

NORKA for the Welfare of migrants and return migrants: An Assessment

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I. Abstract

Migrants play a prominent role in the Kerala's economic development and many of them have found greener pastures abroad. Their remittance to Kerala is one of the major components of state Gross Domestic Product. Due to various economic changes many of the migrants are returning to their home country. This will have a negative impact on Kerala's economy like unemployment, family financial issues, decrease in migrant remittance etc. So, the government should take care of the migrants and the return migrants. For the welfare of migrants and returnees the government of Kerala established Non-Resident Keralites Affairs Department. The aim of the study is to analyse various schemes initiated by government through Non-Resident Keralites Affairs Department for the migrants and return migrants in Kerala.

KEYWORDS: *Migrant, Remittance, Return migrant, Welfare, Schemes*

II. Introduction

Human migration from one place to another is an integral part of the world history. Globalization is considered as the major reason behind the migration of people all over the world. Many people migrate to various places for a better life. People expect better employment opportunities, income, better lifestyle and fortune in destination countries. Migration usually occurs from underdeveloped countries to developed countries and from poor rural areas to urban areas within the country. Migration has huge impact on both the native economy and destination economy of the migrants. Migration is depended on the size and composition of the population of a country. When a country's population increases it also increases the demand for their goods and services. It leads to an increase in production activities which in turn will generate more employment opportunities. But this theory of correlation does not occur always in under developed and developing countries like India. The increasing



population creates a more serious issue that is unemployment. India has a large pool of skilled and educated youth and they find it very hard to get a suitable job of their educational qualification in their own country. Secured jobs with better working conditions and decent salary are less so, many people migrate to other countries in search of better opportunities. Of the nearly 31 million non-resident Indians, an estimated 8.5 million are working in the Gulf¹. Migrant's remittance is a significant factor in the development of Kerala. The huge migration from Kerala to Gulf started in 1970s after the oil discovery boom. Since then, Gulf migrant's remittances created many progressive changes in the Kerala's economy. Kerala economy is largely depended on migrant remittance.

Migrant's return to their home country is an unavoidable phase of the migration cycle. Due to many reasons migrants return to their native place. The return may be forced or voluntary. Reasons may be economic crisis, retrenchment, retirement, health problems, job insecurity, nationalisation process in the destination country, reduction in business activities, and bitter experience in destination country etc. The migrant's return critically affects both their native economy and their families. The reduction in remittances severely affects their family's finance and their children's education. The migrant's native economy suffers increased unemployment, rehabilitation issues and decreased migrant remittance. The returnees post return life mainly depended on the nature of their return. During voluntary return the migrants take proper plans regarding their departure and post return life and they may have some savings for that. But in the case of forced migrant return they do not get enough time to make plans about their post departure life and the sudden loss of their job makes their life worse. In Kerala majority of the skilled and unskilled works are being filled with the migrants from different parts of our country. This severely affect the returnees to find a suitable job. The wage structure in Kerala is low when compared to other countries, so it also affects the returnee's financial status. Proper support is needed by the returnees during the post return phase. This is depended on the rehabilitation and reintegration initiatives of the native state.

On 6th December 1996, Government of Kerala launched the Department of non-resident Keralite's Affairs (NORKA) to redress the grievances of non-resident Keralites both in India and abroad and to have a sustainable partnership with them². NORKA is established for their welfare and to offer assistance and to provide help to



the needy in times of emergency. NORKA has taken many initiatives and schemes for the welfare of the migrants and return migrants. In India, Kerala is then first state to set up a department for the welfare of non-resident Keralites. In 1998, Non-Resident Keralites Welfare Agency was established as a field agency to implement and execute the welfare schemes developed by NORKA. As it failed to meet its mandate, the Government of Kerala dissolved NORKWA in 2002, four years after it was set up. NORKA ROOTS was initiated in 2002 to act as an interlink between the Government of Kerala and the non-resident keralites³.

III. Objectives

1. To examine various schemes of NORKA for migrants and return migrants

IV. Methodology

This study is purely based on secondary data and for that journal, articles, reports of various financial institutions and websites have been used. The study is descriptive in nature

V. Non-Resident Keralites' Affairs Department (NORKA)

On 6 December 1996, the Government of Kerala constituted the Department of Non-Resident Keralites Affairs (NORKA) to address and resolve the grievances of the Non-Resident Keralites (NRKs), The main objective of NORKA is the welfare of non-resident Keralites.

A. NORKA ROOTS

In 1998 NORKA established an agency called Non-Resident Keralites Welfare Agency (NORKWA) to effectively implement and execute the various schemes of NORKA. It was established under the society's registration Act of India. But NORKWA failed and the government dissolved it in 2002. After that NORKA ROOTS, was implemented to act as a link between the non-resident Keralites and the government of Kerala. It is a licensed recruiting agency. The various activities of this agency are managed through official formalities. It addresses various issues of migrants like protection of their rights and interest, rehabilitation and reintegration of returnees. Apart from these it also offers a wide range of services like certificate



attestation, predeparture training programmes, skill upgradation classes, awareness campaigns, financial help to returnees and repatriation of migrant's corpse.

B. Objectives of Non-Resident Keralites Affairs (NORKA)

NORKA aims at the welfare of the non-resident Keralites. NORKA ROOTS offers various programmes to assist the needs of non-resident Keralites. Their major objectives are as follows:

1. To provide all the necessary support to non-resident Keralites and to deal the issues concerning them with the Kerala and Indian Government and with other organisations and agencies in India and abroad.
2. To develop strategies for the rehabilitation of migrants returning to the state.
3. To give main importance to the industrial development of the Kerala by properly channelising migrant remittances and their expertise and to support them to start new ventures and projects in Kerala.
4. To regulate and to give assistance to export human resource through lawful methods.
5. To monitor and to manage a global network of non-resident Keralite's groups.
6. To enhance skills and knowledge of job seekers
7. To provide heritage villages for non-resident Keralite's parents
8. To promote Kerala's culture and language
9. To promote state's economic development with the assistance and participation of non-resident Keralites
10. To facilitate relief fund for providing rapid assistance to non-resident Keralites in need.
11. Properly organise annual meetings
12. To channelize non-resident Keralite's investments to Kerala.
13. Employment mapping
14. To set up non-resident Keralites data bank
15. Prevent illegal recruitment
16. To provide social security network for non-resident Keralite's
17. To conduct cultural exchange programme between Keralites settled abroad and the natives.

C. NORKA SCHEMES

1. Santhwana

This scheme aims to provide financial assistance to the returned migrants. The returnees can avail the scheme for their health treatments like heart surgery, cancer, chronic kidney damage, severe problems due to accidents, children's marriage, to repatriate corpse of migrants, purchase equipment for disabled returnees like wheel chair, artificial limbs, hearing aids etc. The persons applying for this scheme should satisfy certain conditions ie they should have lived abroad for at least two years, their annual income should be less than 1.5 lakhs.

2. NORKA Department Project for Return Emigrants (NDPREM) for Rehabilitation of Return Emigrants

This is a rehabilitation scheme which focuses on promoting entrepreneurship among return migrants. It provides subsidy for starting businesses with a seed capital of up to 30 lakh rupees. 15% subsidy on capital and 3% rebate on interest of loan are offered for the first 4 years⁴.

3. Re integration and skill upgradation training scheme for non-resident Keralites

This scheme aims at upgrading the technical skill and knowledge of Keralites to face various hurdles in the destination country. It offers orientation regarding various migration related procedures like visa, employment contract, soft and technical skills required for the specified job etc. Under this scheme the candidates are offered training for skill upgradation.

4. Orientation Programme

It is a pre departure awareness and orientation programme. It aims to create awareness among migrating candidates regarding job opportunities and the current situation in the destination country. It offers awareness programme regarding illegal recruitment and agencies. It also conveys necessary information regarding travel, visa, job contract, emigration rules and formalities. It aims at making an efficient set of job seekers that suits the destination country's skills and their practical exposure. NORKA conducts this programme in all districts of Kerala.

5. Swapna Saphalyam



Under this scheme financial support is provided for air ticket to migrants who was imprisoned abroad for no will full default and after release don't have enough money to procure return ticket to Kerala.

6. NBFC

The Norka Business Facilitation Centre focuses on encouraging the non-resident Keralites to invest in Kerala's micro small and medium enterprises and NORKA will work as a single window system for them to make Kerala a better investment destination. This scheme also offers expert consultants to provide important guidance and information on how to start up a project without much troubles. It aims to ensure easiness in starting and doing a business.

7. Registration and Database

A data bank of non-resident Keralites is created under this scheme. It records all the details regarding the migrants. It would help in providing information regarding skills of migrants, identification of migrants, provide necessary details during various emergencies and help the state and central government in taking various actions.

8. Legal Cell

NORKA formed a cell to provide free legal assistants to migrants. It includes various activities like orientation classes, awareness programmes and legal assistance. The free legal aid includes case filing, advice etc.

9. Repatriation fund during emergency

The Ministry of External Affairs evacuate the migrants from abroad during natural calamities, war and other emergencies. It includes free economy class air travel, free Kerala house accommodation, other expenses etc. The repatriation of the corpse of migrant persons from abroad to Kerala are covered under this fund.

10. Recruitment and Job Portal

In order to provide details regarding various overseas employment opportunities to job aspirants from Kerala, NORKA started Jobs NORKA. It is a well professionally managed online platform, and it help employers to recruit qualified persons. It acts as a link between the job aspirants and the employers by exchanging accurate information. It helps employer to choose talented persons for their organization based on their skills merit, experience and acute authenticity. Aspirants can search various job vacancies with registered employers through this portal.



11. Emergency Ambulance Services at the Airport

It helps migrants by providing free ambulance service to return home for treatment and to transport the corpse of a migrant back home. This service is available at all airports in Kerala.

12. Loka Kerala Sabha and Loka Kerala Kendram

To promote social, political, economic and cultural integration, Kerala Government constituted Loka Kerala Sabha (LKS). It states that the expertise, skill and knowledge of the migrants is an asset for the overall development of Kerala. To strengthen the bond between Non-Resident Keralites and the state, the Government constituted Loka Kerala Kendram. It promotes Kerala's art, traditions, food and culture.

13. Directors Scholarship Scheme

Under this scheme financial assistance is offered for the higher education of migrant's children from financially backward family.

14. Pravasi Bhadratha – PEARL

This scheme helps the weaker migrant returnees with low income and savings. This scheme is proposed to implement via Kudumbashree to address the targeted group with a sustainable livelihood. It provides revolving finance to the group or person, offers support to start micro enterprises, interest free loan facility up to two lakhs etc. The applicants under this scheme should be migrant returnees and should have completed at least 2 years abroad. The returnees must have returned due to job loss or they have stuck in Kerala due to pandemic situation. The applicant under this scheme should be a member of Kudumbashree.

15. Pravasi Bhadratha - MEGA

Under this scheme the Kerala State Industrial Development Corporation Ltd provides loan up to two crores rupees per enterprise at interest 8.25% to 8.75%⁵. This scheme is offered to migrant returnees and the investors from other parts of the country. NORKA will act as the controller of this scheme whereas Kerala State Industrial Development Corporation Ltd acts as an implementing agency.

16. Pravasi Bhadratha – MICRO

Under this scheme assistance is offered to migrants in starting micro and small-scale business. This scheme is implemented through Kerala State Financial Enterprises. Capital subsidy is offered at Rs. 25% of the loan amount and up to a maximum of one lakh rupees and loans up to five lakh rupees is offered⁶.



VI. CONCLUSION

The migrants play crucial role in the economic development of Kerala. So, it is the duty of the Government to take necessary measures to support the migrants and to rehabilitate the return migrants. The COVID 19 pandemic paved way for global economic recession. The reduced business activities across the world left many migrants unemployed. Along with other factors this also increased the number of return migrants to the state. The unexpected return affected low paid migrant workers. So, in order to provide support, the migrants and to rehabilitate the returnees Kerala Government is conducting various programmes through NORKA. NORKA plays a major role in the lives of non-resident Keralites by supporting them during emergencies. They have introduced above mentioned schemes to support to migrants and returnees. Many migrants and returnees have availed these schemes. The agency is actively engaged in supporting the migrants and returnees. Through social medias and through print medias government is creating awareness among public regarding various initiatives of the agency. This organisation is a model that can be implemented in other Indian states which have a large number of migrants.

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