



# MICROLINKS WEBINAR: LEVERAGING RECONSTRUCTION: OPPORTUNITIES FOR CREATING GOOD JOBS

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PRESENTATION TRANSCRIPT

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## PRESENTERS

Sonia Mistry, Solidarity Center

Neha Misra, Solidarity Center

Gregory Randolph, JustJobs Network

Bama Athreya, USAID Center of Excellence on Democracy Human Rights and Governance

## MODERATOR

Kristin O'Planick, USAID Office of U.S. Foreign Disaster Assistance

Chrissy Burbank, USAID Knowledge-Driven Agricultural Development Program

*Kristin O'Planick:*

Hello everyone. We're going to get started. Welcome to this month's micro links webinar, Leveraging Reconstruction, Opportunities for Creating Good Jobs. I'm Kristin O'Planick from USAID's Bureau for Economic Growth, Education and Environment. A few weeks ago my colleague Bama, who is here with us today, sent me a report she thought I might find interesting. It was titled Rebuilding Nepal, Creating Good Jobs Amid Reconstruction and Migration. And I did find it really interesting. It touched on so many topics we've been grappling with. The relief to development continuum is one. Issues around creating good use employment in large enough volume. How to work with the realities of labor migration for the benefit of worker's households. How to really stimulate economic transformation in less than ideal circumstances.

So here we are today to examine the Nepal earthquake recovery process and highlight the importance of good jobs and the value of human capital of workers to grow economies in developing nations and hopefully get at some of these topics I've listed. As the world faces unprecedented humanitarian needs, these lessons surely aren't confined to Nepal.

So let me briefly introduce our speakers. Sonia Mistry is a senior program officer in the Asia department of the Solidarity Center. She supports worker rights and union building programs throughout south Asia, including Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, India, Nepal and The Maldives. Sonia also works with the organization's regional departments to promote child labor elimination efforts through worker rights promotion. She holds a master's of international affairs from Columbia University School of International and Public Affairs.

Neha Misra is the senior specialist for migration and human trafficking at the Solidarity Center, an international worker rights NGO based in Washington, DC. Previously, Neha was the deputy country director and program manager for the Solidarity Center's counter trafficking and person and labor migration programs in Indonesia. She has a JD degree from Washington College of Law, American University, where she focused her studies on international human rights law.

Greg Randolph is executive vice president at the JustJobs Network where he is responsible for guiding the organization's research, outreach and communications strategy. His work entails engaging a diversity of stakeholders in the promotion of JustJobs around the world. His current work focuses on labor, migration and urbanization in societies of the global south witnessing rapid structural transformation.

And Bama Athreya is a senior specialist, labor and employment rights at USAID's Center of Excellence on Democracy, Human Rights and Governance. And I thought my title was long. She has more than 20 years'

experience on international labor, women's rights and business and human rights. And has worked for the AFL CIO Solidarity Center, International Labor Rights Forum, International and the Intentional Labor Organization. She holds a Ph.D. in social anthropology from the University of Michigan and is a member of the Council on Foreign Relations.

As a reminder to our participants, please type your questions into the chat box as we go along. Once the presentation portion concludes we should have plenty of time for questions and answers. But don't feel you need to hold your questions until then. And with that, I pass it over to you, Sonia and Neha.

*Sonia Mistry:*

Great. Thank you so much, Kristin. Just a quick word about the Solidary Center. We're headquartered in Washington, DC. And we work in over 60 countries promoting worker rights worldwide. And we work with a variety of civil society partners, but primarily with workers organizations and trade unions.

So just wanted to give a brief explanation of what inspired this research in the first place. And then we'll get into really the build of the findings of the research and how the findings might be applied more broadly.

So following the earthquake, our union partners in Nepal sprang to action helping to collect donations and provide immediate assistance in local communities. And one of the things we started thinking about was what happens after the literal and figurative dust settles. What will rebuilding look like? And can it be done in a way that both protects workers in the process and sets up communities for better economic prospects after reconstruction.

So these questions were particularly important in the context of high rates of out migration, particularly as there was so much attention on the migrant workers who couldn't get back home to help their families, such as those stuck in Qatar who couldn't get exit visas, and the growing concern that crisis situations can exacerbate cases of forced labor and trafficking, particularly of women and children.

At the same time, the Solidarity Center and other migrant rights groups had already been asking the question, how do we spur meaningful development in communities of origin for migrant workers so they have a real choice about migration rather than being stuck in perpetual cycles of migration for low wage exploitative jobs?

So we're lucky to have funding from the National Endowment for Democracy to fund this research. And we can certainly get into the specifics of the research questions if anyone wants to know in more detail.

But our key question really was how can we promote the development of good jobs in sustainable sectors in the context of reconstruction but also allow workers a real choice about migration for work?

We wanted the research to be action oriented and really support advocacy efforts. And so in relation to reconstruction and disaster recovery, what we – we wanted to make sure that we didn't see a repeat of like what we saw in the US, these post Katrina like practices where labor standards were weakened in the name of disaster recovery. Because we see workers as key stakeholder and they should have a seat at the table in planning and designing recovery and development efforts.

And in Nepal, unions are repeatedly dismissed as being “too political” and they're rarely included in development dialogues. So this is really to the detriment of development efforts. And this research is important in that it explicitly included the unions and workers in developing recommendations.

Our intention for the research was to help unions and other stakeholders take advocacy to a more concrete level. Because they were already developing recommendations with assistance from the International Trade Union Confederation, which is a global trade union umbrella body, to promote decent work through reconstruction. And we wanted to help push that advocacy further to look beyond the jobs that are created in the actual rebuilding to longer term sustainable development. And I'll turn it over to Neha to talk about the migration piece.

*Neha Misra:*

Thank you, Sonia. Good morning everyone. Please forgive me, I have a little bit of a cold. So as Sonia was mentioning, when we were looking at the Solidarity Center has been working on issues of labor and migration for a really long time. And our work in Nepal, a lot of our work in Nepal has focused on labor migration issues. And so it's really interesting when after the earthquake happened and we were hearing stories about migrant workers that were stuck in places like Qatar who were trying to get back to see their families, couldn't get exit visas to leave, it really made us start to think about labor migration in a broader context in the work that we do at Solidarity Center.

So just to take a step back. We at Solidarity Center have been looking at the issue of labor migration for many years. And we've seen that international donors from the World Bank to the United Nations to others have really been promoting labor migration as a solution to sustainable development. They call it a triple win. A win for origin countries, a win for destination countries and a win for workers. Because it is a way for workers to get employment in countries that have a lot of unemployment and to send back remittances. And I think we all know that remittances

from different countries are in the billions of dollars around the world. And Greg will talk a little bit more specifically about Nepal.

But one of the things that we've been seeing in our work at Solidarity Center is kind of these cycles of migration. You know we worked all over Asia and in places like Indonesia, Nepal and other places, we were seeing generation after generation of workers migrating for the same low wage jobs. And so in Nepal, for example, you hear of many migrant workers going to work in construction. And these jobs often tend to be low wage, highly exploitative jobs. And so in the context of sustainable development when we're looking at sustainable development, Solidarity Center's been asking the question, you know how can we really promote labor migration as a form of sustainable development when we see so many workers exploited in these low wage sectors? And when we continue to see generations of workers, the children of these migrant workers, also having to migrate in the same low wage sectors.

We were wondering, you know how do we call this a triple win when workers often have to pay high recruitment fees to get these jobs. Often while they are able to send home remittances, it's not enough really to get their children to be able to stay home and work in good jobs or to be able to migrate for higher skilled jobs. To us that didn't really seem like sustainable development.

And so we've been starting to really ask these questions and look at these issues about what does labor migration for decent work really mean. And one of the things that we were seeing is that countries are not putting as much emphasis on the creation of decent work in origin communities as they are in promoting labor migration as a quick solution to unemployment and poverty in countries. And that to us really seemed like a shortsighted solution to the issue of sustainable development. Because as I was saying, a lot of these jobs tend to be exploitative jobs and do not necessarily provide the next generation with better jobs.

And so we're starting to ask the question how do we maximize the benefit of labor migration so that it actually does promote sustainable development? And we see the way to do that is by creating an enabling environment through long term holistic strategic economic planning and policies. And this really means that countries must emphasize the creation of decent work at home as much as they do labor migration.

Just as an example outside of Nepal, since we're gonna talk a lot about Nepal today, Indonesia for many years has millions of migrant workers that migrate abroad. They actually have five year economic plans where they talk about how many migrant workers they're gonna send abroad. At the same time, this economic plan they are not talking about how they

would use the skills or the expertise of the returning migrant workers to create jobs at home. Or how they will look to find sectors or niches where they can build employments in Indonesia so that these millions of migrant workers don't continually have to migrate out because of economic compulsion. Instead, will only migrate out of choice.

And so with JustJobs Network over the last few years we've been talking about these issues. And really wanting to look at what happens to origin communities when large percentages of people migrate out for work? And how do we really talk about the creation of decent work, both at home and abroad? And JustJobs Network worked with Solidarity Center a few years ago to do a report in Indonesia that looked at a high community that had been sending out migrant workers for 30 years. And found results similar to what I'm talking about where children of migrant workers are migrating for the same low rate exploitative jobs.

And then the disaster struck in Nepal, and as Sonia was talking about, our office started to look at the reconstruction and disaster recovery. Because of the millions of migrant workers that go abroad every year from Nepal, we also started to wonder what does this mean for the creation of decent work in Nepal so that these migrant workers that have been going to Qatar and other places don't have to continue to migrate?

So I'm going to turn it over to Greg now to continue from here.

*Gregory Randolph:* Great. Thank you so much, Sonia and Neha, for a really nice introduction to the research. I'll just start by quickly, you know for those who aren't aware, just quickly giving you a bit of background on the JustJobs Network. We are basically a global think-tank that works on issues of labor and employment and seeks to influence policy using evidence based solutions that we come up with in our research. And all of our research sort of relates back to this big and broad question that many different institutions are trying to address, which is how can we create more and better jobs? So looking both at job creation as well as improving quality of work.

And as Neha mentioned, we've been deeply engaged in collaboration with the Solidarity Center on some of these issues, particularly around labor migration. And looking at how labor migration, what the implications of labor migration are in terms of long term economic development strategies and long term job creation strategies.

So my role here today is to talk specifically about the research, how we went about it, and what our findings were. JustJobs was brought into this product to conduct the research. And do encourage all of you to go and look at the report that came out of this research which is co-authored by

myself and colleague Prachi Argawal who's joined us today from Delhi. Because there's a lot more information in that report than we can potentially present to you today. But I'm gonna go over some of the highlights.

So let me first talk about sort of the way we approached the research in terms of the design and methodology. So we started by really mining all of the secondary data on Nepal both that's available from government sources as well as data that's available from civil society organizations and multilateral institutions to really understand what the broader trends are in terms of the economy, in terms of the labor market, and more specifically, in terms of labor migration as well as reconstruction.

And then what we did was we sought to sort of nuance and add greater texture to some of those findings that we were able to extract from secondary data by actually going to Nepal and conducting about 30 semi-structured qualitative interviews with a range of stakeholders. So we spoke with government officials, we spoke with civil society organizations and in particular organizations that work directly with migrant workers. And we also talked with returning migrants and with earthquake survivors. And in particular we placed emphasis on consulting and involving trade unions in Nepal in this research process because of some of the issues and challenges that Sonia mentioned in her introduction.

So these interviews covered a range of themes that are related to sort of the key research question of this project. Which is how do we think about reconstruction as an opportunity to address some of the broader and more chronic kind of longstanding challenges that Nepal faces when it comes to economic opportunity.

So one of the main findings of our research, which I think relates to many of the different questions we're trying to address in the Nepali context, is the fact that if you look at Nepal sort of through a macroeconomic lens. You see that the structural changes that are occurring in Nepal sort of mirror those that are occurring in many other developing economies, many other countries in the global south. Which is basically that agriculture is becoming a less important component of national GDP and that services and industry, in particular services in Nepal, are becoming more important to the national economy.

But what this sort of broader sort of typical macroeconomic story masks is the fact that this kind of structural transition in the economy is not really leading to a broader kind of structural transformation in the labor market. So despite the fact that services and industry are you know play an increasingly important role in stimulating Nepal's economy and its

economic growth, workers are not really transition sort of at a large scale into more productive occupations in those sectors.

So about two-thirds, about 67 percent, of Nepal's workforce still remains in agriculture. Which is a sector that in Nepal is only about a third as productive as these other sectors.

And what we see here is the possibility of a kind of negative feedback loop. Where youth who are sort of demotivated by the lack of productive employment opportunities in agriculture, choose to leave the sector. Many choosing to migrate abroad. And as a result, the sector loses its most productive workers, which are youth. So we see the possibility here of a negative feedback loop that's being kind of reinforced by out migration.

And this leads us to really looking at what's happened over a fairly short period of time in Nepal in terms of the volume and scale of out migration. Nepal has really become a migration dependent economy over the last 10 or 15 years. Of course if we look at the history we see that there is, you know there are patterns of out migration in Nepal going back to colonial times in south Asia. But really the scale and the volume, as I mentioned, have really picked up considerably since the turn of the twenty-first century.

So between 2001 and 2011 the number of Nepalis living outside the country increased more than six times. And 86 percent of Nepalis who live outside the country now left the country in the last ten years. We also see this really playing out in terms of the contribution of remittances. The reliance of the national economy on remittances. So in 2004, remittances were equivalent to about 11 percent of Nepal's GDP. But now that figure is up to almost one-third. So almost one-third – remittances are equivalent to almost one-third of Nepal's GDP. So really a very dramatic escalation in this reliance on remittance capital. Remittance income.

And it's important to mention, as Neha pointed out, that most of the migration out of Nepal is into sort of low wage and precarious jobs, which all of us are, of course, familiar with given all of the various controversies surrounding the construction sector, for instance, in many of the countries in the Middle East and in the Gulf Cooperation Council.

The other thing though that I think is less sort of discussed or less talked about is the fact that you know Nepali workers basically have four or five key destination countries that they are dependent on for employment. And that means that there is sort of a high degree of vulnerability of the Nepali economy to the policy decisions, specifically the immigration policy decisions that are made in these three or four countries, which are

basically Malaysia and then a few countries in the Gulf Cooperation Council.

All of these countries are beginning to institute indigenization policies in their labor markets. All of them have specific goals of increasing workforce participation among native workers in their countries. And all of them have stated goals of decreasing their dependence on foreign labor. Which is, of course, related to other sorts of, you know global, economic and geopolitical concerns.

But what this means is that Nepal's economy is increasingly dependent on countries that are increasingly sort of unlikely to extend their reliance on foreign migrants into the future. So this is a pretty precarious situation for the economy as a whole to actually be in.

The next slide sort of shows you some of the linkages between different patterns. Different social and economic patterns in Nepal. So the previous slide, which I'll just go back to for one second. This map shows you the density of out migration in different parts of the country. So the darker the green the higher the number of out migrants in a particular district in a country. So you can see that the highest rates of out migration are in the southern plains of Nepal. Along the border with India.

And what I hope you can observe in these two maps on the next slide is that there is a strong connection between the districts of origin, the geographies of origin in Nepal and places where there is a high density of industrial establishment. So this first map on the left hand side shows you density of the manufacturing sector. So, again, the darker colors are illustrative of where the number of industrial establishments is the highest. And also shows you, the next map on your right hand side, shows you where the percentage of the net population, the youth net population – that's youth that are not in employment education or training. It shows you that that population's also highest in the same region of the country.

This is connected to a story of decline in Nepal's manufacturing sector. So basically what we see is that the same region that is sort of dependent on manufacturing, that has seen a decline in its manufacturing capacity over time, is also the region that has the highest share of youth that are essentially unoccupied and the highest share of migration.

So what we're beginning to sort of see here is this story of the linkages between a low productivity agricultural sector that youth no longer want to be a part of, a waning industrial sector that is offering a decreasing number of opportunities to youth who are looking to exit agriculture and high populations of young people who are unoccupied and looking for other opportunities and, therefore, choosing to migrate.

So this is sort of the broader kind of economic story in Nepal.

So against this backdrop we see a very severe amount of economic damage caused by the earthquake, which struck about two years ago now in Nepal. So overall economic damage from the disaster was equivalent to about a third of Nepal's GDP. And if you look at this map here, what you can see is that the darker colors, this map is actually showing you economic losses as a percentage of per capita income at the district level in these districts that were most highly affected.

So what you can see is that the darker colors here, the darker green, these are districts which saw economic damage that was equivalent to in some cases as high as ten times annual per capita income. So the average household is losing property or economic assets that are valued at about ten times their annual per capita income. And then the economy as a whole is losing about, an equivalent of about a third of its GDP.

So this is, you know we often talk about loss of life, which is, of course, you know one of the most important impacts of a disaster like this. But the economic impacts of a disaster like the Nepal earthquake are very severe. Which also means that the reconstruction effort is, and must be, very comprehensive.

So it was really sort of observing the scale of economic damage and the scale of the sort of proposed reconstruction effort that started to get us thinking about how this can be done in such a way to really address some of these more chronic and long term issues with Nepal's economy that I've mentioned in the previous slides.

I want to highlight some of the policy gaps that we identified in the course of doing our research. So so far the data that I've shown you really relies quite heavily on the secondary data available for Nepal. But we also, you know in the course of these qualitative interviews we got to understand with greater nuance sort of how the Nepali government is trying to address these multiple challenges. And where some of the gaps lie.

So one issue that was identified and kept coming up in interview after interview with government officials was the fact that reconstruction funds are highly restricted. So the number that was reported sort of in international media and within the donor community was 4 billion. This was the – you know 4 billion dollars was the pledged amount that donors promised to the Nepali government to help in the reconstruction effort. This is already less than the, far less actually than what was projected to be the total cost of reconstruction. But it's still a fairly impressive figure.

But what this figure kind of obscures is the fact that this is a very complicated landscape and mixture of different types of agreements. Many of which are attached to very specific reconstruction projects that don't leave a lot of opportunity for the Nepali government to innovate or to think about how to rebuild infrastructure in more efficient or more creative ways that might address other social and economic needs. So this was one of the major – this highly restricted sort of form of international aid was one of the main policy issues that emerged in the course of our qualitative research.

Another issue that came up was the fact that the Nepali government has particular job creation policies. And specifically sectoral strategies around stimulating the tourism industry, around stimulating the manufacturing industry through an agro processing strategy. But these are pretty much deed linked from the way that the government thinks about skill development and vocational training.

Skill development and vocational training is largely seen as an opportunity to sort of create pathways for people to enter what I would call survivalist entrepreneurship. So this is teaching women how to sew. Teaching men how to become plumbers. But it's not necessarily connected to some of these broader sectoral strategies that could actually promote people's entrance into higher productivity or formal economy occupations. So that was another sort of important policy gap that we identified.

We also found that this increasing reliance on remittances in the economy of Nepal is contributing to a kind of policy inertia around broader, long term strategies for economic development and contributing to a kind of inertia around more productive or innovative instruments to leverage remittance capital, both social and financial within the country.

So there are some sort of loose proposals in Nepal, for instance, to implement remittance bonds. But these don't really have a whole lot of political traction or they don't really have an advocate within the government. And they're also limited by the fact that there are other sort of major political challenges in Nepal. Which is the fourth point here.

Nepal, as many of you would be aware, is undergoing, is sort of witnessing this protracted political transition after the civil war that ended in 2007 and toward a more stable representative democracy. It's achieved a lot over those last, you know let's say ten years now. But one of the major issues is that there's this sort of awkward power sharing arranging right now between the major parties. And the government changes hands very frequently. So each time a new government comes in, policy priorities are reassessed and changed. And this really contributes to major challenges around implementation of long term policy strategies.

So I need to sort of speed up here because I know we're running out of time for the presentation portion of the webinar. But basically what we tried to do in the report, and I do hope that you will go and engage with it, is present a sort of redefined vision for reconstruction that can really focus on linking physical, social and economic infrastructures. So rather than just saying, okay, let's replace whatever was lost in terms of physical buildings and physical infrastructure, how can we think more broadly about reconstruction as an opportunity to build a more inclusive job rich economy? So this is, you know what Sonia and Neha sort of started off by talking about.

What I want to quickly focus on before I turn things back over to Sonia and Neha, is what does this really mean in the context of Nepal? What are we actually proposing in the report in terms of a redefined vision for reconstruction?

The first thing we're proposing is that the replacement of physical infrastructure be actually looked at as an opportunity to build better infrastructure that focuses on creating stronger economic linkages in the country. So we're talking in the report about the creation of local and national value chains that actually harness some of the economic possibilities in Nepal.

One of Nepal's kind of strategic advantages is that it has very diverse geographies with different kinds of economic potential. So some of the hilly and mountainous regions that are closer to where earthquake damage was most severe have the potential to grow some very kind of niche agricultural products that are unique to Nepal and could be quite successfully marketed in the international economy. And some of these southern regions of Nepal in the plains that have more capacity, more industrial capacity, could actually be places where those agricultural goods are processed and packaged and prepared for export to India given the proximity to the Indian border.

So this is just one example of how physical infrastructure could be used. The opportunity to rebuild physical infrastructure could be used to actually think about more strategic ways of promoting these economic linkages.

Another sort of key proposal that we put forward in the report is to institute a long term plan for quality jobs in construction. One of the main issues right now with the reconstruction effort is that individual households are actually kind of the key stakeholder in terms of employing a construction workforce. The burden of reconstruction actually falls mostly on individual households. But there is no labor market information

system to actually link those household employers to construction workers that are seeking jobs in the reconstruction effort.

So we talk about instituting, using, you know technology and other innovative tools to actually create a labor market information system. And to link workers to employment opportunities. And also to use this as an opportunity to institute stronger enforcement and compliance mechanisms within the construction sector so that we see higher quality jobs being created in this sector. Through the reconstruction effort.

I'll just quickly mention these last two points and then encourage you to go read the report and get some more information on what we mean. But we also talk about the importance of crafting economic development strategies that place human capital at the center. So this means aligning skill development priorities with sectorial strategies. It also means encouraging more policy coordination among ministries, as well as policy coordination between donors and the government. As well as enhancing participation of local governments in Nepal, which just recently had elections and, therefore, have a little bit of a stronger mandate right now in the crafting of these economic development strategies.

And finally, we talk about using innovative policy tools to really engage migrants and specifically returning migrants as partners in this redefined vision for reconstruction. So rather than just seeing migrant workers as people who will come back and spend money in the economy, rather than only seeing them as consumers, we also need to see migrant workers as potential producers and potential partners in building a more inclusive economy and in creating employment opportunities, high quality employment opportunities.

So I think I've gone a little bit longer than I intended to, but now I'm going to hand it back over to Sonia and Neha to talk a little bit more about the broader implications of the findings.

*Neha Misra:*

Thank you, Greg. This is Neha again. So just to build on what Greg was talking about in the migration sphere, what I was saying earlier, and Greg touched on this also, is that there really is kind of a short sightedness when governments are thinking of labor migration as a solution to unemployment, as a solution to development. It tends to be in low wage sectors, often very precarious, as Greg was saying, and exploitative. We're seeing this for Nepali migrant workers. I'm sure everyone has seen the stories of Nepali migrant workers in Qatar who are building the infrastructure for the World Cup in 2022. And the stories of forced labor and other things that we are hearing there. And we are seeing even when Nepali migrant workers are coming back, as Greg was saying, they are able to provide remittances back to their families, but most of it tends to

be, end up tends to be for household consumption. And we're not necessarily seeing people being able to come back and use the skills that they learned abroad to find better jobs in Nepal. Most of them have to migrate again in the same low wage sectors. And we're also not seeing necessarily the children doing better.

The other thing we're not seeing, and this happens globally and not just in Nepal, is governments' reliance on these remittances and reliance on migrant workers going back out to migrate is then not transformed into policies about creating decent work at home. And Greg just talked about that in Nepal.

And so what we were really excited about the findings of this report that came out is really making a connection between how the creation of decent work can really help with the economic and social development in Nepal. And so one of our key findings on the migration side is that the creation of decent work must be central to social and economic development strategies.

And as Greg was talking about what we mean by that, is really connecting migrant workers when they come back, the skills that they have learned, connecting them to jobs in the economy in Nepal. If there's reconstruction, for example, and construction workers are in high demand, whether it's for rebuilding homes or the larger, I saw one of the questions, larger infrastructure projects. You know rebuilding schools, rebuilding hospitals, roads, hydroelectric power, etcetera. There really needs to be a strategy and a plan within the Nepal government about how to connect returning migrant workers and the skills that they brought back into that.

And then just more broadly in terms of economic policy and labor migration, governments really need to be thinking about how do they harness the money, the remittance, the money that they're making off of remittances but also, as Greg was saying, the last point he just made, the money that migrant workers are bringing back for the creation of decent work at home. Instead of just, you know small scale things like sewing, etcetera, how do governments really place an emphasis on developing an economic plan in origin communities and use government resources but also using the resources of migrant workers?

So that's the second point on the slide. That governments should invest in origin communities and facilitate the use of remittances and other economic gains of labor migration as a way to promote economic development and the creation of high quality jobs. And this really means you know thinking long term and strategic and not just short term that we can make money from remittances off of labor migration.

The third point is that workers themselves and the organizations that represent them, sorry, such as unions, really need to be a part of the decision making and encouraged to invest in ways that support stable employment. As Sonia was saying at the beginning of our presentation, one of the failures that we've seen in other research that's been done on these issues and just in terms of government economic policy on labor migration reconstruction is they often don't talk to the workers themselves and they don't talk to unions. Unions are very good at negotiating with employers, understanding workplaces, understanding economies, what decent work means. Also have experience in engaging with governments on policy work. And they really need to be a stakeholder in economic policymaking and decision making that goes on.

In Nepal, the unions in Nepal actually do focus a lot on labor migration and migrant worker issues. Several of the unions in Nepal have gone to some of the GCC countries to look at a situation of workers. The Nepali migrant workers in those countries. Have worked to organize them and help them to try to push for decent work creation in the destination country so they understand what is happening for Nepali migrant workers abroad. They also know what's happening to them when they come back and they need to be stakeholders in sustainable employment decisions that are made.

Finally – [Coughing] – excuse me. Migrant workers, whether low wage or high skilled, come back with knowledge, expertise and skills that should be harnessed for local job creation. Migrant workers also need skill certification to leverage their acquired skills into better jobs at home.

One of the things that I found really fascinating with the results of the Nepal study was really the disconnect between all the different government agencies in Nepal. And what JustJobs Network found was that they weren't really talking to each other about, strategically about how to use the skills that migrant workers have in the different economic sectors that they're focusing on. There was really no plan about how to harness what skills migrant workers were bringing back.

You know we heard stories of Nepal actually bringing in migrant workers from other countries to fill some of those jobs. Instead of trying to build the skills of returned, use the skills of returned Nepali migrant workers. And that was a little bit shocking to me. Even when workers are migrating into what people often call low skill jobs, which are construction, for example, there is a lot of things that can be used when they come back in the sectors that Greg was talking about earlier. And there really isn't a plan right now to do that in Nepal. And that was one of the key findings that we found. That there could be a lot of benefit from harnessing the skills and the expertise that migrant workers bring back. And finding a

way to help them connect. The other thing that JustJobs Network found was that migrant workers didn't know how to connect to jobs in construction, in the construction sector in Nepal in reconstruction, for example. There just wasn't – those connections were not being made. And as Greg was saying earlier, for households and others that are involved in the reconstruction process, there was no connection for them being made to skilled construction workers in Nepal either. And that really needs to be focused on.

So I'll turn it over to Sonia now.

*Sonia Mistry:*

Thanks, Neha. So Greg did a really great job of laying out what some of the key findings and recommendations from the report were. And as Neha touched on for migration, these findings, many of them have important applications beyond just Nepal. And in relation to development and disaster recovery efforts, I wanted to highlight a few. Sorry. One second.

The first is that disaster recovery can be an opportunity to reimagine an integrated and holistic inclusive development plan. So rather than simply rebuilding or replacing physical infrastructure, the planning for rebuilding should take into account where some of the infrastructure gaps were previously and what opportunities there might be for improving people's lives with new infrastructure. So not just simply rebuilding the same problems from before, even if the buildings are more sound, but really taking into account where the previously existing infrastructure actually wasn't working for the communities.

So I've noted in the report, and as Greg described, integrated infrastructure development can enhance local or regional economies to support good job growth for more people. We don't want to simply replace the livelihoods that existed before, but actually connect recovery efforts to longer term development goals. So we should be asking questions like, how can recovery efforts help resolve gaps or barriers to inclusive growth and development?

So what we're advocating for is more than just building back better, because this isn't just about reducing vulnerability or increasing resilience. This is about thinking bigger and more holistically. So we must consider the more complete needs and opportunities in a country and enable more impactful disaster recovery, including through the creation of infrastructure that supports job growth in sustainable sectors.

The second point is that donor coordination and flexibility can be integral to supporting broader development goals. Through the research it became evident that while the Nepal government's won structural and practical challenges were limiting progress in reconstruction efforts, the fact that

much of the dedicated aid from donors , as Greg was describing, was tied to specific projects, this is constricting the ability to approach reconstruction more holistically. And it's completely understandable that donors would want to be very careful about making sure that their funds are actually going to their intended use, that we're minimizing corruption. But increased flexibility and more coordination would actually help have greater impact with those funds.

So third, reconstruction jobs, such as those in the construction sector, should help boost the welfare of affected communities not weaken protection. So one major mistake in recovery efforts is a weakening of labor and other protections or standards. Rebuilding means more than just rebuilding physical structures. If we're seeking to rebuild communities and livelihoods, then jobs must truly be good jobs. And what we mean by that is we're talking about jobs with full rights protections in line with national laws and international core labor standards, including freedom of association, collectively bargaining, occupational health and safety standards. We're also looking at jobs that include a living wage that allow families to be self-sufficient and pull themselves out of poverty and enable upward mobility.

Another key finding was that donors can support projects that protect worker rights, formalize employment and ensure that funds are not used on initiatives that end up actually exploiting workers. One positive example of a US government effort to do this actually was in a draft bill that was introduced in the Senate in July 2015 called the Nepal Recovery Act. The bill included language that prohibited the use of US funds in any construction efforts that used forced or child labor or unregistered recruitment agencies. The bill also promoted full time jobs that paid living wages and were in compliance with Nepal's national labor law, as well as **ILL** poor labor standards, including workplace health and safety. And this is really a great example of what we're advocating as the right way to provide disaster recovery support.

The last finding I really wanted to lift up was what Greg and Neha have both really emphasized is that effective skills training programs must go beyond traditional vocational training like sewing and beautician skills. Skills training programs should enable workers to secure good family sustaining jobs. They should match the anticipated skills needed in sectors that are targeted for development beyond just immediate disaster recovery. And consider the needs of all workers, including youth and women. Which too many of us it seems very obvious, but at the same time it's really worth repeating.

I wanted to just, because Solidarity Center is a worker rights organization, I wanted to emphasize the role of workers and unions because they're

often sidelined in development in disaster recovery efforts. And the role of workers and unions, they actually can play an important role. So there are three that I wanted to particularly highlight. The first is that workers and their unions must be considered integral stakeholders in disaster recovery and development planning. Workers are not separate from the affected communities. They actually make up these communities. And they're the ones who can and must play a key role in rebuilding or developing their communities and their own country.

Unions are the only legally protected organization of workers with the express mandate of representing the interests of workers. And they shouldn't be seen as a nuisance or another barrier or difficulty. But rather as critical civil society partners.

The second point is that workers are the best workplace monitors. And I can't emphasize this enough. Unions can be strong partners in helping to enforce labor rights standards, and through collective bargaining and advocacy efforts, unions have helped combat forced labor and child labor and even played important roles in improving workplace safety and compliance with labor standards.

And the third point I wanted to lift up is that unions can be excellent partners in reaching affected communities. Their members live in these communities. They can contribute to policies and programs that have greater buy-in. And they can support effective implementation of these programs.

So I'm going to turn it back to Neha to finish up with some of our top takeaways. And then I guess we'll move into question and answer.

*Neha Misra:*

Thank you, Sonia. So in the interest of time I'll go through these quickly. But our top takeaways. The first one. Disaster recovery should not – excuse me. Disaster recovery should be designed to drive inclusive growth. Reconstruction can be envisioned as a broader opportunity to spur the creation of decent work opportunities. And I think Sonia and Greg both did a great job of really talking about that. One thing that really not necessarily surprised me, but I found really interesting in the research results, is that there are a lot of potential opportunities in Nepal for decent work creations. There are sectors that could have long term growth potential. There are ways that, as Sonia was just talking about, that donors could play a role in making sure that reconstruction work is decent work. That donors can set an example of paying a living wage in a job. Making sure that they're a benefit in infrastructure projects that they're supporting for the worker, for example.

There are actual opportunities. And I think I saw some questions on this. And Greg can get into a little more specifically some sectors that had potential for higher economic impact. They are available there. And that disaster recovery really should be designed as way to show that decent work can be created in Nepal and that there are opportunities for inclusive growth.

The second top takeaway is labor migration must be a choice not an economic compulsion. Labor migration as a development tool must be part of a more holistic comprehensive economic strategy with the creation of quality jobs in countries of origin. And I'm going to link this to the third one.

Overreliance on migration can create policy inertia. Countries that rely heavily on migration as a pathway for youth workers often lack long term solutions to promote inclusive homegrown economies. This point is really important. As Greg as seeing earlier, we're seeing trends in the destination countries that Nepali migrant workers are going to of destination countries wanting to reduce the numbers of Nepali migrant workers going abroad or coming into their countries. And this creates a lot of volatility. We really believe that when governments rely as heavily as a country like Nepal does, on labor migration as an economic solution, it really opens up potential for volatility and is not a long term solution to the creation of decent work and inclusive growth in a country. Governments must focus as much on the creation of decent work in origin communities as they do on labor migration as a solution to sustainable development.

The fourth one, and Sonia really covered this well now include workers and their unions. Worker organizations must be treated as key stakeholders in policymaking in programs that affect them. We have seen time and time again when workers and the organizations that represent them are included in policymaking, the policies become much more sustainable and effective. In Nepal, you have some very strong unions that can play a very important role in ensuring decent work is created at home and supporting Nepali migrant workers abroad.

And finally, development must lead to good jobs. Inclusive development and poverty alleviation necessitate the creation of high quality jobs with full right protections. This is a great point to leave you all with. That development is not just about the creation of any job. When you create low wage exploitative precarious jobs that is not sustainable development. That is not something that should be promoted as a policy. We really need to see jobs that help migrant workers and their families, that Nepali workers in Nepal in their families be a part of inclusive growth, have access to resources and really be a part of sustainable development that supports their social and economic growth. Thank you.

*[End of Audio]*