

Summary of discussion following Plenary 3

Below is a summary of the questions, answers, and open discussion following Rex Varona (Asian Migrant Centre)'s presentation on "Migration and Development," and Jackie Pollock (MAP Foundation)'s presentation on "Portability."

Flexicurity and Security: A participant from Thailand asked Jackie Pollock to elaborate upon comprising between ideas of flexicurity and security, noting that, in practical terms flexibility is part of the discourse of a capitalist system that is imposed on workers. Another participant from Thailand asked how difficult it would be to change attitudes from concern with security to flexicurity. He asked whether such an attitude shift might be easier in Denmark, where there is already a degree of security for workers and safety nets in place.

Jackie Pollock expressed some doubt as to the practicality of EU-style flexicurity in the Mekong region. She explained that in the EU, flexicurity started with government commitments to social protection. She noted that if governments are committed solely to the economy and not to social protection, there is very little possibility for developing such a policy. In regard to Denmark, she noted that trade unions were instrumental in developing flexicurity, and that likely there was some challenging of concepts.

Mr. Rex Varona added that there might be a chance to mediate between flexibility and security. He gave the example of the Philippines, whereby pressure on government has resulted in more responsibility towards citizens. Rex noted, however, that there is little likelihood that the Mekong region will follow the course of Nordic states and the EU, who are themselves backtracking on such issues and eroding job security.

The need for a new discourse and vision for civil society: A participant from Thailand noted his agreement with Jackie Pollock's call for a new discourse, and called attention to Rex's point about new strategies that could "derail entrenched powers that have firm grips on labour and capital." He asked, "How do we counter what's in place, and provide our own vision? If you look at the Global Forum on Migration and Development (GFMD), civil society's still at the kiddie table!"

Rex Varona suggested that a solution is the direction of discourse. "Are we advocating for a borderless world, for example? I haven't heard that [discourse] for ten years." He added that there is a need for labour movements to rediscover themselves. "What we've won is because of continued struggle – so let us struggle anew, elevate previous victories and work towards labour rights." Jackie Pollock suggested that there is a need to challenge nationalism and fight racism. "[We must] fight against the politicians who use migration as a political issue, who then get the media on board. Are they really representing the views of the people?" She called for a stronger voice of the people to counter this representation.

Some practical steps towards change: A participant from Thailand suggested that the Mekong region needs the kind of social dialogue that exists in Europe. He noted the

challenges of migration in the GMS, but suggested that, “we need a strong assertive regional body, and to reclaim the educational process.” Another participant from Thailand said he wanted to see the Thai government develop a long-term policy for handling migrant workers, and to find new ways to create mutual understanding between Thai workers and migrant workers in order to protect human rights, including the importance of making the NV process less complicated. He raised the potential for using important anniversaries, including the 20th anniversary of social security law and of the UN Migrant Workers Convention as a chance to highlight related causes. On a final note, Rex Verona noted that considering government’s penchant to do as little as possible to protect migrants, peoples’ movements play an important role in strengthening pressure.

Below is a summary of the questions, answers, and open discussion following Phil Robertson (Human Rights Watch)’s presentation on “Human Security.”

***Policy trends on migrants and refugees:** A participant from Thailand asked why governments are willing to conflate migration and terrorism, but not migration and refugees.*

Phil Robertson emphasized Human Rights Watch’s concern about “the hollowing out of commitments to protect refugee rights in Asia. “This is not just a few countries, it is a regional trend. It is a virus. Spreading through Asia. For example, Australia has decided to simply suspend asylum applications, ignoring world opinion. If Thailand tries to send back the Burmese, will there be an outcry? Many people said don’t [repatriate] the Hmong, but military ties came first.” He noted that once governments’ erode rights for refugees, migrant workers are next. He noted the example of governments, including the US and Canada, of using policies to stop trafficking as a means to stop migration.

***Human security vs. human rights:** Another participant asked about the relationship between concepts of human security versus rights and development.*

Phil Robertson responded by saying that human security can bring together different approaches to different issues in a way that sounds good to governments. He noted that during Kofi Annan’s tenure as Secretary General of the UN, there was a “big push” towards human security including a global commission. Recently, however, he points out that the discourse has been pushed aside. He said, “We have to bring back [the discourse of human security]. If people want to talk about national security, which divides us, we need a counter-conversation about bringing people together.”

***UN challenging national security regimes:** A participant asked what the UN can do to challenge host country governments’ approach to national security, and whether Human Rights Watch may pursue something of that nature.*

Phil Robertson discussed the challenges of HRW’s approach, particularly at the UN, noting that while it is taking up more economic and social rights issues, its work primarily focuses on civil and political rights. He suggested that the main challenge to changing the paradigms around the issue of migration, and bringing back a human

security approach, is the need to stitch together national-level work and push it to the UN in a way that they will listen. He also suggested that it can begin in the EU states, who are in broad agreement about human security for their citizens, but need to be encouraged to include migrants within such a framework.

Jackie Pollock added that there are challenges to human security, since it is not seen as related to migration, and that it still lacks support in the global media. She called to attention the example of strikes in South Africa, where strikers have been portrayed as traitors betraying the country.

Rex Varona added that even if the world has a progressive view of human security, it is undermined by distinctions between citizens and foreigners. He suggested the need to reconceive the globality of the world, not just for globalization but a common humanity: “As capitalist globalization intensifies, there is more competition between countries... We cannot assert a common humanity without breaking down free-trade capital, which creates divisions and [emphasizes] capitalist individualism.”

Security through economic relationships: A participant from Thailand asked about security as pursued through economic relationships.

Phil Robertson responded by talking about the nature of Border Economic Zone projects. He gave the example of Mae Sot, which he said was “more about economic largess that a group wanted... but later justified on national security grounds.” He noted the trend of national security being used as a “ready template for justifying economic self-interest.”

Looking at Emerging Issues

The following is a summary of the emerging issues and potential next steps for MMN, as identified through open discussion.

- **Organize a training for MMN members on climate change**, in view of the increasing impact of climate change, train
- **Pursue Campaigns focusing on living wage and working conditions**, considering the continued lack of a living wage for internal and cross-border migrants
- **Continue work on Arrest Detention and Deportation (ADD)**, particularly how it relates to HIV/AIDS-affected migrants
- **Conduct a policy review from migrants’ perspectives**, focusing on what policies mean on the ground
- **Take a stance on ASEAN non-interference and integration, ADB projects**
- **Emphasize mutual responsibilities of sending, transit, and receiving countries**, through increased communication and coordination on safe migration, price issues, pre-departure standards.
- **Connect organizations throughout the GMS that work with migrant children**

- ***Increase cooperation between China and other GMS countries***, to ensure that globalization benefits not only China's economy, but local people and workers instead of governments
- ***Support pre-departure training for migrant workers in Vietnam***
- ***Lobby Thailand to better support migrant workers in terms of health and education***, in view of their contribution to Thailand's economy
- ***Focus on capacity-building initiatives for local communities in Special Economic Zones and border areas***
- ***Work towards an ASEAN policy on universal education***
- ***Conduct comparative studies on welfare systems in Southeast Asia***
- ***Bolster the efforts of migrant workers through lobbying and legal aid***
- ***Address the challenges facing the children of migrant workers born in Thailand***, particularly their pessimistic outlook on the future, due to lack of opportunities
- ***Address apprehensions of migrant workers as to their future post- NV***
- ***Focus more on advocacy***, particularly around migrants getting legal status
- ***Create regional or country committees to work closely with governments to investigate, oversee, and monitor migrants entering countries for work***
- ***Address dam-related issues for migrants, including health security as a result of water contamination and new diseases***
- ***Take up more media advocacy as a means to raise regional issues more effectively***