



Nitipat: This is part of the Mahidol Migration Center-Joint Research Unit podcast. The segment is sponsored by the International Labour Organization for the 2022 program "Strengthening policy advocacy of migrant workers labour rights in Thailand, focusing on agriculture." We hope to bring the voices and stories of migrant workers to the general public. I am Nittipat Prasartkul, Research Assistant with the Institute for Population and Social Research at Mahidol University. In the next segment we will listen to some conversations we had with Shan workers- some are migrant workers, others have become Thai citizens. Regardless, they struggle as longan fruit and guava pickers in Lamphoon Province.

Nitipat: Next we have our RA Yaungchi Soe Naing who spoke to Nan Htwe (pronounced Hwey). She is 49 years old from Pinlon(pronounced Bing lon), Shan State and came to Lamphun Thailand 28 years ago with her husband for a better future. In this segment, she discusses the hardships of work and going from undocumented to receiving a national ID!



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YC: How long have you been in Thailand?

NH: I have been here for 28 years.

YC: Why did you leave Myanmar?

NH: My husband and I did not have job after we married. So, we decided to move to Thailand.

YC: Did you come to Thailand with passport?

NH: I had no document.

YC: Have your wage increased since you first came here?

NH: It has increased. At first, I had language barrier. As I did not have any registered document. I had to stay where they told me to stay. As a burmese saying goes, stay where you should, not where you would like. At that time, a day-labor received only 100 baht.

YC: 100 baht per day?

NH: Yes.

YC: How much do you earn now?

NH: Legally, the daily rate was 320 baht in Lamphun. Now, it has been increased to 330 baht. However, since we are living in a farm, men get 350 baht and women get 150. So, I am not paid at legal rate.

YC: Why do you have to live in the farm? Why don't you live outside?

NH: At first, I was told that it was better for me to stay in the farm together with my husband. So, I didn't need to worry much about accommodation even though the job was exhausting. And I could also save money. And I also worried that strangers could trick me if I chose to live outside.

YC: What was the most difficult experience for you in Thailand?

NH: The lack of legal document was the most difficult experience for me because documents were essential for daily life. For instance, you need an ID if you want to go to hospital. Another thing was working experience. Women were paid only 80 baht per day and men got 100 baht. And I had to wait beside the streets with many others like me for those who came with buses to recruit workers. Although they wanted only 10 people at a time, about 20 people rushed onto a bus.

YC: You had to wait for someone who gave jobs?

NH: Yes. Otherwise, I would be left with no income and nothing to eat.

YC: How many hours did you work for 80 baht per day?

NH: There was no working hour for such kind of jobs. When the sun rises, I leave my house, and when it sets, I return. I didn't stop working even on rainy days.

YC: Did you have day-offs?

NH: No. I couldn't afford to take day-offs because I worried that I would be jobless.

YC: So, you worked everyday?

NH: Yes. Some people rested for a few days. I wouldn't be able to feed my children if I didn't work everyday.

YC: How long did you work without work permit?

NH: About one year. After that, my employer applied the permit for me. Then, I could go to hospitals. At that time, there was no social security card (ประกันสังคม). I didn't know anything about that.

YC: Now, which documents do you have?

NH: I have Thai ID now. At first, I got Highlander ID card. Then, due to the goodwill of the former King of Thailand (Rama IX), I could change my Highlander ID into Thai ID. I was lucky.

YC: What do you most desire now?

NH: Since my childrens have grown up and some are in university, I wish I could get a job with 20,000 baht per month. My life would become pleasant.

YC: Any job?

NH: I can do any job as long as it is legal.



Nitipat: For the final segment, we will listen to the conversation between Somchai from Migrant Worker Federation(need to check for Thai translation), an association with seven hundred members, and Adisorn Kerdmongkol from Migrant Working Group talking about the importance of forming trade unions.

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SC: We are agricultural workers in Lamphoon Province.

AK: What is the name of your federation?

SC: I am a committee member in the association. MWF. But the full name of the federation is Migrant Worker Federation.

AK: What kind of workers in this association?

SC: The Association was started more than ten years ago. We are every sector, regardless if it is construction, domestic workers, or agriculture. Currently, most of the committee members are in agriculture.

AK: In the membership there are many activities, right?

SC: Yes, we have many activities in the northern province- for domestic workers, construction, agriculture. We have every occupation. Right now we have a membership of 700+.

AK: Mostly in Chiangmai

SC: Yes, mostly Chiangmai and Lamphun.

AK: When it was started, what was the thinking behind it? Why start it?

SC: Ten or so years ago, our migrant worker brothers and sisters really did not receive the rights they should receive. Minimum wage was not equal to Thai people. No rights for driver license. Ten years ago we did not have many rights, we could not drive a car. Many things. Migrant workers did not have rights, so they would come and ask for advice. We would help with cases about wages and employment. The biggest problem is that migrant workers are unable to access help from the government, as the group receiving the least amount of help. There is the problem of language, not understanding the law and regulations. That is why we started our group. So that the Association can be the mediator helping mediate and negotiate. Helping each other to lodge labor cases. We are where the workers will come and demand their rights. We are also go to the field, our Association has a program to visit workers in the camps to educate them. In one year 7-8 times.

AK: And now, what is the biggest problem that workers face.

SC: Right now, it is about registration, continuing their documents.

AK: Work permits, Visas or

SC: The members come to us about submitting their documents and the longer cues at the government offices. The documents are in Thai- they cannot fill it out. As a last resort, they have to hire brokers. The documents are difficult. There are so so many! The issue of the costs involved and the extremely short filing time periods allowed. Most of our brothers and sisters are not able to access these processes, so ultimately, they have to hire brokers. The fact that they have to hire brokers is really expensive! Each person pays 10,000 Baht [288USD].

AK: The problem is that they use brokers is because the documents are?

SC: The documents are too difficult. They cannot do it at all! They can get in cue, but it takes 3-4 days.

AK: But if they hire a broker, they get done in a day?

SC: Yeah, one day it is finished. Sometimes they do not even have to go. They give power of attorney. So this all waste a lot of time. The thing that we want to ask the government change is to have the Department of Employment change their online enrollment system.

AK: To be easier?

SC: Yes, so that workers can directly access the system and register.

AK: So they do it themselves?

SC: Right. Right. Make it so it can be done on the mobile phone. Decrease the complexity and difficulty. Decrease the amount of procedures.

AK: Like during Covid that just passed, did the workers experience anything?

SC: During Covid, our Association was the one contacting with outside aid organizations. We received a lot of help from outside NGOs, sending us supplies- protective gear, food. But we did not receive any assistance from government agencies. No benefits or assistance. The Association tried to be in touch with various NGOs. I see how extremely important that the Association is for migrant workers. We are the ones helping give advice. We are the group that is the negotiator contacting with many outside organizations to help solve problems. whether is it the Thai trade unions or NGOs. We are the group that sends representatives to meetings and forums to learn things, to take that information and pass it onto our brothers and sisters in the north. We are also the one's who help contact the government agencies. We try to find a forum to talk to them and the Association is a central organizer for this. This is what we mobilize for.

AK: Right now the problem with Thailand is that we do not have a law that allows for migrant workers to form trade union. What is the opinion of the Association?

SC: We consider it a real challenge for us. We hope that one day, we can register as a trade union in Thailand. Right now we cannot do so. So we must claim based on the International Labour Organization. To establish ourselves, but we cannot register. To this day, if there is some organization asking us, We say we are an independent group. And cite the ILO. The mechanisms cannot really protect our rights in a sovereign country though. We still hope that one day if we can register as a trade union, in the future, we can negotiate better with the government. Now we still cannot do much.

AK: It is hard to say?

SC: Yes.



Q: Let's talk about the future, are you going back to home country? And what you want to see the change that will happen with descendants?

A: I will talk and represent as all migrant workers which I has been told in the past. Mostly, if their own home country settled. Most of them, really want to go back there. They leave their country because a lot of problem about the economy. For the child of the migrants worker that born here, they all not familiar with their home country because they were born here, and they think they also Thai people.

Q: What about your own opinion?

A: Living here is really good, it is easy to earn money and easy to find a job as my experience, Living cost here and myanmar are quite the same. If we look at living expense in Thai, it is quite high right now. The wage per day is 300 and the meat that we buy in supermarket already cost us 200 Baht per Kilogram. The wage is not that different but in Myanmar there not have a job opportunity like in Thailand. There are no factory and no agriculture and also the problems in our country. It's not peaceful. Compare to Thailand, It really easy to live and have a lot of freedom. This is why we prefer live in Thailand.



Nitipat: Through our discussions with migrant workers we start to understand that they are not just temporary guest workers that will return to their home country, but in fact, like many Shan workers are becoming the new permanent residents and citizens in Thailand. I am Nittipat Prasartkul research assistant at the Institute for Population and Social Research at Mahidol University. Thanks for listening to this installment of the MMC-JRU podcast on agricultural migrant workers. Thank you for the support of the International Labour Organization(ILO), ASEAN-ACT, Migrant Working Group, Migrant Worker Federation, and Human Rights and Development Fund (HRDF).