

Circa 300 miliardi di dollari: a tanto ammontavano nel 2007 le rimesse mandate dai lavoratori migranti verso i paesi in via di sviluppo. E c'è già chi propone di considerarle come parte degli aiuti allo sviluppo.

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DEVELOPMENT: Migrant Earnings to Be Counted as Foreign Aid?

by Thalif Deen

UNITED NATIONS, Jan 25 (IPS) - As the flow of migrant earnings to developing nations continue to rise -- with an estimated high of over 300 billion dollars this year -- should these remittances be counted as part of development aid from the rich to the poor?

No way, says Ambassador Munir Akram of Pakistan, until recently chairman of the 130-member Group of 77 developing nations.

"We have to be very careful not to allow these remittances to be portrayed by the North as contributions on their part to development. They are trying to do this," he told IPS.

Akram said Pakistan receives about 4.5 billion dollars annually as remittances from workers worldwide.

As a general rule, he pointed out, those who are poorest among the migrants send the most money to their families back home.

"These are our people, our workers. We invested in them, they studied in our countries, they got their education, and they are sending a small proportion of their earnings back home," he said.

Akram said there is a move by Western donors to treat expatriate earnings as part of development assistance to developing nations.

He said these unnamed donors want to count remittances from North to South, but at the same time, they don't want count repatriation of profits -- from South to North.

"They will try and project expatriate remittances as an element of the contribution from the North to the South as a reason for not meeting other aid targets. We need to expose them," said Akram, the permanent representative of Pakistan to the United Nations.

So far, most of the rich nations have failed to meet the U.N. target of 0.7 percent of gross national product (GNP) as official development assistance (ODA) to the world's poorer nations.

Only five countries have consistently met -- and gone beyond -- the target set by the U.N. General Assembly in 1970. The five countries are Denmark (1.06 percent), Netherlands (0.82 percent), Sweden (0.81 percent), Norway (0.80 percent) and Luxembourg (0.7 percent).

Total ODA from the 30 members of the Paris-based Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) amounted to 104.4 billion dollars in 2006: down from 107 billion dollars in 2005.

In a report on the "State of the World's Children, 2008" released early this week, the U.N. children's agency UNICEF pointed out that the migration of skilled health professionals is a cause of "grave concern" in many developing countries.

"A point of particular alarm is the massive migration of health professionals from poor countries to rich countries (the so-called brain drain)," it said.

The UNICEF report also said "there is a growing concern that affluent countries are benefiting from the brain drain at Africa's expense" -- as doctors, nurses and midwives from Africa are migrating to Western nations, including Britain and the United States.

Recent statistics indicate that half of the medical school graduates from Ghana emigrate within 4.5 years of graduation and 75 percent leave within a decade.

In South Africa, more than 300 specialist nurses leave every month -- never to return, says UNICEF.

"As a result, there has been a growing movement calling for an end to the recruitment of health workers from Africa, or, if that proves unrealistic, as is likely the case, to conduct recruitment only in a way that is mutually beneficial," says UNICEF.

Meanwhile, the flow of migrant remittances to developing nations has continued to increase: from 193 billion dollars in 2005 to 276 billion dollars in 2006, according to the World Bank. The current prediction is that it will increase further, to over 300 billion dollars in 2007.

The Rome-based International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD), however, says that recorded remittances in 2006 were higher than World Bank figures, reaching over 301 billion dollars.

"These figures refer to money transferred through official channels," says Jean-Philippe Chauzy of the International Organisation for Migration (IOM).

Since a sizeable part of the remittances continue to be transferred via non-official channels -- mostly through the underground black market -- the overall remittances accruing to most developing nations are considered

far higher than both World Bank and IFAD figures, according to one U.N. official.

"Overall, in the past decade, remittances have grown faster than foreign direct investment (FDI) and official development assistance (ODA), doubling in several countries, and rising by 10-15 percent per annum over 2001-2005," Chauzy told IPS.

At the recently concluded Gulf Forum on Temporary Contractual Labour, which took place in the United Arab Emirates (UAE), India confirmed it remained the largest single recipient of remittances in 2006, with more than 26 billion dollars in migrant earnings.

And half of that amount -- over 13 billion dollars -- came from India's contractual workers, both skilled and unskilled, employed in the six countries that comprise the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), namely Bahrain, Oman, Qatar, Kuwait, Saudi Arabia and the UAE.

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