**INTERNATIONAL MIGRATION INITIATIVE**

**Portfolio Review Summary and Outcomes**

***Business Engagement in the Asia-Middle East Corridor***

**Elizabeth Frantz, Program Officer**

The first presidential level portfolio review relating to work of the International Migration Initiative was held on February 28, 2014.[[1]](#footnote-1) The review focused on a relatively new line of work in the Asia-Middle East corridor—the engagement of the private sector to prevent exploitation in the recruitment and employment of migrant workers.

The review helped crystalize our thinking and, although it did not result in immediate changes to IMI’s strategy, it provided valuable ideas for new avenues to explore and possible adjustments to make later in the year.

**Portfolio Background & Overview**

IMI’s early work in the Asia-Middle East corridor in 2010 and 2011 focused primarily on initiatives in countries of origin. In 2012 this was expanded to a broader set of efforts in both origin and destination countries that include legal interventions to increase migrants’ access to justice, support for grassroots organizing, work with mainstream and community media, and advocacy for policy reform. Grants and activities pertaining to the business engagement portfolio began in 2013.

The business engagement portfolio is currently carried out through IMI’s support of the field and through its concept, *Innovations in Recruitment.* Though the business engagement portfolio is new, it emerged as a result of careful recalibrations made since IMI’s inception in 2010. At present much of the work in this portfolio is with organizations outside of the migration field (e.g. Engineers Against Poverty) who have relevant expertise but do not focus on migration. By bringing in these actors, and engaging new ones, we aim to build the capacity of civil society *within* the field of migration to lead change in this area in the future.

**Strategy Adjustments With Respect to FSI Worldwide**

An important component of our business engagement is work with FSI Worldwide, an ethical recruitment company we are supporting. We have provided a recoverable grant for a pilot project in the United Arab Emirates to enable FSI to demonstrate an alternative model of ethical recruitment in the construction sector.

The core of FSI’s business has been built in the security sector. It has faced difficulty entering the construction sector and securing contracts due to the small scale of its operations relative to the needs of the industry. Chris asked whether, in retrospect, we would have supported FSI Worldwide in a different way in light of the challenges it has faced making headway in construction. IMI staff remains confident that FSI has the potential to be a powerful driver for less exploitative approaches to recruitment and trusts that it will be able to secure business in construction over time. However, in light of the challenges, we will explore alternative strategies through which FSI’s model could be promoted and popularized.

This includes:

* Empowering FSI to share its expertise and apply elements of its model to *existing* recruitment initiatives, rather than undertaking recruitment work directly. FSI Worldwide could do this, for example, by serving as management consultants to like-minded agencies or providing technical advice to government.
* Developing research to demonstrate the economic viability of FSI’s model in another sector of employment or in a project outside the Arab Gulf, for example in the United Kingdom, where FSI has an office and where there is interest from potential clients.

**IMI’s Role in Relation to External Actors**

The discussion brought into sharper focus two sets of questions:

* **When are our objectives best achieved through OSF-led operational work, and when are grantees better positioned to carry out work?** This question was raised in relation to IMI providing technical assistance on ethical recruitment in construction to quasi-governmental actors in Qatar. Engineers Against Poverty, or another partner specializing in assisting governments, may be better placed to carry this out. Alternatively, here may be a strong case for OSF’s direct action in other areas where it has expertise, such as access to justice. One issue that needs to be examined further is the role IMI should play vis-à-vis governments in this region. Staff will continue to weigh carefully the risks or advantages that direct engagement poses for other areas of OSF’s work and will continue to consult with the Arab Regional Office about this.
* **What are the pros and cons of serving on grantee boards?** Discussion focused on Elizabeth’s participation in the steering committee of FSI Worldwide’s new work in construction and the trade-offs of playing such a role. In playing a dual role as an advisor and funder, how can we ensure that we are able to maintain sufficient distance and obtain objective feedback about the organization in order to evaluate its work? Elizabeth explained that rather than a formal board of directors, the steering committee is an informal group without decision-making authority that advises the development of FSI’s work in Qatar. She does not believe her role on the steering committee hampers her ability to evaluate the organization in an objective manner, but she will bear this challenge in mind and continue to monitor the grantee’s progress through external observers who are able to offer fresh perspectives and critical feedback.

**Follow Up**

Engineers Against Poverty, one of IMI’s partners, serves as the secretariat of the Construction Sector Transparency Initiative (COST), a multi-stakeholder initiative formed with DFID’s support. There may be opportunities for a government agency such as DFID to provide assistance to the Qatari government on recruitment for the construction sector. Elizabeth will discuss this possibility with DFID.

IMI will explore ways to target the investment community as part of its business engagement work. We might, for example, target board members of major investors who could be in a position to press for change from the top. IMI also is exploring the possibility of adding someone from the business community to its Advisory Committee.

1. **In Person** **Participants:** Chris Stone (President, OSF – moderator); Maria Teresa Rojas (Director, IMI); Demetrios Papademetriou (Chair, IMI Advisory Committee); Elizabeth Frantz (Program Officer, Asia & the Middle East, IMI); Naomi Polin (Program Coordinator, IMI); Anthony Richter (OSF Associate Director/SMC Supervisor); Krizna Gomez (Presidential Fellow); Dan Sershen (Associate Director, Results Assessment, Strategy Unit); Daphne Panayotatos (Program Coordinator, Results Assessment, Strategy Unit)

   **Remote Participants:**Carolina Jimenez (Program Officer, Central America & Mexico, IMI/LAP); Simon Cox (Migration Lawyer, Open Society Justice Initiative); Anna Crowley (IMI incoming Program Officer, Central Asia & Russia) [↑](#footnote-ref-1)