonomy and by generating wider awareness and adoption of 'safe migration' practices and assertion of migrant workers' rights. WiF is active in three countries in South Asia (Bangladesh, India and Nepal) and two countries in the Middle East (Jordan and Lebanon). In the sites where SWiFT is conducting research, WiF's intensive community-based interventions are implemented in partnership with experienced local non-governmental organisations (NGOs).

Nepal: Agroforestry, Basic health and Cooperative Nepal (ABC Nepal); People Forum for Human Rights; Women's Rehabilitation Center (WOREC)

India: The Self-Employed Women's Association (SEWA) and Aaina

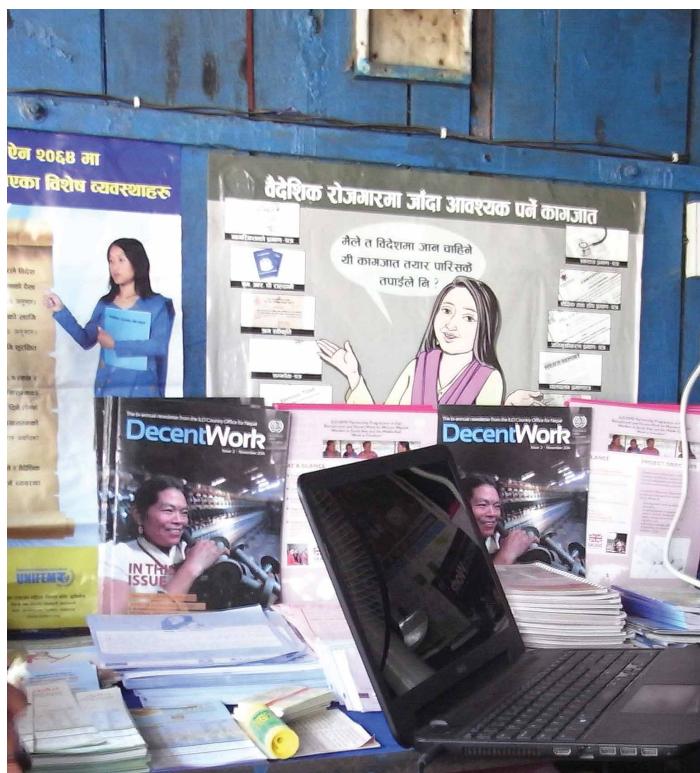
Bangladesh: Ovibashi Karmi Unnayan Program (OKUP)



BANGLADESH

Intervention context

The annual rate of international migration from Bangladesh has slowed in recent years, but the proportion of women migrant workers has grown rapidly. In 2002, women accounted for just 0.5% of Bangladeshi international migrants; by 2014, that figure was 17.9% or 76,007 women migrating internationally for work through formal channels. This 'feminization' of Bangladeshi international migration has generated interest in the gender dimensions of labour migration and vulnerability to trafficking. Assumptions that women's mobility necessarily entails coercion have given way to more nuanced analyses of women's labour migration. In Bangladesh, the Work in Freedom programme (WiF) frames women's labour mobility as a right rather than a compulsion, and trafficking as a risk rather than a certainty.



WiF focuses on migration to destinations in the Middle East, the most common destination for those using formal channels, and India, a major destination for those using 'irregular' migration channels. As elsewhere, overseas migration is commonly financed by usurious loans and mediated by a network of unregulated labour contractors. In both formal and informal processes, Bangladeshi migrant workers can be vulnerable to entrapment and exploitation: their vulnerability to exploitation is often exacerbated by limits on their legal status and rights, while the Kafala system, which regulates relations between many Middle Eastern citizens and non-citizen employees, fosters abuse of documented workers.

Research sites

SWiFT research is focused in Narayanganj, one of seven districts with high rates of women undertaking cross-border migration. Here, the ILO and local partner, the *Ovibashi Karmi Unnayan Program* (OKUP), are implementing the WiF intervention in five *upazilas* (sub-districts). SWiFT evaluation sites include rural, peri-urban and urban contexts to enable comparison.

Research aims

SWiFT explores the resonance of the WiF programme logic for different categories of 'beneficiary' over time. How do participants understand WiF content in light of their prior experiences? How do their perceptions, awareness and practices change as a result of the programme? And, is vulnerability to trafficking thereby reduced?

Research design

Longitudinal semi-structured interviews with:

- **30 working-age women migrants** at three separate time points over the lifetime of the WiF intervention, with separate but parallel interviews of respondents' husbands or fathers. These interviews draw out: the deliberations, negotiations, strategies, practices and outcomes related to labour and migration in the study site; perceptions of safe and unsafe migration practices and of acceptable and unacceptable working arrangements; and engagement with the WiF programme over time
- **10–12 WiF programme staff** at two time points during the programme lifetime, to identify any shifts in programme logic, organisation, accessibility and delivery; and to draw out perceptions of factors external to the programme that might facilitate or constrain its impact

Discourse analysis of policy, advocacy and media texts on women's migration and labour trafficking in Bangladesh, to identify how contemporary representations of women's labour migration and women labour migrants in Bangladesh may enable or constrain future uptake and extension of the WiF programme throughout the country.

Research partners

- The Gender, Violence and Health Centre of the London School of Hygiene & Tropical Medicine
- Drishti, an independent research institute based in Dhaka, Bangladesh, specialising in anthropological research design and field research into gender, labour, migration and trafficking / forced labour



INDIA

Intervention context

The Work in Freedom programme (WiF) is active in several states in East and South India, focusing on labour mobility within India's national borders, or 'internal migration'. Conservative estimates suggest 400 million Indian citizens – 30% of the country's total population – are internal migrants. An estimated 80% of these are women. Internal migrant workers are vulnerable to entrapment and exploitation but for many the income is essential for meeting basic needs. Earnings permit modest advancement and accumulation for some, and even a rare opportunity for autonomy. WiF therefore aims to reduce women migrant workers' vulnerability to labour trafficking while acknowledging the necessity and even the attraction of internal migration for many.

WiF activities in East India – where the evaluation takes place – focus on paid domestic work. This highly feminized sector has grown rapidly and is now the largest employer of women in urban India and the second largest in rural India. Workforce composition has shifted substantially. Multiple-employer, non-residential 'live out' arrangements increasingly replace the classic single-employer, 'live in' arrangement.



Research sites

SWiFT research is focused on the Ganjam district of Odisha State in East India. Odisha has relatively high and growing rates of seasonal and longer-term labour migration. With neighbouring states Jharkhand and Chhattisgarh, Odisha has become a hub for the recruitment of paid domestic workers.

Research aims

SWiFT produces new evidence on the varied ways in which a broad range of factors interact to shape migrant workers' plans, practices and strategies. Migrant workers' vulnerability to trafficking and exploitation are affected by general factors such as informal labour, under-employment, over-indebtedness, sub-contracting and out-sourcing and discrimination by gender and caste. These are exacerbated by migrant workers' 'outsider' status. But how and why do some migrant workers elude or overcome these factors while others, similarly positioned, become entrapped in forced labour?

Research design

A cross-sectional representative sample survey of approximately 1,200 households and 2,400 individuals (one working-age couple per household, with oversampling of women migrant workers) in 20 villages across Ganjam District of Odisha at a single time-point, with households and individuals randomly sampled, and data analysed to assess the applicability of WiF 'vulnerability-reducing' measures and to identify factors likely to amplify or constrain WiF impact.

Longitudinal semi-structured interviews with:

- **50–60 working-age women who have migrated or intend to migrate**, interviewed at four time points during WiF, with respondents' husbands or fathers interviewed separately but in parallel to gain insights into gendered experiences and perceptions of migration and labour; of experiences of WiF; and of WiF influences on household and individual migration plans, trajectories and outcomes
- **8–12 local policy-makers, elected representatives and officials** interviewed at two time points during WiF to draw out and contrast beliefs about women's labour migration; perceptions of safe and unsafe migration practices; and perceptions, experiences and engagement with WiF programme messages over time

Research partners

- The Gender, Violence and Health Centre of the London School of Hygiene & Tropical Medicine
- The Centre for Women's Development Studies (CWDS), an autonomous research centre based in Delhi, founded and supported by the Indian Council of Social Science Research, that completed the first nationally representative survey of women's migration within India



NEPAL

Intervention context

The Work in Freedom programme (WiF) is implemented in five districts

in Nepal and targets women interested in migrating for work in the domestic or garment sectors in the Gulf States (Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Bahrain, the United Arab Emirates). The open border between Nepal and India means that Nepali women working in India are largely unaccounted for. In 2006/07, women constituted only 0.2% of those granted labour permits to work abroad. By 2013/14, this proportion had risen to 3.1%. However, women constitute about 13% of the country's absentee population and, although this figure includes (for example) students and those travelling with husbands, irregular or unofficial migration is considered a primary reason for the discrepancy.



Labour migration can provide social and economic benefits to women and their families, but at the same time workers may be vulnerable to exploitation and abuse of their irregular legal status, unregulated work sector and social marginalisation. Without collateral for loans from formal institutions, women may be forced to borrow from money-lenders or recruiters who may charge excessive fees. With periodic restrictions on female migration in Nepal, women may be trafficked or smuggled via a third country. In destination countries, women migrant workers often have poor living and working conditions and there are regular reports of physical and sexual abuse. Despite the positive contributions women migrants make to their household and national economy, many returnees experience difficulties at home, including enduring debts and social stigma. To address human trafficking, the Government of Nepal introduced the Foreign Employment and Anti-Trafficking Law and bilateral agreements with destination countries.

Research sites

SWiFT is conducted in three of the five WiF districts: Chitwan, Rupandehi and Morang.

Research aims

In Nepal, SWiFT is designed to inform the WiF programme and other trafficking prevention programmes on the nature and scale of adverse migration outcomes; factors that increase or decrease a woman's risk of being trafficked; and prospective women migrants' pre-departure knowledge and decision making. How does WiF affect individual migration decisions, behaviours and experiences? Are WiF's assumptions valid and widely applicable?

Research design

Cross-sectional surveys with:

- **approximately 500 returned migrant women who migrated** (including to India) and returned to Nepal within the past five years, to capture women's experiences from initial preparations through to return and possible remigration
- **approximately 300 prospective migrant women** identified by WiF partners, to capture women's plans and preparations, including their participation in community awareness activities or formal training

Longitudinal cohort study, following all women who took part in the prospective migrant women's survey (approximately 300) for up to 18 months through phone interviews, to capture experiences at destination, including those of exploitation or forced labour

Qualitative semi-structured interviews are conducted with approximately 55 of the prospective migrant women who participated in the survey to explore their plans and preparations before the full roll out of the WiF intervention. They will be interviewed again after the WiF 2-day pre-decision-making training to understand their experience and opinions of the training

Research partners

- The Gender, Violence and Health Centre of the London School of Hygiene & Tropical Medicine
- The Centre for the Study of Labour and Mobility (CESLAM), a research unit within Social Science Baha, a not-for-profit research organisation in Kathmandu