



Agenda

Multi-Stakeholder Workshop

Jobs in SEZs: Promoting Gender-Sensitive Policies in the Mekong Region

20-21 June 2019

Centre Point Hotel Sukhumvit 10, Bangkok, Thailand

Organised by

Mekong Migration Network (MMN) and Asian Institute of Technology (AIT)

Supported by

International Development Research Centre (IDRC), Canada

A. Background and Objectives

Special economic zones (SEZs) have emerged as effective instruments for capturing foreign investment and a key strategy in the pursuit of regional economic integration in the Greater Mekong Sub-region (GMS). The IDRC-supported research project *Jobs at the Border: Promoting Gender-Sensitive Policies for Special Economic Zones in the Mekong Region*, jointly implemented by MMN and AIT, investigated labour and migration issues in four SEZs across Cambodia, Myanmar and Thailand from 2016 to 2019. Guided by the question of whether the jobs being created within SEZs are promoting decent work, MMN and AIT conducted research on cross-border and internal migrant garment factory workers employed in these spaces. Garment factories are heavily dominated by women workers, who are often paid minimum wage or lower and are usually not entitled to any paid leave. The study found that one of the only ways that they can increase their income is through overtime work. Despite accumulating experience and improving their skills, women are still categorically labelled as “unskilled” or “low-skilled” workers. Their skills remain unrecognized and invisible. Being a woman worker as well as a migrant worker amplifies their vulnerability and marginalization.

This problem of framing women workers as “unskilled” has been acknowledged and discussed over the past few decades, yet little has changed to date. In light of rapid technological advances, environmental concerns and demographic changes, governments and employers can no longer ignore the need for greater capacity development of their workers to adjust to these changes. Another issue that has long been pointed out, but has seen little progress thus far, is that of care. Even though some countries’ national laws require the establishment of factory-level daycares, and child allowances have been introduced in some GMS countries, childcare responsibilities still lie predominantly with women workers. The provision of greater care supports is imperative to ensure decent work and lifelong learning that fosters women workers’ development. Although SEZs may have the potential to increase opportunities for decent work, the project’s findings suggest that this potential has yet to be realized due to barriers, including legal, governance, and additional structural shortcomings.

Workers are entitled to secure employment where they can plan for their future career in the work that they do. This is equally relevant for migrant workers. In an increasingly globalized world,



workers need to be able to imagine their future careers across borders and have their skills validated. All workers should be able to choose to take up a specific job because it will enable them to enhance their skills and see their growth reflected in their career and pay. Such career development is currently exclusively available to so-called “higher-skilled” workers. It is time for all workers to be recognized for their skills and entitled to professional development. In this workshop, MMN and AIT not only highlight workers’ working conditions and access to labour rights in SEZs, which remain significant issues, but also their skills development and recognition and care responsibilities, which are important factors for their future life plans. This research recognizes that skills recognition and care work supports are greater challenges for women workers relative to men and, thus, have been given a particular focus in the workshop’s agenda.

The Multi-Stakeholder Workshop will frame the dialogue around the themes of labour migration, working conditions, labour organising, skills training and recognition, career development, and care responsibilities, with an overarching focus on labour within SEZs and the garment industry in the Mekong. The SEZs included in this study are: Phnom Penh SEZ and Manhattan SEZ in Cambodia; Thilawa SEZ in Myanmar; and Tak SEZ in Thailand.

The objective of this workshop is to discuss whether and how SEZs can play a role in leading such changes or whether they are an impediment for change. MMN and AIT will launch a report examining these themes and foster in-depth discussion on the findings and recommendations that emerged from the project. The workshop will be in the form of a dialogue. In each panel, findings from the study will be presented, followed by comments from various stakeholders and open discussion.

This workshop seeks to bring together an inclusive, diverse, and representative group of participants to foster new exchanges on how SEZs across the sub-region can be reformed to better protect and promote the rights and welfare of workers, while continuing to support economic growth.

B. Participants

MMN and AIT are inviting principal decision-makers, practitioners and experts in relevant fields to actively participate in this workshop. These participants include representatives of governments, employers’ associations, civil society organizations, trade unions, training centers, and regional and international organizations.



C. Program

Day 1: June 20, Thursday	
8:30-9:00	Registration
9:00-9:30	<p>Opening remarks</p> <p>Ms. Ayesha Rekhi, Counsellor (Political/Economic) and Permanent Observer to ESCAP, Representative of Ambassador Donica Pottie, Embassy of Canada to Thailand, Lao and Cambodia, Thailand</p> <p>Ms. Gillian Dowie, International Development Research Centre, Canada</p> <p>Dr Eden Y. Woon, President, Asian Institute of Technology, Pathumthani, Thailand</p> <p>Ms Reiko Harima, Regional Coordinator, Mekong Migration Network</p>
9:30-9:50	<p>Keynote address:</p> <p><i>SEZs and implications for labour rights</i></p> <p>Ms Marja Paavilainen, International Labour Organization</p>
9:50-10:00	Group photo
10:00-10:30	Coffee Break
10:30-10:50	Participant introductions
10:50-11:30	<p>Introduction to the workshop and Launch of the report</p> <p>Presentation by Ms. Carli Melo, Mekong Migration Network</p>
11:30-12:45	Lunch
12:45-14:30	<p>Panel 1: Labour rights and working conditions in SEZs</p> <p>Facilitator: Mr. Bent Gehrt, Workers Rights Consortium</p> <p><i>Presentation of key findings and recommendations, Ms. Carli Melo, Mekong Migration Network</i></p> <p><u>Commentators</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ms Pataraporn Laouwong, National Economic and Social Development Board, Thailand • Mr Randolph Dacanay, Asian Development Bank • Mr. Kaing Monika, Garment Manufacturers Association in Cambodia, Cambodia • Mr Komsoth Tim, Ministry of Labour and Vocational Training, Cambodia • Mr Thit Lwin Aung, Future Light Centre, Myanmar <p>Open discussion</p>
14:30-15:00	Break



15:00-16:30	<p>Panel 2: Skills development and recognition in SEZs</p> <p>Facilitator: Mr. Sokchar Mom, Legal Support for Children and Women, Cambodia</p> <p><i>Presentation of key findings and recommendations, Professor Kyoko Kusakabe, Asian Institute of Technology</i></p> <p><u>Commentators</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ms. Hnin Phyu Phyu Aye, Aung Myin Hmu Training Centre, Myanmar • Mr Sun Sameoun, Phnom Penh Special Economic Zone Management, Cambodia • Ms Marja Paavilainen, International Labour Organization • Mr Soe Naing, Ministry of Labour, Immigration and Population, Myanmar <p>Open discussion</p>
19:00 – 21:00	Welcome dinner
Day 2: June 21, Friday	
9:00-9:15	Recap of Day 1
9:15-10:45	<p>Panel 3: Childcare and family care in SEZs</p> <p>Facilitator: Mr. Brahm Press, MAP Foundation</p> <p><i>Presentation of key findings and recommendations, Professor Kyoko Kusakabe, Asian Institute of Technology</i></p> <p><u>Commentators</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dr. Than Than Thwe, Thilawa Special Economic Zone Management Committee, Myanmar • Ms Sally Barber, UN Women • Mr. Sai Aung Tun, Foundation for Education and Development, Thailand <p>Open discussion</p>
10:45-11:10	Break
11:10-12:30	Group work: Country-level discussions
12:30-13:30	Lunch
13:30-14:30	Reporting back from group work
14:30-15:30	Plenary discussion
15:30-16:00	Break
16:00-16:30	Concluding discussion and closing