

A RESEARCH FORUM ORGANIZED BY THE COLLEGE OF ALICE & PETER TAN IN COLLABORATION WITH THE
ASIA RESEARCH INSTITUTE AND THE FASS SOCIAL SCIENCE AND POLICY CLUSTER

MEETING MIGRANT'S NEEDS: SHARING KNOWLEDGE FROM RESEARCH AND PRACTICES

15TH SEPTEMBER 2018
NGEE ANN KONGSI AUDITORIUM
UNIVERSITY TOWN, NUS

0900 - 0915

OPENING REMARKS

0915 - 1045

PANEL 1: MAKING WORK VISIBLE

Moderated by: Mr Chan Kok Hoe, NUS Economics

Speakers:

- Mr Rajiv Khandelwal, Aajeevika Bureau;
- Mr Sangeeth Sugathan, Centre for Migration and Labour Solutions, Aajeevika Bureau
- Ms Charmaine Yap and Dr Tamera Fillinger, Transient Workers Count 2
- Ms Kellynn Wee, Asian Migration Cluster, Asia Research Institute

1045 - 1100

TEA BREAK

1100 - 1230

PANEL 2: MAINTAINING MIGRANT HEALTH AND WELL-BEING

Moderated by: Assoc Prof Nicholas Hon, NUS Psychology

Speakers:

- Dr Shawn Vasoo, HealthServe
- Dr Pavitra Mohan, Health Services, Aajeevika Bureau
- Ms Kristel Acedera, Asian Migration Cluster, Asia Research Institute

1230 - 1330

LUNCH

1330 - 1430

PANEL 3: RECOGNISING MIGRANT HOUSEHOLDS AND COMMUNITIES OF ORIGIN

Moderated by: Asst. Prof. Yasmin Y. Ortiga, SMU, School of Social Science

Speakers:

- Ms Priyanka Jain, Centre for Migration and Labour Solutions, Aajeevika Bureau
- Dr Chand Somaiah, Asian Migration Cluster, Asia Research Institute

1430 - 1530

TEA & NETWORKING

This forum brings together NUS scholars and CAPT community partners invested in understanding and alleviating the challenges that migrant workers face. The forum will include non-profit organizations that work with internal and international migrants as well as academics who study the issue of gender and migration, occupational health, and precarious work.

Programme

8:30 – 9:00: REGISTRATION

9:00 – 9:05 WELCOME ADDRESS

A/P Adeline Seow, Master, College of Alice and Peter Tan

9:05 – 9:15 OPENING REMARKS

A/P Reuben Wong, Director of Studies, College of Alice and Peter Tan

9:15 PANEL 1: MAKING WORK VISIBLE

Moderator: Mr Chan Kok Hoe, NUS Economics

This panel will highlight the challenges faced by migrant workers caught in precarious work conditions often invisible to the general public. Presentations will feature the double-edged sword of using documentation as a means of making work visible and protecting migrants from possible exploitation.

9:15 – 9:30 MIGRANT AND THE CITY: EVIDENCE AND POLICY INSIGHTS ON LABOUR MARKET PRACTICES AND URBAN GOVERNANCE IN INDIA

Speakers: Mr Rajiv Khandelwal, Co-Founder and Executive Director, Aajeevika Bureau); Mr Sangeeth Sugathan, Research Executive, Centre for Migration and Labour Solutions (CMLS), Aajeevika Bureau

This paper delves into three of India's largest cities – Mumbai, Ahmedabad and Surat, bringing together the experiences of workers from across construction, textile, small manufacturing and waste recycling industries. The research in Mumbai explores the working conditions of migrant workers in the very dense Kurla cluster where thousands remain trapped inside small repair and recycling units. Evidence from India's largest powerloom cluster in the city of Surat exposes the virtual incarceration of workers in deafening production units and sub-human dormitory spaces. A study of living conditions of migrant workers in Ahmedabad city explains the contestation of low and erratic wage incomes, demanding work cycles with unaffordable housing options that push migrant workers to living on roadside pavements and under flyovers. The evidence from these locations is extended to derive policy implications, that have resonance with the larger problem of governance and labour protection across the developing world.

9:30 – 9:45 MANDATORY ELECTRONIC PAYMENT OF SALARIES FOR MIGRANT WORKERS

Speaker: Ms Charmaine Yap and Dr Tamera Fillinger, Transient Workers Count 2

Singapore is quickly becoming a cashless economy and very soon public transport will accept electronic payment only. Yet, Work Permit holders who are the lowest paid and most vulnerable group of employees are not yet required to be paid electronically.

When workers are paid by cash, there is no reliable record of payment making it difficult for the government to resolve salary disputes. Electronic payment of salaries through bank transfer creates a paper trail allowing both employers and employees to prove their claims when disputes arise. Given the slew of initiatives by the government, banks, and NGOs that make electronic payment for migrant workers easier, the time is ripe for legislation to require that all Work Permit holders be paid electronically.

This presentation will highlight the evidential difficulties that arise when Work Permit holders are paid in cash. It will also provide an overview of the developments in policy debate and initiatives, followed by a discussion of the remaining barriers to mandatory electronic payment.

9:45 – 10:00 “NO MONEY, NO TALK”: THE DEBT-FINANCED MIGRATION OF INDONESIAN DOMESTIC WORKERS TO SINGAPORE

Speaker: Ms Kellynn Wee, Research Associate, Asia Research Institute

Over the past thirty years, Indonesian women have moved to Singapore to work as migrant domestic workers. Lacking capital, they migrate based on a debt-financed migration system: instead of paying their costs upfront, they take on “loans” from employers and agents and pay back their recruitment fees by working 6-9 months for little to no salary. There have been growing concerns about the hefty sums that migrant women pay in order to secure a job, sparking calls for a move towards a “zero recruitment fees” system.

Based on a two-year research project on the migration industry, this presentation shows how debt-credit relations and the gendered nature of women’s migration contribute to the inflation of migrant women’s recruitment costs. Speculative “bids” and “bets” are extended across the migration industry in order to secure tentative labour flows. This presentation also shows how, in order to avoid these tangled debt-credit relations and minimize their migration costs, some migrant women are adopting irregular or “alternative” migration routes in order to circumvent state-sanctioned migration pathways.

10:00 – 10:45 DISCUSSION AND Q&A, PHOTO TAKING

10:45 – 11:00: TEA BREAK

11:00 PANEL 2: MAINTAINING MIGRANT HEALTH AND WELL-BEING

Moderator: A/P Nicholas Hon, NUS Psychology

This panel will focus on the threats to migrant workers' well-being, and the different strategies that NGOs and migrants themselves had taken on in maintaining physical and mental health.

11:00 – 11:15 MENTAL HEALTH ISSUES AMONG MIGRANT WORKERS

Speakers: Dr Shawn Vasoo, HealthServe

Low-wage migrant workers are vulnerable to healthcare inequities. We sought to identify potential barriers to healthcare and risk factors for mental health issues in non-domestic migrant workers in Singapore, and identify high-risk subgroups. We identified gaps in non-domestic migrant workers' knowledge of healthcare coverage, and substantial financial barriers to healthcare. The Bangladeshi population in our study was at higher risk of such barriers and psychological distress. These represent areas for further research and intervention.

11:15 – 11:30 TOXIC LIVELIHOODS: THE BURDEN OF DISEASE, ACCIDENTS AND UNDER NUTRITION AMONG MIGRANTS

Speaker: Dr Pavitra Mohan, Director, Health Services, Aajeevika Bureau & Secretary, Basic HealthCare Services

Costs from extractive work and living conditions are directly absorbed by the bodies of migrant workers, translating into poor health and nutrition status. The presentation maps this physical toll in terms of disease, accidents and under nutrition, spanning across migrants from the states of Rajasthan, Gujarat and Maharashtra in India. The presentation argues that the debilitated nature of migrant workers' bodies emerge from the industry's reluctance to bear the costs of their safety and health, as well as the country's poor public health infrastructure that is doubly exclusionary of migrant populations. In addition to bringing forth evidence on ill health, lack of basic safety and under-nutrition among migrants and the environments they work and live in, this presentation will delve into policy and practice solutions that show potential of improving the health profile of some of the poorest, laboring communities of the country.

11:30 – 11:45 ON CARE VIA MOBILE PHONE SCREENS: LABOUR MIGRATION AND THE NEGOTIATION OF EMOTIONAL HEALTH THROUGH LONG-DISTANCE COMMUNICATION

Speaker: Ms Kristel Acedera, Research Assistant, Asia Research Institute

The complex and unparalleled migration flows within and beyond Asia have rendered family members to be geographically apart for long stretches of time. This period of separation is often characterized by precarity and uncertainty for the migrants and their left-behind family members due to labour and employment practices that create job insecurity, delayed family reunions, amongst others. Amidst the moral panics that labour migration is tearing families apart, the advancements in communication technologies—especially mobile phones—have become ‘lifelines’ for migrants and their families.

Based on a large scale and longitudinal study involving both household surveys and in-depth interviews in the Philippines, this paper aims to explore the central role of mobile communication technologies in migrant and transnational family life. Using empirical evidence from the perspective of left-behind carers and children, it explores how care and social support from the homeland are mediated through communication technologies. We analyze how these informal mechanisms of support enable (or, at times, disable) the way migrants navigate the mental and emotional stresses of labour migration.

11:45 – 12:30 DISCUSSION AND Q&A, PHOTO TAKING

12:30 – 1:30: LUNCH

1:30 – 2.30 PANEL 3: RECOGNISING MIGRANT HOUSEHOLDS AND COMMUNITIES OF ORIGIN

Moderator: Dr Yasmin Y. Ortiga, Assistant Professor of Sociology, Singapore Management of University

While much attention has been placed on migrants within their host societies, researchers have long argued that migration also impacts those who have never left. This panel features research that seeks to understand the issues and perspectives of migrants’ families within their countries of origin.

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1:30 – 1:45 GOING BACK HOME: SOURCE AREAS AS THE PRISM TO MIGRATION OUTCOMES

Speaker: Ms Priyanka Jain, Programme Manager, Research and Knowledge, CMLS, Aajeevika Bureau

For all of the difficulties faced by migrants at work, does engagement with urban spaces and labour markets eventually help the poor migrate out of poverty? For internal circular migrants, this question invokes a close and multi-pronged investigation into the life-cycle of a migrant household, embedded in the socio-historical context of the larger community that the household is a part of. This presentation focuses on the experience of tribal communities from southern Rajasthan, that are among the poorest and most dispossessed in the country. It brings together insights from various micro-studies, surveys and life-history analyses of migrant households from the region to unravel the intra-household and inter-generational outcomes from migration. The presentation emphasizes on the labour and health of various members of a migrant household, particularly its women and children. It argues that these factors should be viewed as key coordinates of the condition under which labour migration can have a poverty alleviating impact for the poor.

1:45 – 2:00 GENDER, CAREWORK & ASPIRATIONS OF LEFT-BEHIND YOUTH IN INDONESIA

Speaker: Dr Chand Somaiah, Postdoctoral Fellow, Asia Research Institute

Family or parental migration projects are often conducted for the sake of the children, to enable better futures under harsh economic circumstances. Drawing upon qualitative interviews from the Child Health and Migrant Parents in Southeast Asia (CHAMPSEA) Wave 2 project – where migration's impact on the children, spouses and families left-behind (as a result of one or both parental migration) is explored more broadly – here we focus on investigating recalibrated, gendered carework and envisioned futures for migration or staying from the perspective of left-behind young women. Fieldwork was conducted in two rural migrant-sending villages in East Java, Indonesia. Lived experiences of left-behindness are studied to understand how this might affect pursuits of alternative livelihoods within cultures of migration. Freedoms, constraints, ambitions, and the distinctions between caring *about* from a distance, and everyday embodied, caring *for* is investigated from the perspectives of migrants' children and their carers.

2:00 – 2:30 DISCUSSION AND Q&A, PHOTO TAKING

2:30 – 3:30: TEA BREAK AND NETWORKING

SPEAKERS

Rajiv Khandelwal is Co-Founder and Executive Director of Aajeevika Bureau. In this role he oversees the organisation's strategies, programmes, liaison, fundraising and capacity building functions. Over the course of his 30 year career, Rajiv has held leadership roles in a range of non-profit organizations, implementing programmes, conducting research and providing advice and guidance to NGOs, donors and government in Rajasthan. Rajiv worked for many years with the tribal communities of Southern Rajasthan, implementing large scale agricultural change programmes. The idea of Aajeevika Bureau took seed at this time, when Rajiv saw a significant change in livelihoods from farming to wage labour. Rajiv was named an Ashoka Fellow (2005) and India Social Entrepreneur of the Year (2010). He holds a degree in rural management from the Institute of Rural Management, Anand.

Sangeeth Sugathan is Research Executive at Centre for Migration and Labour Solutions, Aajeevika Bureau. He anchors multiple Action Research Projects on understanding and improving housing conditions of seasonal migrant workers, building evidence on time poverty and labour burden experienced by women migrant workers in the construction industry. He has two years of experience in the development sector. He earned a Bachelor's degree in Economics and Political Science from St. Stephen's College, Delhi University, and a Master's in Development from Azim Premji University, Bangalore. Sangeeth previously volunteered with Pradan (Professional Assistance For Development Action), a community-based organization to understand the root causes of distress migration in the tribal belts of Chattisgarh and Maharashtra. Sangeeth enjoys focusing on informal labour and migration topics.

Charmaine Yap is a volunteer with the TWC2 research subcommittee. She has worked with other local and regional migrant worker NGOs including Healthserve, HOME, and Justice Without Borders. Charmaine taps on her research and casework experience to support her advocacy work on migrant worker issues in Parliament as a Legislative Assistant of MP Louis Ng.

Tamera Fillinger teaches at the SMU School of Law as adjunct faculty and helps manage TWC2's legal clinic assisting workers with their injury and salary claims. She is also part of the TWC2 research subcommittee and is one of the authors of "Labour Protection for the Vulnerable: An Evaluation of the Salary and Injury Claims System for Migrant Workers in Singapore"
<http://twc2.org.sg/2017/06/29/labour-protection-for-the-vulnerable-challenges-and-recommendations/>

Kellynn Wee is a Research Associate in the Asian Migration cluster at the Asia Research Institute, National University of Singapore. Her research interests include the migration industry and migration brokerage; the gendered dynamics of labour migration; and social movements and civil society.

Dr Shawn Vasoo is a Consultant in the Department of Infectious Diseases at Tan Tock Seng Hospital and the National Centre for Infectious Diseases. He graduated from the National University of Singapore in 2001, and further trained Infectious Diseases and Clinical Microbiology. He has been involved in migrant care as a volunteer doctor since 2002 and currently is one of the doctor-volunteer coordinators at the Karunya Community Clinic, and he also volunteers at HealthServe.

Pavitra Mohan is Director of Aajeevika Bureau's partner, Basic Health Services, providing high-quality, low cost health services to the most vulnerable communities. With over 18 years of clinical, research and teaching experience, Pavitra co-founded Basic Health Services in 2013 with Dr Sanjana Mohan. Previously, Pavitra worked at UNICEF's India Country Programme for nine years, leading its child health programmes across India. He taught in the Rabindra Nath Tagore Medical College in Udaipur and worked at Action Research and Training for Health (ARTH), a leading public health NGO. Pavitra is a Fellow with the prestigious National Neonatology Forum of India. Dr Pavitra trained as a doctor at Delhi University and holds a Masters in Public Health from the University of North Carolina.

Kristel Acedera is a Research Assistant in the Asian Migration cluster at the Asia Research Institute. She holds an M. Soc Sci degree in Geography from the National University of Singapore. Her current research interests explore how intimacies of transnational familyhood unravel in and through the digital spaces and temporalities of communication technologies.

Priyanka Jain leads the research programme at the Centre for Migration and Labour Solutions (CMLS). She provides oversight of CMLS' research projects, which examine a range of cross-cutting labour migration issues. Priyanka also brings significant experience in research training of practitioners working with migrant communities. Previously, Priyanka worked as a public servant with the Singapore government's Economic Development Board. She holds a Masters degree in Development Studies from IDS, University of Sussex and a BsC in Economics from SMU.

Chand Somaiah is a Postdoctoral Fellow in the Asian Migration cluster at the Asia Research Institute, National University of Singapore. She received her PhD in Sociology from Macquarie University. Her research interests include gendered, classed and intersectional experiences of (im)migration, (im)mobilities, intimate citizenship practices, carework, everyday transnationalism, kinwork, emotions and circulations of care. She is currently working collaboratively on the mixed-method longitudinal Child Health and Migrant Parents in Southeast Asia (CHAMPSEA) Wave 2 study (P.I. Professor Brenda Yeoh) which is investigating the longer-term impacts of parental absence on children from sending communities of international labour.
