



## IMPLEMENTATION STRATEGIES AND EXPERIENCES: LESSONS LEARNT FROM PREDO



Knowledge Management - Labour Migration Project Sri Lanka- Phase 111

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## Abbreviations

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CBO	Community Based Organisation
CSO	Civil society organisation
DS	Divisional Secretariat
DO -FE	Development Officer –Foreign Employment (under MFE, attached to the Divisional Secretariats - responsible for labour migration)
FBR	Family Background Report
FPMC	Family Progress Monitoring Chart
GN	Grama Niladhari (Village head, administrator)
GND	Grama Niladhari Division (lowest administrative structure; village)
LMPSL	Labour Migration Project Sri Lanka
MFE	Ministry of Foreign Employment
MIC	Migration Information Centre
NGO	Non-governmental Organisation
PREDO	Plantation Rural Education Development Organisation
SDC	Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation
SLBFE	Sri Lankan Bureau of Foreign Employment
ToT	Training of Trainers

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## **1. Introduction**

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Plantation Rural Education Development Organisation (henceforth referred to as “PREDO”) is an organization registered with the Social Service Department and working towards the improvement of the living conditions of the plantation workers and rural people. It has been recognized by the Central Provincial Council as a "Best performing" NGO in the plantation sector, for its work with children, early child development, gender promotion, conflict transformation and peace building. A member of many networks in the sector and at the national level, PREDO has been in partnership with SDC since June 2007.

PREDO is currently implementing SDC's safe labour migration project, predominantly working in the areas of safe labour migration information, financial literacy, psycho social support and grievance/complaints handling.

This report is based on the lessons learnt and experiences gained through the field visit made to PREDO – Bogawantalawa field office on 29.06.2016.

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## **2. District Information**

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PREDO currently implements the safe labour migration project in 3 Divisional secretariat divisions in the Nuwara Eliya District, namely, Kotmale, Ambagamuwa and Nuwara Eliya. Ambagamuwa covers a vast geographical area<sup>1</sup>. According to PREDO, approximately 270,000 Tamil speaking individuals reside in Ambagamuwa.

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## **3. Implementation strategy**

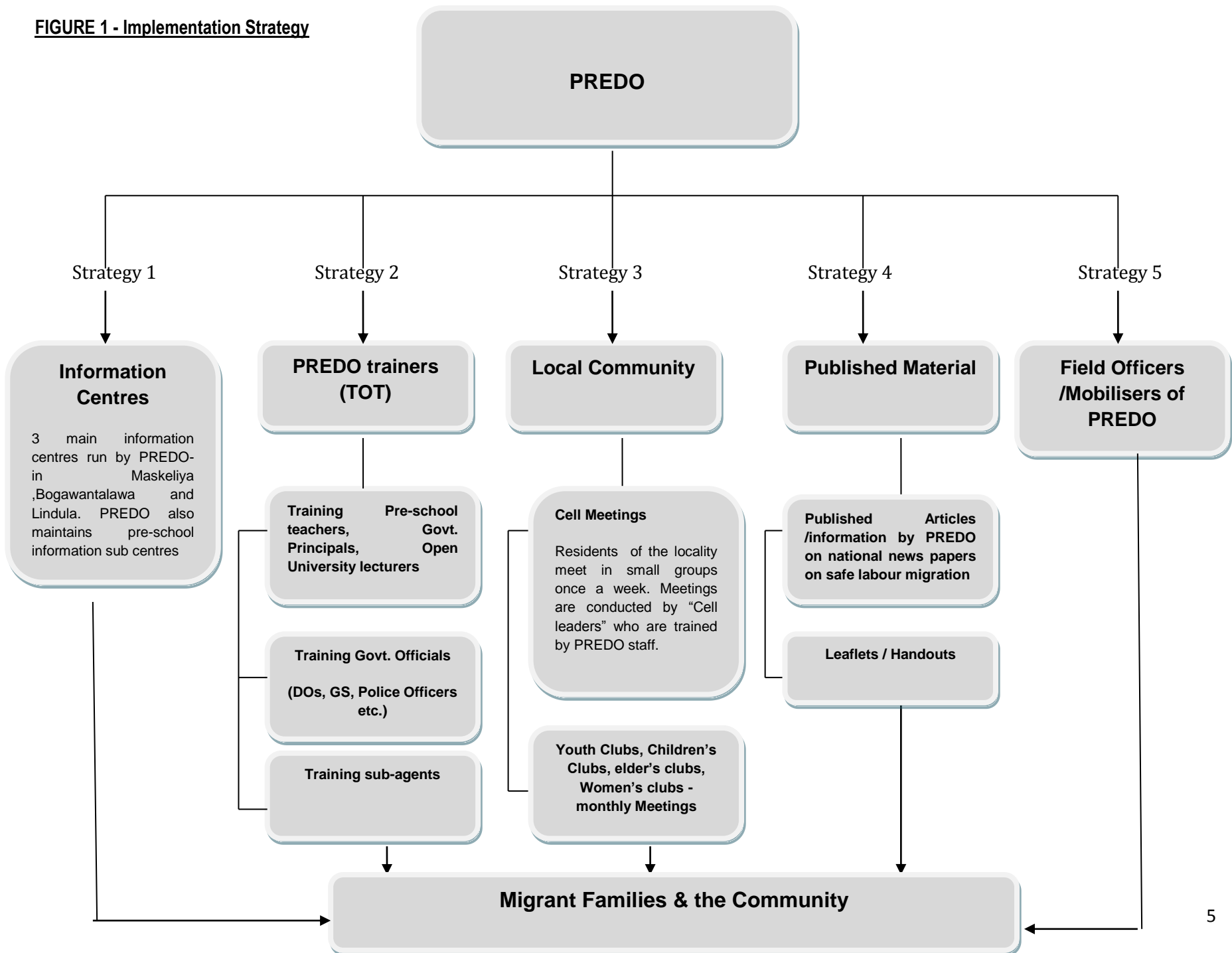
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PREDO has a unique and a well-established mechanism in place to disseminate information pertaining to safe labour migration. PREDO's project implementation strategy is as follows:

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<sup>1</sup> As per the Ambagamuwa DS division website, Total land area of Nuwara Eliya district is 1741.2 Sq kilometers and that of Ambagamuwa division is 477 sq kilometers. It consists of 67 GN divisions and 302 villages.

**FIGURE 1 - Implementation Strategy**



PREDO has its own paralegal, psycho-social and safe labour migration trainers. PREDO has trained 20 trainers on safe labour migration in order to provide training (TOT) to pre-school teachers, principals of government schools, state officials etc. PREDO conducts 4 hour training sessions once a month in each division that they are implementing the project.

### **(1.) Trained pre-school teachers, principals, state officials, Sub-agents**

- Pre-school teachers – They hold meetings once a month to prospective labour migrants. In Bogawantalawa, there are 28 pre-school teachers trained to provide safe labour migration information. Government principals have also been trained to disseminate safe labour migration information.

- Government officers do not appear to have an established mechanism in place to provide safe labour migration information. PREDO, maintains a good rapport with government officials in the locality and often invite them to participate when conducting programmes and meetings. It was reported that there have been instances where not only the DO-FEs, but also the police officers in the area have participated in such meetings/programmes. Building and maintaining such relationships with key stakeholders is of paramount importance when implementing the safe labour migration project in order to ensure sustainability even beyond the project period.

- PREDO has also trained sub-agents on safe labour migration. The relationship maintained by PREDO with the sub-agents have brought about positive changes. On a number of occasions sub-agents have referred cases to PREDO.

### **(2.) Local community**

- “Cell meetings”. Cell meetings usually target a few families/residents of a small locality. Meetings are conducted by the appointed leaders. They gather once a week to discuss migration related issues.

- PREDO further disseminates information through women’s clubs, youth clubs, children’s clubs and elders clubs meetings which are generally held on a monthly basis.

The aforementioned clubs and a number of cell groups are in existence in each division PREDO implements the labour migration project.

### **(3.) Information Centres**

- PREDO further disseminates information through 3 of their main Centres –in Maskeliya, Bogawantalawa and Lindula. PREDO also maintains pre-school information sub centres. Spacious preschools are used as information centres into order to avoid rent payments and to

ensure sustainability after the project period. These centres to some extent attempt to fill the deficiency of state Safe migration services not reaching the plantation sector.

#### **(4.) Published Material**

PREDO has published a large number of articles on national Tamil newspapers – providing pre-departure information for labour migrants. Beneath the newspaper article, PREDO's contact number is provided. PREDO provides safe labour migration information and receive complaints from various areas through this mechanism. Reportedly, on one occasion, PREDO referred a complaint received from an individual from Ampara to the SDC partner organization in Ampara, through this mechanism.

In addition, PREDO has also published a number of leaflets/handouts on safe labour migration.

#### **(5.) PREDO Staff**

PREDO, through its trained staff, mobilizers/field officers continue to engage in providing safe labour migration information to the community.

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## **4. Experiences with regard to Development Officers - Foreign Employment (DO-FEs)**

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2 development officers have been assigned to both Kotmale and Ambagamuwa divisions while in Nuwara Eliya, the number of DO-FEs deployed is 5.

Some of the challenges encountered by PREDO with regard to the DO-FEs based in Ambagamuwa are as follows:

- (i.) The number of DO-FEs assigned to Ambagamuwa Divisional Secretariat, is not sufficient to adequately address the issues of the migrant workers and their families in the respective division.
- (ii.) The DO-FEs are available in their respective divisional offices only on Mondays and Wednesdays. Estate workers find it difficult to meet these officers only on these 2 particular days due to work commitments in the plantation sector.
- (iii.) As the 2 DO-FEs are not conversant in Tamil. Hence, Tamil speaking labour migrant community experience difficulties in communicating and expressing their issues.

Due to the foregoing issues, many individuals are reluctant to approach the Divisional Secretariat Office in Ambagamuwa. Migrant workers often seek the support and assistance of PREDO to make interventions.

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## **5. Experiences with regard to the Family Background Report (FBR)**

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### **Current practice <sup>2</sup>:**

PREDO claims that FBR is no longer a requisite for migrant workers. Reportedly, this practice has come into force in Ambagamuwa, Kotamale and Nuwara Eliya Divisional Secretariat divisions 3 months ago. As per the new practice, prospective migrant workers are merely required to obtain a letter from the Estate Superintendent to the effect that it is possible for the individual concerned to return to work in the plantation sector after 2 years - upon his/her return to Sri Lanka. PREDO claims that they were informed of the new practice in place by the Divisional Secretariat office in Ambagamuwa.

As per the new practice, no provision is in place in relation to child care arrangements. Reportedly, Women with children under the age of 5 years are no longer prohibited from migrating for employment as domestic workers in the Nuwara Eliya District.

Nevertheless, it has also been reported by PREDO of certain instances where subagents themselves have prevented individuals from migrating as domestic workers upon taking the family background of the prospective migrant into consideration, despite the “temporary suspension” of the FBR.

There appears to be drastic differences in the implementation of the FBR in different DS divisions possibly due to lack of uniform interpretations and adequate instructions given by the state. Question arises as to how an initial circular issued by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs with specific instructions in relation to FBR can be interpreted and implemented in different geographical locations in a drastically different manner.

### **Previous Practice:**

When enquired about the previous practice in place with regard to obtaining a FBR, PREDO explained the procedure and main requirements – such as the provision for care arrangements, husband’s consent and the DO-FEs approval to the effect that the migrant worker has no children under the age of 5. Moreover, when enquired about the instances where the DO-FEs used to refuse issuing the FBR apart from the 5 years age limit/requirement of children, PREDO informed that generally women with differently-abled children (irrespective of child’s age) and women with young unmarried daughters were often denied of the FBR.

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<sup>2</sup> Position as at June 2016



When enquired about separated women and women who are unable to obtain the consent from spouses, PREDO informed that sub-agents often circumvent this requirement by forging the signature of migrant's husband.

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## **6. Grievance Handling**

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PREDO offers paralegal advice through legal mobile services/legal clinics. Advice and information in relation to grievances are also provided by pre-school teachers. PREDO has a well-established mechanism to document/record, relevant details of all complaints received. The records were well organized, easily accessible and properly managed.

PREDO not only receives and refers the complaints to SLBFE, but also directly liaises and lodges complaints at the relevant Police station on behalf of the migrant worker in matters involving abuse/harassment by employer or fraudulent activities carried out by recruitment agents. Moreover, PREDO directly liaises with Sri Lankan embassies in destination countries regarding complex complaints involving migrant workers.

There is no decentralised SLBFE office in Nuwara Eliya District to receive complaints of migrant workers. Therefore, migrant workers often seek the assistance of PREDO to lodge complaints. Reportedly, Migrant workers are required to attend the inquiry at SLBFE-Colombo on several occasions. Having to travel long distances on several days during the period the complaint is heard, not only inconveniences the migrant worker but also adversely affects their day-to-day activities.

During the discussion held with PREDO it transpired that Tamil interpreters are not provided by the SLBFE Colombo, during the inquiry/conciliation. Therefore, the Tamil speaking migrant worker community is often reluctant to attend the inquiries held at SLBFE as they do not understand the process or the questions posed to them during the hearing/inquiry.

Absence of recruitment agents during the inquiries is another factor which often prolongs the inquiries. It is the migrant worker who encounters enormous difficulties as she/he has to constantly travel to SLBFE Colombo to attend the inquiry. Reportedly, another Challenge encountered in the process of grievance handling is the practice of changing conciliators by SLBFE while the matter is taken up for inquiry/hearing. Consequently, the decision will be ultimately made by a completely different conciliator who is only partially familiar with the facts of the complaint lodged and who has not even been present during the initial stages of the inquiry. It is reported that SLBFE has a practice of appointing different conciliators on different dates to adjudicate a single complaint lodged.

The most common types of complaints lodged by migrant workers in the Nuwara Eliya District , as described by PREDO include cases involving lack of communication, physical abuse, non-payment of wages, problems with recruitment agencies, deaths, sexual exploitation in safe houses, Police cases lodged abroad etc.

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## **7. Psycho-Social Support**

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PREDO opines that the psychological impacts on the families of migrant workers caused as a result of a spouse/parent migrating, are of grave concern. It is reported that the family members of the migrant worker often tend to neglect going to work or school. Child abuse, early child marriages appear to be prevalent in the area as a result of the mother migrating for employment.

No adequate psycho social mechanism has been made available by the state authorities. For instance, one psychiatrist visits Bogawantalawa hospital to deal with such cases once in every three months. However, communication is challenging due to language barriers.

PREDO's staff has received sufficient training to provide psycho social support to the migrant workers and their families. PREDO refers serious cases requiring psycho social support to the government hospital in the area. However, no state mechanism is available to address issues of serious nature. Although there are psychosocial officers appointed by the government they are not able to converse well with the migrant community owing to language barriers. It is reported that it takes 4 hours for a resident of Bogawantalawa to travel from Ambagamuwa Divisional Secretariat office at Ginigathhena. Migrant worker may require several sessions of Psycho social support. Having to travel 8 hours up and down to receive psychosocial assistance is challenging for the migrant worker.

There are children's clubs<sup>3</sup> in 675 GN Divisions. During the meetings children are made aware of their rights, the value of education, etc.

From January 2016-June 2016, 43 cases involving children who require psycho social support have been identified by PREDO. PREDO has a well-established mechanism to document/record relevant details of all the cases requiring psycho social support. The records were well organized, easily accessible and properly managed.

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## **8. Financial Literacy**

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PREDO's staff has received sufficient training on financial literacy. PREDO officers make visits to migrant workers' houses and make them aware of managing remittances. Families of Migrant workers are advised to maintain two accounts for expenditure and savings. They are further advised to maintain a separate book, listing out their expenses. As a result, migrant families are progressively becoming more cautious of their expenditure & savings.

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<sup>3</sup> Consists of children of 6-18 years.

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## **9. Manuals/ Documents developed**

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PREDO has developed its own Safe Labour Migration Manual – Training of Trainers (TOT). In addition, a number of leaflets/handouts have also been published in relation to safe labour migration.

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## **10. Unique experiences & strategies**

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PREDO has developed unique implementation strategies. Disseminating information through pre-school teachers and sub-agents can be viewed as a more practical and sustainable mechanism for disseminating information to the migrant workers as well as the members of the community.

PREDO's trainers have provided comprehensive training to pre-school teachers on safe labour migration. Pre-school teachers hold monthly meetings to disseminate such information to the local community. Furthermore, owing to the training received, pre-school teachers are in a better position to identify children of migrant families who are in a vulnerable situation and provide them with required psycho-social support. They not only provide assistance to such identified children, but also extend their support to the migrant workers and their family members in the areas of providing pre-departure information, psycho social support, grievance handling etc. Since they are working as pre-school teachers, they are in a position to engage their activities at the grass root level, thus ensuring the sustainability even beyond the project period. Migrant families as well as the other individuals in the locality would continue to approach them seeking their advice with regard to labour migration. Furthermore, pre-school teachers will continue to refer Complaints and issues of serious nature to PREDO.

The Introduction of Family Progress Monitoring Chart (FPMC) has encouraged the spouse of the migrant worker to take the responsibilities seriously. FPMC has helped in improvement of child welfare and protection, proper handling of foreign remittances and in strengthening family relationships.

PREDO has further maintained close links with the sub-agents. They have been adequately trained by PREDO trainers on all aspects pertaining to safe labour migration. Therefore, sub-agents are often encouraged to conduct their activities in a more ethical manner reducing room for irregular or clandestine migration. Owing to the close rapport maintained with the sub-agents, there have been instances where subagents themselves referred certain cases to PREDO.

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## **11. Conclusion**

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PREDO has a well-established, sustainable mechanism to disseminate information to the migrant workers and their families. Through pre-school teachers and the various clubs formed, migrant workers receive adequate information/advice to make sound & well informed decisions and to address their issues. Despite the absence of a SLBFE office in the Nuawara Eliya District, PREDO has taken the initiative to receive complaints and refer them to SLBFE Colombo. PREDO further provides psycho social support through its officers and pre-school teachers. Information pertaining to remittances management is also provided to the migrant workers through the well-established cluster system in place.