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## Acting for Awareness: Street Drama Campaign on Safe Labour Migration

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Every year close to 200,000 men and women from Sri Lanka migrate on foreign employment through both regular and irregular channels of migration. Kalutara district situated in the western province in Sri Lanka is among the high migration districts in the country, where over 11,000 people migrated on foreign employment in 2017 according to the statistics of Sri Lanka Bureau of Foreign Employment.

Over the recent years the number of Sri Lankans migrating through irregular channels have gone up making them more vulnerable to harassment, abuse and deceit in the along the migration cycle. Among the main reasons for irregular migration is the lack of awareness and knowledge on safe labour migration during pre-decision making and also on the services provided by the Government to migrant workers and their families at the divisional, district and national level. In order to address this, Asia Lanka, a civil society organization supported by HELVETAS Swiss Intercooperation Sri Lanka under the Labour Migration Sri Lanka project funded by Swiss Agency for Development Cooperation conducted a street drama programme, called "*Think Again*" in collaboration with their street drama team. This street drama performed in Beruwala, Kalutara and Panadura towns on 5th, 6th and 10th April respectively attracting an enthusiastic audience of 1800 people on all three days.

The story of the street drama revolves around Kusuma who decides to migrate abroad to support her debt stricken family at hind sight. She meets an unlicensed sub agent in her village who promises her a job with a good pay and to prepare all documents for the journey including medical reports on her behalf. The sub agent also paints a rosy picture of the migrant workers he has supported to encourage her further and purposely avoids sharing grim realities of migration. Upon sub agent's departure, a conversation takes place between Kusuma, her husband Sethan and two villagers: Sudath and the school principal. They educate her on the importance of safe and informed migration to avoid falling into trouble due to fraudulent sub agents and agencies who deceive people. The school principal informs Kusuma on how she could seek support from the Development Officers working on foreign employment at the divisional secretary and the Sri

Lanka Bureau of Foreign Employment to safely migrate. The street drama, "Think Again" brings to the stage the underlying socio-economic issues that pushes a person to migrate, obstacles and challenges in the recruitment process, the role of intermediaries and on the government services that are available to migrant workers at the local level.



Following the end of the drama, audience members especially women, sort advice from staff at Asia Lanka on safe labour migration.

**“People were highly interested in the drama, they were taking pictures and recording it from their mobile phones. After the drama they came and told us they learned a lot from it and thanked us. They even asked us for more performances of the same drama.”**

### **Actor, Street Drama**

The street drama programme, received positive feedback from the audience in which an overwhelming majority said they were informed for the first time on the services of SLBFE and development officers through this drama. There were also requests from audience members when the drama was performed in Beruwala to conduct a similar street drama campaign to raise awareness on human trafficking.

**“Until I saw the street drama, I didn’t know anything about the services provided by development officers and the SLBFE for migrant workers.”**

**Audience member from Panadura**

What motivated Asia Lanka to start working on labour migration by conducting this street drama programme, was the knowledge they gained from the CSO capacity building training programme conducted by HELVETAS in 2017. During this training programme, Asia Lanka was introduced to various aspects of safe labour migration. These include: migration cycle, international and national policies on labour migration, support provided to migrant workers by SLBFE, issues faced by migrant workers and on how CSOs can collaborate with DOFEs to address issues of migrant workers and their families. To develop this street drama programme, Asia Lanka received guidance and funding from HELVETAS. Prior to the performance, HELVETAS conducted a special workshop for the cast of the drama to raise awareness on labour migration as well to sensitize them on the issues faced by migrant workers. And this workshop helped the actors to create the script and to act it out.

The content of the drama is in line with the media campaign on safe labour migration initiated by the Ministry of Telecommunication, Foreign Employment and Sports, in collaboration with the Sri Lanka Bureau of Foreign Employment, and supported by the Embassy of Switzerland in Sri Lanka.

Article compiled by Ajith Kaluarachchi and Chandula Kumbukage