



Mobile Phones and Migrant Workers in Malaysia

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What do we know about migrant workers?

- Influx of migrant labor in growing Asian economies
 - \$ 108.1 billion total remittance inflows in developing Asia (2007)
- 1.8 million in Malaysia
- 16% of Malaysia's total employed workforce
- 500,000 to over 1 million undocumented



What do we want to know more of?

Information, communication
needs

Social networks

Interests, aspirations, and
barriers to these

Insights on useful services

Methods

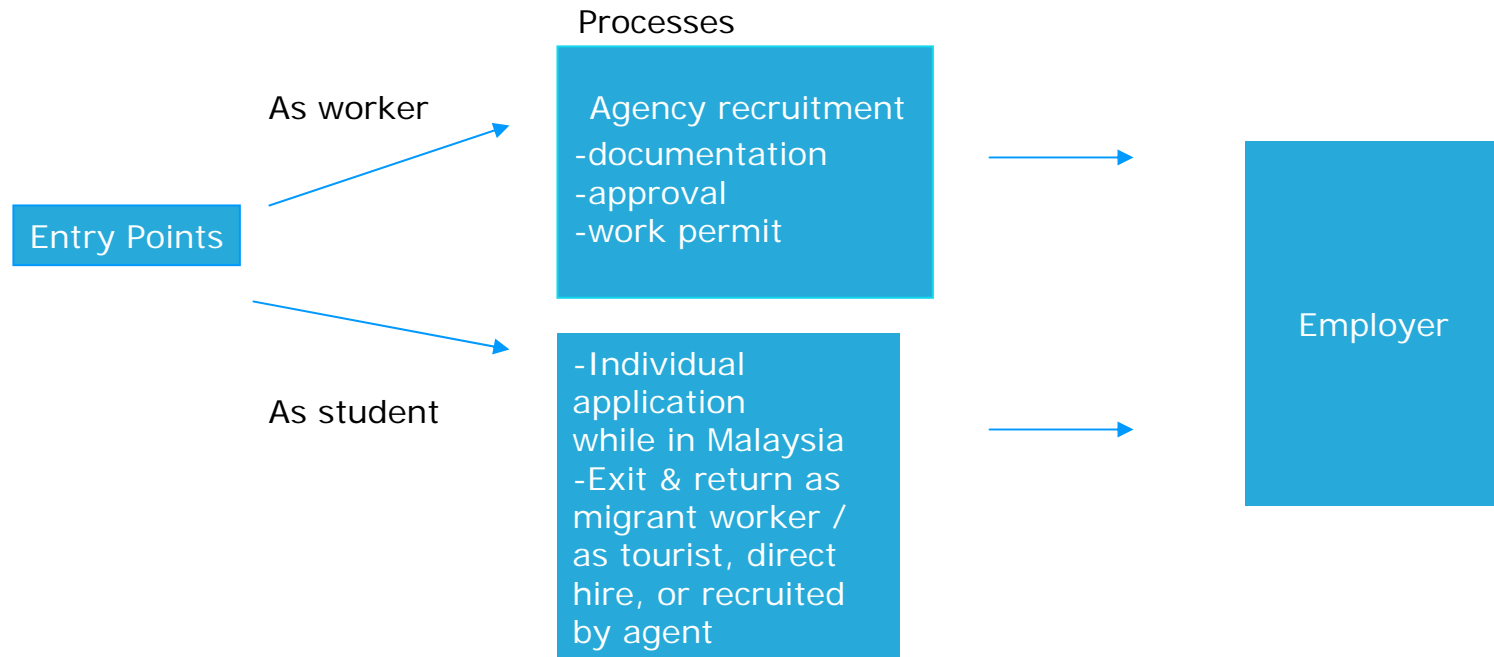
- In-depth Interviews- 24 individuals
- Context interviews
Three (3) recruitment agencies dealing with Bangladeshi, Filipino, Indonesian manpower needs in Malaysia
- Photos taken by respondents



Profile	Description
Nationality	Bangladeshi (8) Indonesian (8) Filipino (8)
Gender	Female (8) Male (16)
Age	18-45
Industry	Construction Services
Working Status	Contractual
Length of Stay	1-2 years > 2 years
Mobile Phone	User

About the Migrant Worker

Getting a job in Malaysia



The first month upon arrival of the migrant worker is a crucial transition period.

Agents need to get permit/ call-in visa for workers. Legalizing stay and getting the worker into the employer's hands is key. On the part of the migrant worker, homesickness, adjustment to new environment and communication are key concerns.

"First month I always homesick, feel lonely. I wanted to go back. I just try to be patient want to talk to them (family back home)." (Josette)

Migrant concerns and coping mechanisms

- Communication
 - Safety in work place, accommodations, risks in going out, even on the way to work
 - Salaries, food and living conditions, documentation
 - Over-working, praying, borrowing, and having side business as coping mechanisms
- *Communication is first problem. I try and learn. I can speak a little Malay. I have an American employer. (Gina, Filipino)*
 - *Sometimes companies do not provide them work. No food. Sometimes when a company needs only 200 people, they bring in 1000 people and that's problem. Their boss did not provide salary and food to eat. (Munna, Bangladeshi)*
 - *Sometimes I overdo the work till the extent that my employer says "enough, it's good enough already to me." (Mella, Filipino)*



Time – constraints and opportunities

- Restrictions on time and mobility
 - Time as a precious commodity
 - Pockets of free time – after lunch, night time, and Sundays
 - Sometimes use is related to self-fulfillment or self-expression
- *I have no free time. It is because I work non stop. (Virginia, Filipino)*
 - *I only have free time during lunch time, like this 1-2pm. Normally I'm free only Sunday. (Abdul Kahar, Indonesian)*
 - *I teach Bahasa Melayu in FWRC for almost 3 years until now. (John, Filipino)*



Mobile devices and usage

Mobile devices and usage of services

- Almost all acquired own mobile phone in Malaysia
- Many have simple handsets, also at the receiving end (home country)
- Limited competence on mobile settings and limited time and social networks for helping out
- More advanced handsets and usage among the males, and among the youth
- Reasons for calling:
 - Miss their families (emotional)
 - Business or work-related
 - Follow-up of money transfers and inability to make transfers
 - Birthdays, special occasions
- *I have two phones, one given by the employer (Maxis) and one private (DiGi). (Mella, Indonesian)*
- *I cannot send pictures to my children because my children's handset are not very high technology. (Cory, Filipino)*
- *I dont have time to go to DiGi centre for settings. I am not connected yet. So I just call and SMS. (Elvira, Filipino)*
- *My phone is much updated. I have everything like MMS. There is nothing I can't do. (Nafik, Indonesian)*



Media Consumption

Limited media consumption

- Lack of devices and shared devices
 - Most popular is TV
 - some usage of radio, newspapers and games
 - Taste for local content from home country (e.g. news, music)
 - Taste expands with exposure, and broadens over time - Malaysian becomes local
 - Media content is waste of money for some, high willingness to pay for others
- *Sometimes after work I will be very tired so I will relax and watch TV. (Mohammad, Bangladeshi)*
 - *I get them (games) from the mobile phone shop" "I go to the shop and they download for me" I like to play motorsports and ball games. (Mufid, Indonesian)*
 - *Go to cinema means time lost money lost. (Elvira, Filipino)*
 - *I think if there is one Bangladeshi channel open for us in Malaysia, it is very good for us. If we can we don't mind to pay. Every month we can pay. (Mohammad, Bangladeshi)*



Community and social networks

Different nationalities, different networks



- Bangladeshi and Indonesian workers seem to have tighter social circles
 - Filipinos: church-based and government-initiated organizations
 - Local connection for successful assimilation
 - When the migrant worker's network expands, communication is further driven.
- *I have no group here. My friends here are Indonesia that I met randomly here. They are normally from construction and factory and they do not have so much friend."* (Abdul, Indonesian)
 - *Nowadays I did not go anywhere beside the community. Morning till evening. There is a lot of work. Sometimes there is birthday party and we get together and celebrate.* (Josette, Filipino)
 - *There's a Malay take me as godchild. His family always helps me. I start to get close because I did the renovation for this family. From there the relationship built.* (Munna, Bangladeshi)

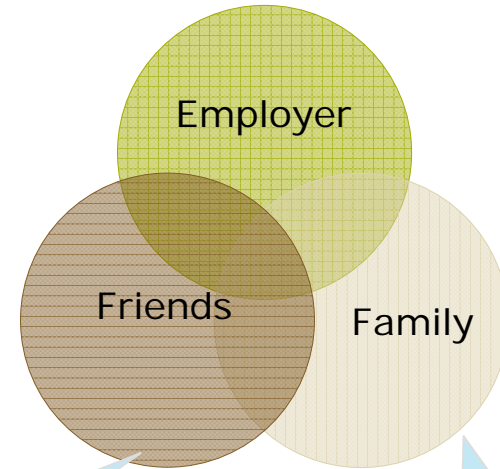
Sharing and gifting among migrant workers

- There is sharing and gifting among migrant workers especially among friends and home companions
 - Among things that are commonly given and shared are:
 - mobile phones
 - rental, living expenses
 - music, video
 - clothes
 - personal items
- *Actually if stay together means share. We 3 person share whatever we have. (Rafi, Bangl)*
 - *I'm using Motorola, but this is not from Malaysia. My friend from Japan gave it to me. (Mamun, Bangl)*
 - *Usually I'll send back clothes. They ask for mobile phone from me too. I send mobile phone before. (I give mobile phone to) My wife. (Mufid, Indon)*
 - *(Music, song from a movie) It's a music video. Munna sent it to me. I got it only from friends. (Shanti, Bangl)*
 - *I'm not very keen on buying things. My friends keep giving me things. Sometimes when they went out for shopping they will bring back something for me and say 'this is very cheap. I brought it for you'. I never buy stuff only my personal item. (Cory, Fil)*



Trust and building relationships through mobile

- Migrant workers put a lot of trust on:
 - their employers
 - friends, and
 - family members.
- Mobile seen to help maintain friendships
- “Mobile married” – channel for finding potential spouse



In the Filipino community, after we talk to them there, we exchange number so we will call or SMS each other.

A lot of people are “mobile married”. Talk, talk, talk and get married at the end. They send photo to each other and recommend family. If everything alright, they will get married.

Aspirations and role models

- Top three:
 - own a business
 - children's and own education
 - home, raising a family
 - Role models - friends or family members who have established themselves financially
- *I think if I open up business here I can earn more money. Because I know most of the business here...If I open up a shop, I will earn a lot. (Alam, Bangladeshi)*
 - *I studying book keeping treasurer and computing. Maybe I can use that in future. Now I plan to involve in baking. Because when I go back and no need to work here, we can start a business. (Gina, Filipino)*
 - *My wish is I'm able to buy a big house in my home town Davao. I wish I would never grow old because I haven't got a wife yet. (Dondon, Filipino)*
 - *My cousin, he is rich now. He has a fish pond. I want to learn from him. (Afendi, Indonesian)*



Benefits of the mobile phone to the migrant worker

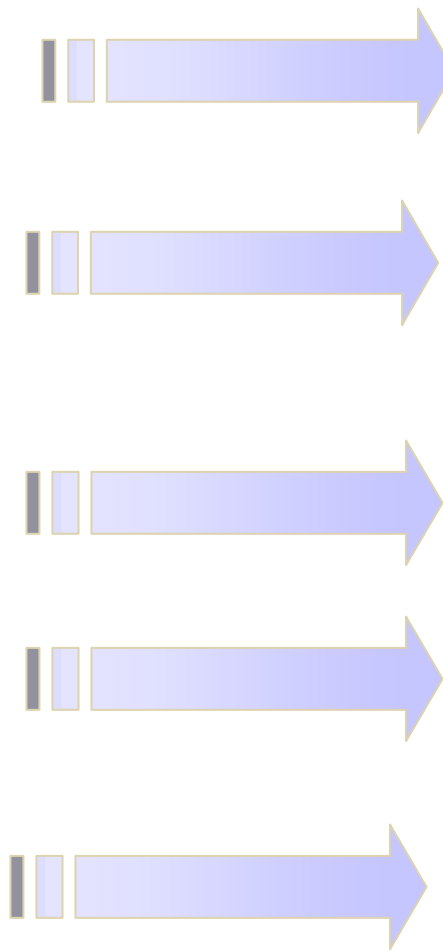


When the migrant worker's network expands, communication is further driven.

Employers
Co-workers

Family

Social
Networks



Coordination
- work tasks

Keeping in touch
with family & friends
- emergencies,
staying connected, emotional
comfort

Remittances
- sending and
verifying

Information
- news from
home, finding
work

Expanding network

Migrant Worker's Life Links Back to Home



Mobile as tool to help bridge aspirations and needs.

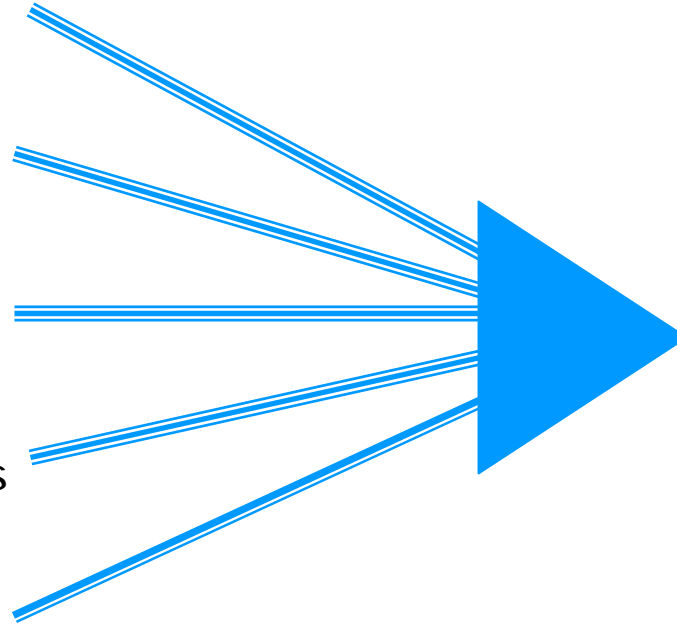
Communication

Information

Remittance

Social networks

Aspirations



Home

