

# FOUNDATION FOR MIGRANTS FROM THE MEKONG NEIGHBOURHOOD



2014

ANNUAL REPORT

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### THE FOUNDATION'S ACHIEVEMENTS IN 2014

MMN Foundation continued its work to enhance understanding and knowledge of culture and language relating to labour from the countries in the Mekong Neighbourhood, to promote domestic and international cooperation with local communities and civil society, and to exchange data and information to support the rights, health, education and welfare of labourers.

The projects MMN Foundation implemented in 2014 largely fall under the following themes.

1. Enhancing the understanding and knowledge on cultures and languages of workers from countries in the Mekong sub-region;
2. Promoting the domestic and international cooperation with the locality;
3. Exchanging information on the support of the rights and welfare of migrant workers;
4. Promoting the cooperation on the education and health of migrant workers;
5. Conducting activities for public benefits or for cooperation with other charity organizations;
6. Performing acts that are exclusively unrelated to politics.

Throughout 2014, three main projects dominated MMN Foundation's efforts: Advocacy on Arrest, Detention and Deportation (ADD) Research and Monitoring, the Embracing Diversity Project, and the Regional Exchange Program.

## 2014 OVERVIEW

### THAILAND AND ITS MEKONG NEIGHBOURS

The Thai government emphasizes bilateral cooperation with neighbouring countries as a main component of its migration management strategy. Memoranda of Understanding (MOUs) on Employment Cooperation, which Thailand signed with Lao PDR and Cambodia in 2002 and Burma/Myanmar in 2003 relate to undocumented migrants already residing in Thailand as well as the recruitment of new workers from abroad.

As of October 2014, there are over 1.7 million Burmese migrant workers and over 880,000 Cambodian migrant workers in Thailand who are registered through the MOU and NV processes. The Lao PDR government continues with NV and MOU processes for workers going to or already residing in Thailand. However, due to the complexity and expense involved in the regular migration channels, workers are often discouraged from obtaining the proper documents for migration. Thailand offers social protection to workers who migrated by way of the NV and MOU schemes via the national Social Security program and the Compulsory Migrant Health Insurance (CMHI).

After the rearrangement of Thailand's government in May 2014, up to 300,000 Cambodian migrants returned to Cambodia. It was one of the largest human movements in Southeast Asia since the 1970s. In response to the subsequent strain on industries in Thailand, the government introduced mechanisms to increase legal migration including the One Stop Service Centres (OSSCs) to register migrant workers; and the Facilitation Centres for the Return of Cambodian Workers (FCRCWs).

The current migration policies in Thailand continue to be short-term basis as the government endeavors to both meet labour demands and manage migration. In 2014, regular changes to policy were made. Most notably, deadlines for registration of undocumented migrants for NV procedures were repeatedly extended.

While One Stop Service centers and NV measures have increased the number of migrants who have legal status, there are ostensive gaps where protection mechanisms for migrants are lacking. The policies emphasize the Thai government's focus on national security over the

promotion of the security and welfare of migrants. It remains to be seen how registration and regularisation of migrant status have impacted labour conditions, access to justice and/or quality of life of migrants. Moreover, a large number of migrants have also fallen out of the regularisation processes and continue to remain undocumented.

## PROJECT ACHIEVEMENTS IN 2014

### I. EMBRACING DIVERSITY PROJECT

MMN Foundation has been working on issues of integration and social cohesion of migrants in the Thailand since 2012, when it held a symposium on these themes titled “Living Together”. A subsequent project, based on recommendations from that symposium, was carried out with the support of the Toyota Foundation. In this project, entitled “Embracing Diversity”, MMN Foundation produced educational materials for children of different ages, and held a symposium to launch the materials.

#### 1. Outcomes

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##### 1.1 Children’s Book *Dragon Lake*

One part of the project was the creation of an illustrated book for children aged 6-7 entitled *Dragon Lake*. In developing the book, MMN Foundation first carried out activities at schools in Chiang Mai to see how children thought about these issues, and their understanding of migration. The MMN Foundation consultant then developed a story line and details of the characters for the book in a way that would be accessible to young children. It follows a community of dragons who have a variety of characteristics and explores the importance of living together with neighbours who have different ways of life. In this way, the book introduces to children themes of inclusion and exclusion. The book seeks to open dialogue on these important issues not only between children and adults, but among adults as well. The book is published in Thai, Burmese, Shan, Khmer, Lao, and English.

The book will be primarily used in schools in Thailand. It has been widely circulated, including at migrant learning centres, local schools, libraries, and churches.

*Dragon Lake* is available at: [http://www.mekongmigration.org/?page\\_id=2740](http://www.mekongmigration.org/?page_id=2740).

## 1.2 Lesson Plans on the History of Migration

The other component of educational materials was the development of lesson plans on the history of migration for children aged 10-11. MMN Foundation drafted the initial version of the lesson plans with the input of two collaborating schools in Chiang Mai. In June 2014, the MMN Foundation team carried out pilot lessons in the two collaborating schools, Wat Chang Kian and Wat Suan Dok.

The lesson plans are available in Burmese, Khmer, Lao, Thai, Vietnamese and Japanese, and have received excellent feedback from representatives of Thailand's Office of the Basic Education Commission.

The lesson plans are available at: [http://www.mekongmigration.org/?page\\_id=2732](http://www.mekongmigration.org/?page_id=2732)

## 1.3 Symposium on Embracing Diversity

In October 2014, in collaboration with the Centre for Peace and Conflict Studies, Chulalongkorn University, and the Foundation for Migrants from the Mekong Neighbourhood, MMN Foundation held a Mekong Symposium on Migration titled “Embracing Diversity: Seeking Multicultural Values and Mutual Understanding”, at which the above educational materials were



launched. Over 50 people including representatives from the Thai Ministry of Education, community based organisations, international NGOs, intergovernmental organisations, educational institutions and universities attended the symposium.

## II. REGIONAL EXCHANGE PROGRAM

On 5-7 August 2014 a Regional Exchange Program on Migration Issues was organised in Chiang Mai, Thailand. The Program was designed to benefit organisations that have been working on migration issues. A total of 24 participants from Burma/Myanmar, Thailand and Cambodia took part in discussions about the intersection of the issues of migration, labour rights, women's rights and development. To further understanding participants also visited migrant communities and projects carried out by NGOs.



### 2. Outcomes

#### 2.1 Knowledge Sharing

At the exchange, participants strengthened their understanding on the history of recent migration in Thailand, principles and international frameworks to promote the rights of migrants.

The Exchange Program concluded with a range of recommendations for MMN Foundation regarding further action, which included organizing similar Exchange Programs on a regular basis.

## III. RESEARCH AND MONITORING OF MIGRANTS' ISSUES IN THE MEKONG

MMN Foundation continues to monitor the key migration policies and issues affecting migrants' welfare. Despite the government's efforts to regularise migrants' status many migrants remain undocumented, hence face a number of difficulties.

### 3. Projects

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#### 3.1 The Advocate's Handbook

MMN Foundation has focused on responding to the issues faced by migrants in vulnerable situations. The Foundation has focused on developing reference tools to enhance civil society's response to migration issues and facilitated collaboration among various civil society organisations.

The Foundation has identified migrants who find themselves in a situation involving arrest, detention and deportation (ADD) among the most vulnerable. In 2014, following recommendation of the partners, MMN Foundation produced a handbook for CSOs to enhance their understanding of policies governing ADD. The handbook includes information on relevant polices, explanations of key terms, and practical advice.

#### 3.2 Report: The Precarious Status of Migrants

Beginning in June 2014, Thailand witnessed the departure of over 220,000 Cambodian migrant workers. The reliance on migrant labour in Thailand, combined with lacking economic opportunities in Cambodia, meant the inevitable return of migrant workers to Thailand. In anticipation of this eventual return, and hoping that migrants would use formal channels, both Thailand and Cambodia swiftly introduced a number of policy reforms to make legal migration channels more accessible. MMN Foundation and its partner organisations believed it was critical to ensure that these rapidly developing responses reflected the voices of migrants and their families, and decided to conduct a series of interviews for this purpose. Interviewees were those who had returned to Thailand, their employers and local government officials in Trat, Rayong and Sa Kaeo, Thailand.



The research revealed that the top two concerns of Cambodian migrants' while migrating are the cost and legality of their actions. Migrants' willingness to migrate through legal channels appears to have grown stronger since the

exodus. However, many face significant financial obstacles in doing so, and the issue is exacerbated by the fact that many migrants are receiving a below minimum wage. This research highlights the need for both the Cambodian and Thai governments, along with ASEAN, to work collaboratively to improve both the living standards of migrants, and the migration process overall.

The full report in English is available on the MMN Foundation Webpage at:

<http://www.mekongmigration.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/12/FINAL-REPORT- The-precarious-status-of-migrants-in-Thailand.pdf>

## CONCLUSION

MMN Foundation made a number of achievements throughout 2014. Projects were also very timely in anticipation of ASEAN Economic Community that will lead to increased interaction among people in ASEAN. The Embracing Diversity project highlighted the roles of various stakeholders in order to enhance the knowledge and understanding of the cultures of neighbouring countries. The MMN Foundation will continue its work with an aim of contributing in making ASEAN neighbours closer.