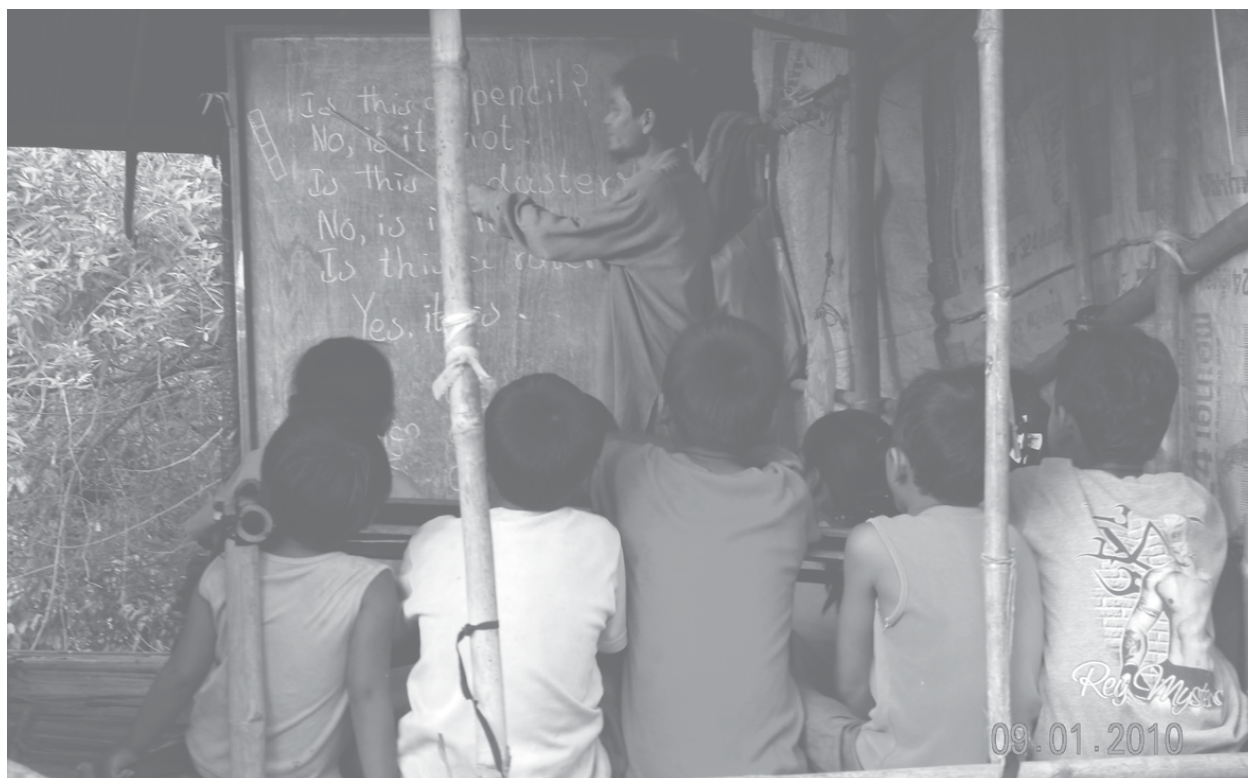


SERVING THE UNSERVED

How government agencies and NGOs learned to reach migrant children with educational opportunities



THE PROJECT'S OBJECTIVE: Meeting the educational rights of migrant children by expanding the coverage and services of the formal education system to fit their needs and enhancing the quality and absorption capacity of non-formal education providers, with the overall aim of reducing child labour.

Expanding educational services to migrant children

THE INITIAL CHALLENGE: Despite the Thai Government's 2005 policy to provide free compulsory education to all children in Thailand, regardless of nationality and status, the proportion of migrant school children remained low. The reasons varied, from language difficulty with Thai instruction, highly mobile or fearful parents, inability to get to school or no time for proper studying because of working demands to schools lacking the will or the space to accommodate them. Recognizing that education is the key mechanism for taking children - migrant as well as Thai - out of hazardous work or preventing them from being sucked into it, there was a need to help more children access educational opportunities.

THE RESPONSE: Through the International Labour Organization's International Programme on the Elimination of Child Labour and its Project to Support National Action to Combat Child Labour and Its Worst

Forms in Thailand (the ILO-IPEC project), working children and children at risk in Samut Sakhon and Tak provinces were identified and referred to a proper education system, based on their potential. Awareness trainings were provided to the teaching staff, students, parents and communities on children's rights and working hazards, including trafficking and exploitative labour. Children were removed from hazardous or inappropriate work situations and referred to a public school or a learning centre. Children older than the legal minimum working age who could not study full time were encouraged to attend non-formal education and life skills training classes.

Although the two provinces were targeted because each has a large number of foreign migrants, the situations in each are vastly different and required different approaches. Tak province has a long history of hosting migrants from Myanmar, with many Burmese groups providing funding for a large number of non-formal centres that offer some form of education to migrant children. Migration is a relatively more recent phenomenon in Samut Sakhon and the Burmese groups there are not as well organized in terms of supporting migrant children's education. While there are numerous NGOs in Tak that run or support learning centres for migrant children, there are only a few NGOs in Samut Sakhon providing similar service.

Thus in Tak, the ILO-IPEC project focused on working with the non-formal learning centres, and in Samut Sakhon the support was directed towards integrating children into formal schools.

THE PROCESS:

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Tak province

The ILO-IPEC project supported both the collecting of information on migrant children and the mapping of schools and learning centres in two districts. In addition, the project enabled the mapping focused on language, depending on the situation of a school or learning centre, to help teachers and students better communicate and understand each other.



The Education Area Office of Tak province (EAO) is responsible for the delivery of all formal education in terms of access to and quality of education as well as monitoring and overseeing of all public and private schools in its five districts. While the total number of students in the 74 public schools was 51,286 in 2008, only around 1,600 migrant children were among them. More than 7,400 migrant children were attending 54 non-accredited learning centres run by local and foreign organizations. Many of those centres had been operating for more than a decade.

The learning centres were scattered geographically and in their approach: with diverse programmes, teaching and learning methods, content and curricula. Some learning centres used curricula from Myanmar without teaching Thai while others used originally created curricula or provided career training that couldn't be transferred to the Thai school system. Some teachers were volunteers. There was a need to develop practical guidelines and regulations to promote, coordinate, supervise and monitor the educational provision in those learning centres.

The public schools also struggled with mixed-language students.

The EAO recognized the need for identifying and monitoring child workers and children at risk to refer them - according to their potential - to the proper education system. In collaboration with the Office of National Education Council (ONEC), the EAO responded to the various issues with three strategies:

- 1. Develop and integrate an information system on migrant and stateless children and children of migrant workers.** Surveys were conducted and information collected in two districts (Mae Sot and Pho Phra) on all children, in school or a learning centre or not enrolled in any educational service. The information was entered into a database that had previously been established by the Voluntary Service Overseas Thailand. Through the survey, children at risk of hazardous child labour were flagged for assistance in accessing an education. The target for the database covered 70 schools and 61 learning centres.

A mapping of the educational services in two districts was conducted. This included the number and location of schools and education centres, their environment, commuting routes, community surroundings, operational and donor organizations, names of administrators, teachers and their teaching experience, and students, school operating period, the curriculum, community cooperation and their needs and assistance granted.

- 2. Training of education personnel.** The project trained Thai and Burmese teachers to become “change agents” by building their capacity to understand and address the issues of child labour. The participating teachers were expected to monitor children at risk of dropping out of school for work and to try to encourage them - and their parents - to stay in school. Working children targeted for withdrawal from their labour situation (see the programme note on child labour monitoring) were referred to schools or learning centres.

The curriculum for a ten-day intensive training course in the Burmese language for Thai teachers was designed and two training sessions were conducted. The curriculum aimed to give the teachers a basic understanding of Burmese so that they could interact with migrant children and their families as part of the efforts to withdraw children from work and keep them in school. The course focused on either communicative Thai or Burmese for everyday use, child labour monitoring and occupation health in agriculture work (such as correct use of chemicals and safety at work). The course on communicative Burmese was for Thai teachers and the separate course on communicative Thai was for Burmese teachers. A course on occupational safety and health issues was organized separately for all teachers. The teachers were targeted because they have direct contact with migrant children and are familiar with local community members; it would be easier for them to pass on the knowledge learned from the trainings as well as convey the importance of an education to parents and others as well as the students.

For the training, the ILO-IPEC project developed a curriculum and kits that include a training manual, instructional materials and a self-learning CD as well as evaluation and assessment procedures. The CD features communicative Burmese for everyday use to help Thai teachers practice Burmese on their own.

Ten teacher trainers were trained for conducting the training courses on occupational health in agriculture work. For the initial training of trainers course, 30 teachers from 9 public schools and 21 learning centres were selected. After the training manual and materials were developed by ONEC and EAO, with help from the Mae Sot Civil Society, the teacher trainers adapted them to suit the local context. The trained Thai and Burmese teachers then were fixed to be trainers or resource person in the next three training courses for other target teachers. A training course for 452 teachers from public schools and learning centres, divided into three batches, was conducted in Mae Sot from August to October 2009.

The organization responsible for the management of a school or centre monitored the outcome of the training, using operational records, reports and random checks with students or community members.

3. Building community awareness. To encourage parent and community acceptance of the ILO-IPEC project's interventions, brochures publicizing the importance of collecting information as well as the benefits of an education were produced and distributed. Burmese-language brochures on the 2005 Thai resolution providing compulsory basic education to all children living in the country and on ILO Convention No. 182 on the worst forms of child labour were also disseminated. Other activities included a street parade involving Thai and migrant students from 14 schools and learning centres on World Day to Combat Child Labour and a video on child labour issues was shown to 1,340 students, 100 school and learning centre directors and teachers, 50 EAO personnel and 20 journalists.

4. Provision of direct assistance to child labourers and children at risk. Financial support for uniforms, meals and transportation were provided to children, based on their need, to help them enrol in a school or learning centre. Children specifically targeted for direct support were from 6 public schools and 15 learning centres, or children who were working in close vicinity of these 21 schools and learning centres.



Samut Sakhon province

In Samut Sakhon province, next door to the Bangkok capital but bordering the Gulf of Thailand and teeming with migrants who come largely for work in fishing-related industries, the ILO-IPEC project provided help, through the provincial EAO, with salaries for teaching assistants in five public schools that enrolled migrant children or for learning centre programmes that aimed to prepared students to enter a public school. The

assistants were trained also in monitoring the migrant beneficiaries. The teaching assistants spoke either Mon or Burmese as well as Thai and served to help migrant students keep pace with their classmates.

For young migrant workers aged 15-17 years old, the Non-Formal Education (NFE) Office collaborated with a technical team from Chulalongkorn University and local NGOs to apply an existing NFE life skills

curriculum and to develop a new module for young job seekers and workers in the Samut Sakhon area. The curriculum was tested and consolidated and has been submitted to the Ministry of Education for approval.

To help children struggling with Thai-language proficiency prepare to enter public school, the ILO-IPEC project supported the Labour Rights Promotion Network Foundation (LPN), a Thai NGO working on foreign migrant rights, in offering a Thai literacy class for children aged 5-14. For older migrant workers aged 15-17, the ILO-IPEC project supported the LPN in offering NFE and life skills training at the LPN's learning centre.

Direct assistance to help migrant children through educational services and family-support activities.

LPN found that many local schools did not have the physical capacity to absorb migrant children into their systems. It thus turned to community-based groups to provide educational support and recreational services for migrant children. Among the groups, a Mon cultural learning centre obtained support from LPN to provide educational services to 150 Burmese-Mon children, 90 of whom used to work. This strategy was initiated as the likely model for providing education to children throughout the province. At its own learning centre, the LPN provided non-formal education classes on Sundays for 30 children aged 4-8 and 20 children aged 9-14.

LPN also collaborated with the Wat Srisutharam school, where it had referred 120 Mon and Burmese migrant children, to help those students apply for a required 13-digit identity document from the Office of Local Administration. The ID number gives each registered migrant child a legal status for ten years and entitles a school to obtain from the Ministry of Education a per-head subsidy for each registered migrant student.

On the family front, LPN helped teachers to organize an orientation meeting at the start of each semester for parents of migrant children to inform them of their children's educational performance and to encourage them to take an active role in supporting their children in learning. LPN also helped organize monthly meetings between migrant parents, and the teachers reinforced the awareness of the benefits of education and its role in keeping their children safe. LPN staff visited family members on a weekly basis to discuss both their children's progress as well as health care and work-related issues. In addition, LPN conducted periodic training workshops for teachers that included skills training, children's rights and awareness of the vulnerabilities of migrant children. To ensure that children get to school and home, LPN rented vehicles to transport the students.

Direct assistance through non-formal education. At its Labour Center, LPN provided a training package for young people aged 15-17 that covers literacy in Thai and English, computer skills as well as rights education, occupational safety and health information and awareness on human traffick-



ing and exploitative labour practices. LPN established a mobile awareness education and recreational service for migrant communities. The training focused on issues related to human trafficking, the worst forms of child labour, life skills and workplace safety. In addition, a series of trainings concerning migrant registration and application for the national verification process was also provided for adolescent migrant workers from June 2009 through February 2010. LPN also organized “camps” of fun activities for young migrants to improve their understanding of issues regarding human trafficking and the worst forms of child labour so that they can better protect themselves. Young migrants in difficult situations were provided legal and social assistance.

ONGOING CHALLENGES:

- There remains much discrimination against migrant children and much resistance towards providing them with educational service, while the educational needs among Thai children are still not fully met.
- The Government’s recent registration and national verification programme requiring that migrants return to Myanmar to acquire a temporary passport may be prompting migrants to either return their home village or go into hiding in border areas out of fear that if they report themselves to the Myanmar authorities, it will harm their safety as well as that of their family back in the village. They also fear they will have to pay high taxes once they are in the government registry. A school in Samut Sakhon that has the largest number of migrant students experienced a dramatic drop-out among them - 281 at one point during the registration period of migrant workers.
- In general, many migrants tend to move around frequently, sometimes depending on job opportunities and sometimes because of the seasonal demands. Even if schools are open for their children, their frequent moving can be disruptive.
- The language training in Tak province responded to the Burmese teachers’ training needs and improved their knowledge and skills to communicate in Thai, although it wasn’t sufficient for teaching their students.
- Although the Ministry of Education’s regulation opens schools to children whose parents are without legal status, they still feel unsafe to travel around town because they can be abused by police. Travelling from the workplace, such as a plantation, to a school or learning centre remains a challenge. The registration process is not an easy and cheap one for employers and workers - therefore they are reluctant to register workers.
- Because the approach used to access working children in Tak was through schools and learning centres, children out of the school system have missed out on the opportunity to benefit from the programme.

OUTCOMES:

- Some 300 adolescent migrant workers in need of legal aid and referral services were withdrawn from a situation of rights abuse, including physical and sexual abuse, labour rights violation, fraud and human trafficking.
- Some 200 children younger than 15 in Samut Sakhon province and 128 in Tak province were removed from hazardous working conditions and enrolled into schools and learning centres; in addition, 1,200 migrant students were enrolled in some 30 local schools in Samut Sakhon province while 200 migrant children and former migrant child workers aged 10-14 were enrolled into two community-based learning centres in Samut Sakhon. Family support activities, including regular family visits and family support counselling were also provided. More than 300 parents and guardians participated in the project.
- Around 500 migrant child labourers aged 15-17 participated in the non-formal education course in Samut Sakhon province.
- Some 312 children received school uniforms, textbooks, funds for lunch and other materials necessary to help continue their studies in Tak province. Twenty learning centres received small funds to pay for school transportation. Another 300 children in Samut Sakhon received similar in-kind support from the project.
- Some 600 migrant child workers were trained on labour rights and workplace safety. A series of training workshops on child labour and vulnerable children involved 200 employers and migrant volunteers.
- Data on 2,039 Thai and migrant children who are working or in the worst forms of child labour and those at risk of either was collected in the two districts of Mae Sot and Pho Phra in Tak province from February through June 2009.
- The Communicative Thai training course involved 140 Burmese teachers in the two districts of Tak province from May to July 2009; in addition, 10 teacher trainers were trained and 200 sets of training documents were distributed.
- The Communicative Burmese for Everyday Use training course involved 110 Thai teachers from November 2009 to March 2010 in Tak province.
- The training course on children's rights, child labour and its worst forms and occupational safety and health involved 452 Thai and Burmese teachers from August to October 2009. A training manual was developed and then adapted by teacher trainers to make them relevant to a particular context in Tak province.
- Some 20,000 Burmese-language brochures on the 2005 Thai resolution providing compulsory basic education to all children and on ILO Convention No. 182 on the worst forms of child labour were distributed.

The database has become a great tool for the EAO to see gaps in its education services provision and find ways to enrol more children into schools and learning centres. The mapping of the educational services has been a useful tool for setting guidelines of adequate and efficient education services for migrant children. The mapping results are available at <http://202.143.173.21/tak/index.php>

The teacher trainers are now working as agents in a strong child monitoring system in Tak province.

The LPN continues to support preparatory and life-skills training, while the partner school has appointed a school committee to manage the students and the school's curriculum for migrant students. LPN regularly supports focus group meetings between teachers and parents.

Young migrants have expressed appreciation for the social and learning opportunities. "I do like to spend my day off with friends and teachers at the LPN learning centre," say Nai, a 17-year-old migrant worker. "I really like when we organize activities on special occasions - we have so much fun. Also, I am happy to be a watchdog volunteer in my community for LPN."

Teachers also have commented on the value of what they learned through the ILO-IPEC project. Says Somrat Kaewjaidee, a teacher with the Pyandao Learning Centre in Tak province, "I have received a number of trainings. The most impressive one is the child rights training. For many teachers, it is their first time to learn about child rights and know that migrant children also have such rights."

ONEC has since organized a workshop on Education Provision for Migrant Children and Child Workers - From Policy to Practice (May 2010). The workshop brought together education personnel to discuss the situation, problems, good practices and recommendations on providing education to migrant children and child workers.

LESSONS LEARNED:

- Having teacher trainers run the training courses created a strong network of teachers from public schools and learning centres.
- Screening teachers for the language training course helps ensure their regular attendance and allows for grouping participants in order to provide training according to their ability.
- All training packages and other types of capacity-building activities should be reviewed and improved to make them more relevant to the actual conditions and needs of the migrant people in a particular area.
- A briefing on the past and further implementation of the programme should take place before the unfortunate transfer of an administrator or manager of an implementing agency.
- Establishing an effective database system of child labour and children at risk and a mapping of schools and learning centres are valuable tools for raising awareness on the importance of providing education to migrant children and child workers.
- Active involvement of local authorities in designing educational services for migrant children and monitoring their attendance is an integral part in mainstreaming educational services to migrants.