



EDUCATING AGAINST VULNERABILITY:

An integrated approach to addressing the exploitation of female migrant workers

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Introduction

The challenges faced by female migrant workers are unique due to the gendered effects of labour migration. In this report, we deliver a detailed analysis of the difficulties that female migrant workers experience when travelling from Indonesia to Saudi Arabia for work. We then provide an innovative solution that considers families and communities in the process of migration – from pre-departure to return – and that empowers women to make practical choices suited for their own circumstances.

By including spouses and children into our solution, empowerment becomes collective, rather than a super-added burden on women. The Indonesia-Saudi Arabia corridor provides us with a useful pilot project that can be applied across contexts where female migrant workers face gendered challenges that require holistic solutions.

The report proceeds in the following manner:

In the first two sections, we introduce Indonesia as our investigative context and pilot project location.

We then lay out the wide-ranging negative effects of female labour migration, focusing primarily on women's roles as "tradition-bearers" and the implications that labour migration has for changing family dynamics. This section thus serves to theoretically ground our contribution.

Next, we provide an analysis of the existing programs in Indonesia. This section reinforces the innovativeness of our approach, and contextualizes our role in contributing to the existing infrastructure.

We subsequently outline our innovative contribution as it follows from the preceding analysis. The focus is on a training program and resource centre that provides a holistic solution to female labour migration by addressing its gendered nature and involving the entire family unit and broader community into the migration process.

Finally, we consider how we could make our proposed project operational. In so doing, we orient our innovative contribution for eventual implementation.



We have chosen Indonesia as our analytic focus and proposed pilot project location largely as a function of the country’s demographic peculiarities, its current economic trajectory, and its noteworthy out-migration statistics. We have selected Saudi Arabia as the host country to focus on due to the high number of Indonesian migrant workers who travel there; the religious, cultural, and geographic drivers of this migration; and its significant recorded abuses of female domestic workers.

The Indonesia-Saudi Arabia corridor is also a current and significant case study in female labour migration. The poor treatment of many Indonesian domestic workers has caused massive public outcry that reached high points of tension when a maid accused of killing her employer was executed in 2011.¹ As a result, Indonesia imposed a ban on sending domestic workers to the kingdom.² Nevertheless, more than 45 Indonesian domestic workers remain on death row.³ The ban has since been lifted,⁴ with a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) signed between Indonesia and Saudi Arabia in February of 2014.⁵

In addition to the many physical, emotional, and sexual abuses that occur in domestic employment, a common practice in Saudi families is to request “blood money” of up to US \$2 million in exchange for the release of (mostly falsely accused) women awaiting execution.⁶ The problem has become so pervasive that Indonesia is currently in the process of establishing a “Blood Money Agency” to assist families in this position.⁷

Our report is thus situated both as a case study at the crux of a present controversy, and a proposal that addresses the much more widespread problems associated with female labour migration.



FEMALE
LABOUR
MIGRATION IN
INDONESIA



MIGRATION STATISTICS

Indonesia is the fifth most populated country⁸ in the world with a population of

249.9 million

The largest economy in Southeast Asia and one of the fastest growing economies in the world,⁹ Indonesia has been one of the leading exporters of migrant labour since the 1980s.¹⁰ Every year millions of Indonesian workers leave their families and villages to seek work abroad as migrant workers.

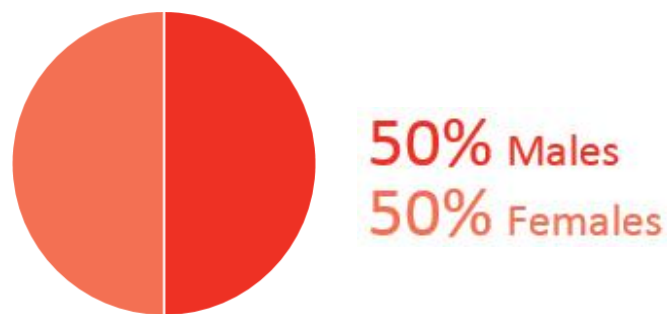


There are approximately 4.3 million legal workers employed overseas, and the number of undocumented migrants is estimated to be two to four times higher.¹¹ Of all Indonesian labour migrants, approximately 60% are employed in countries in the Middle East, including Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Jordan and Qatar. The remainder work in East and South East Asia, in countries such as Malaysia, Singapore, and Hong Kong. Some travel even further, to the Americas.

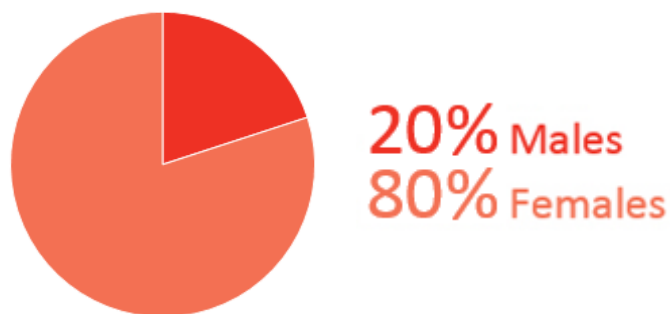
Feminization of Migration: From Indonesia to Saudi Arabia

While the sex ratio in Indonesia is one to one,¹² there is a significant gender imbalance in Indonesian migrant workers. Between 1989 and 1999, Indonesia experienced extensive feminization of labour migration. About 80% of overseas workers – often referred to as *Tenaga Kerja Indonesia* (TKIs) in Indonesian – are women employed in the domestic and caregiver sectors.¹³ This is the highest outflow of female migrant workers in Southeast Asia.¹⁴

Indonesian Sex Ratio (2014 est.)¹⁵



Gender Breakdown of Migrant Workers (2013)¹⁶



From 1994 to 1997, 2,042,206 female workers were sent abroad, as compared to only 880,266 male workers. Additionally, in the years following Indonesia's economic crisis of 1997, the importance of international female labour migration increased substantially. This gave rise to the institutionalization of Indonesia's Labour Export Programme in 2002 and dropped the ratio of male workers to female workers to one to five.¹⁷ Similar ratios persist to date.

Women's out-migration to Saudi Arabia has remained persistently high over the past two decades.¹⁸ Indeed, between 1989 and 1994, 59% of all overseas workers from Indonesia chose to migrate to Saudi Arabia, and the majority of these workers were women who were employed as domestic servants.¹⁹ Currently, there are approximately 1.2 million *documented* Indonesian workers in Saudi Arabia, and more than 70% of them are women working in the domestic sector.²⁰



Indonesian social activists have lobbied their governments for increased protections of female TKI's rights in Saudi Arabia since the late 1990s and have met with some success.²¹ However, considerable exploitation and abuse still occur. Notably, there continues to be a substantial gap between addressing the operation and effectiveness of household safety nets in Indonesia as a significant contributor to women's well-being.²²

Driving Forces of Indonesian Female Out-Migration

TKIs migrate for a number of reasons, but the drivers of labour migration are extremely gendered. These include, but are by no means limited to: a lack of employment opportunities at home (owing to discrimination based on gender, caste, class, race, or ethnicity), rural and urban poverty, and wage differentials between Indonesia and many destination countries.²³

TKIs are required to use a recruitment agency, although many migrate through informal channels that do not offer any protection. The choice of destination country is determined by domestic labour market needs and by the recruitment agency's market access. Female TKIs in particular often have very little control in navigating their employment in countries where they are sent, across Asia and the Middle East.²⁴

Socioeconomic reasons drive the majority of TKIs to migrate abroad so that they are able to improve living conditions for themselves and for their families. Many women migrate to protect their families from the devastating effects of poverty. This is facilitated by global labour shortages; increased demand for women in domestic, manufacturing, and service sectors; more job availability; established social networks; and higher salaries in countries such as Malaysia, Saudi Arabia, Hong Kong, and Kuwait.²⁵



Religious and cultural drivers are also at play. TKIs are drawn to countries in the Middle East because of their geographic proximity and cultural and religious similarities to Indonesia. Islam plays a large role in unifying Indonesian female migrant workers as a community of overseas labourers in Saudi Arabia.

The possibility of undertaking the Hajj pilgrimage is a particularly significant driving factor for many TKIs who migrate there. Additionally, female TKIs who are working overseas as domestic workers and/or caregivers often feel comforted in contexts that reflect similar levels of piety and that are governed by similar sociocultural norms.²⁶

At the same time, both countries have a significant role to play in putting Indonesian women in abusive and isolating situations. “Both the Indonesian and Saudi states have contributed to constructing domestic work as a woman’s job that garners low wages, grants little security and few benefits, involves high rates of multiple forms of abuse and provides only slim chances of occupational mobility.”²⁷

In the recently-signed MOU between the two countries, Islam functions as a key stipulation for appropriate conduct and behaviour.²⁸ Religious and cultural drivers should therefore be properly acknowledged in any proposed solution to changing family dynamics.





NEGATIVE
EFFECTS OF
FEMALE
MIGRATION FOR
EMPLOYMENT

Gendering Morality: Women as “Tradition-Bearers”

Indonesian women are culturally expected to be the reproducers of family and nation, shouldering the cultural burden of building tradition within the family unit.²⁹ Women in low-income situations therefore make a choice to leave their family, their partner, and their children to provide for the family, which necessitates leaving their traditional roles and absorbing the guilt that comes with it. The resulting tensions challenge already-difficult relationships, and further alienate women from their husbands, their children, and their communities.

On the broader issue of transnational mobility and changing family dynamics, “women’s relationships with their families come to symbolize national identity, with women’s bodies serving as the bearers to culture and tradition.”³⁰ In the case of female TKIs, this narrative is particularly relevant: “both state and popular discourses have focused on the role of women and the family in producing and maintaining the nation’s social order, moral strength and economic development.”³¹ Female TKIs who leave home to work overseas represent a critical moment in the evolution of “Indonesian civil and popular debates about women’s ideal roles.”³²



This narrative continues to have deep implications for the operation and efficiency of rural social safety nets pre-migration and post-return. In fact, at the same time that migrant work has “challenged the status of [Indonesian] women as *in situ* bearers of tradition in families,”³³ in other ways it has reinforced this very construction.

The dominant vision of idealized femininity as domestically-located mother and wife is translated into a migratory income-earning woman for the sake of the “national family’s” larger goal of economic development.³⁴





Double Burden

In many ways, this overlapping narrative – where the migrant woman is both the national hero and the householder – has contributed to placing a double burden on Indonesian migrant domestic workers. These women come to symbolize motherhood – of nation *and* of household.

This double burden has translated into persistent “cultural struggles” over what constitutes appropriate behaviour for women during all stages of the migration process.³⁵

Economic development is often inextricably linked with cultural struggles, especially for women. Data suggests that rural household safety nets are sites of substantial “gender disorder,”³⁶ wherein female TKIs “face disproportionately heavy labour burdens as a result of their positions within the households to which they have returned.”³⁷

Research indicates that upon migrant women’s return to Indonesia, rural household safety nets do not equally support all family members.³⁸ Therefore, the widely held assumption that women’s labour market participation necessarily equals empowerment is problematic.³⁹

The recognition that female TKIs face cultural struggles and are persistently carrying unequal labour burdens has served to theoretically ground our explanation of how female labour migration, particularly for domestic work, affects women. It aids in understanding our team’s innovative approach to the problem of changing family formations as a result of feminized migration.

More specifically, there are many negative effects associated with female labour migration from Indonesia to Saudi Arabia. These include, but are not limited to: changing family dynamics, increased rates of divorce upon return, a lack of available communication with family and friends while abroad, and gross mistreatment by live-in employers.

Problems While Abroad

While abroad, women are often unable to contact their family in Indonesia. Employers in Saudi Arabia often forbid workers from contacting their families, thereby severing familial ties and emotional support. Employers in the Gulf Region often withhold women's phones as a matter of course, and are less likely to have access to Internet, including social communication channels such as Facebook or Skype.⁴⁰ As a result, female TKIs experience a disconnection from their families, their community, and their culture.

While working abroad, many women are subjected to poor working conditions and abusive situations. Female TKIs regularly report incidents of rape, sexual harassment, overwork, torture, and the underpayment of wages, among many other crimes.⁴¹ They have very few rights and resources available to them to deal with this violence.

In turn, they are highly susceptible to health problems and complications such as unwanted pregnancies, sexually transmitted infections, and physical and emotional trauma.⁴² Unsurprisingly, reports have also indicated high rates of suicide among Indonesian women while they are in Saudi Arabia, as well as high numbers of TKIs returning home prior to contract completion.⁴³

Problems Upon Return

Married female TKIs experience higher-than-average rates of relationship dissatisfaction and divorce, as compared to those who are able to stay at home.⁴⁴

Husbands often spend the money sent home by their wives on personal items or give it to their parents.⁴⁵

Children, particularly those that were very young or in infancy when their mothers left to work abroad, often forget their mothers when they return after years of working overseas.⁴⁶

Many women internalize these difficulties and believe that they are to blame. As women are culturally expected to be nurturers and tradition-bearers, most feel guilty about these changing family dynamics.

They worry they have been bad mothers, they have been overly egoistic to move abroad for work, or that they are morally corrupt and poor preservers of tradition and the family unit.⁴⁷



EXISTING
PROTECTIONS

Legal Rights Currently in Place

i. International Legal Framework

Two main international conventions provide for rights of migrant workers. One is the *International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of their Families*, which aims to protect the rights of labour migrants and their families. The second is the *Convention Concerning Decent Work for Domestic Workers*, which was adopted by the International Labour Organization (ILO) in 2011.

International legal protections for migrants include: a written job offer before migrating, a contract enforceable in the country of employment, and coordination between countries to specify terms of repatriation.

However, states are not internationally bound in their treatment of foreign labour migrants, nor are there enforcement mechanisms associated with these protections.⁴⁸

ii. Protection of Indonesian Labour Migrants in Indonesian Law

Labour laws in Indonesia are primarily concerned with reducing local unemployment. Therefore, the labour migrant legal framework focuses on facilitating the outflow of TKIs rather than their protection.

The National Law on the Placement and Protection of Indonesian Overseas Workers (Law No. 39/2004) was passed in 2004 along with several regulations for the deployment and

protection of TKIs. The law includes duties and responsibilities for the government, rights and obligations of migrant workers, and provisions for many aspects of labour migration.

To go along with this law, a number of Presidential Instructions were issued. One of these established the National Body for the Placement and Protection of Indonesian Migrant Workers (BNP2TKI), which operates under the

Ministry for Manpower and Transmigration (MoM).⁴⁹ Another set of Presidential Instructions required an assessment be conducted of the regulations of host countries that have not signed an MOU with Indonesia.

The reviews were aimed at ensuring that private recruitment agencies are accredited and that contracts of employment contain articles concerning the protection of TKIs.⁵⁰



Indonesian embassies and consulates abroad have representatives who can provide legal aid for Indonesian citizens with legal problems. This includes service provisions for issues such as losing contact with family, accidents, and hospitalizations. Although these services exist, they are often under-funded and unable to help all the people who require assistance.⁵¹

The government's laws and regulations involve a number of different departments. However, different laws, regulations, and decrees may be contradictory in terms of their allocation of responsibility. This has made it easier for government agencies to offload responsibility, and harder to coordinate between multiple parties. There is also a general lack of transparency both in this particular legal framework and the government's workings that leads to inefficient defence of the interests of TKIs.⁵²

Private recruitment agencies are responsible for the entire process of enabling migrant workers to go abroad, including recruitment, education and training, temporary accommodations, departure, and repatriation. There is no systemic monitoring of these agencies by the government and often migrants are intimidated against bringing a complaint to the central government.⁵³

Indonesia's legal protection of TKIs has been criticized for not forming a coherent or binding framework. One criticism is its exclusion of TKIs who intentionally or unintentionally used unofficial channels to migrate. It also does not address issues faced by returnees, such as placement services for employment in Indonesia, or financial education about managing overseas earnings. There is no dispute settlement mechanism for returnees who experienced problems while abroad, and there are no rights recognized for family members.⁵⁴



iii. Protections for Workers Migrating to Saudi Arabia

The recent MOU signed between Indonesia and Saudi Arabia guaranteed that migrant workers have access to communication with their family, monthly wages paid through banking services, sick leaves, work days not exceeding 15 hours, online access to a work contract, and one-month paid vacation every two years.⁵⁵ Moreover, the employer is not allowed to compel domestic helpers to perform a job that is not outlined in the labour contract, or one that is harmful to her health.

Penalties include a one-year recruitment ban or a SR 2,000 (US\$533.23) fine or both, with repeat offenders facing a SR 5,000 (US\$1,333) fine. Recently, Saudi Arabia also started a multilingual phone hotline for domestic workers to register complaints.⁵⁶

Perhaps the most considerable legal issue facing migrant domestic workers in Saudi Arabia is that the country follows the “kafala system.” This system allows employers to retain the passports of hired workers and requires workers to obtain the permission of their employer to leave the country or be transferred to another employer.⁵⁷

It is therefore clear that problems remain in protecting the rights of migrant workers in Saudi Arabia. Migrant workers still have no legal recourse against employers who physically abuse them.

It is challenging to monitor the activities in the private realm of a conservative and traditional society, where gender segregation is a prominent aspect of the culture. In the rare cases where authorities are able to intervene, for most families that can afford a housemaid (or several), a fine of US \$500-\$1000 is not very threatening.



Civil Society Actors

Indonesia has been involved in several regional initiatives to create a stronger legal and policy framework to protect the rights of migrant workers. The most recent example is the ASEAN Triangle Project, which aims to reduce the exploitation of labour migrants in the Southeast Asian region using a gender-sensitive approach.

There are also many grassroots-level initiatives. By the mid-2000s, there were over 100 non-government organizations (NGOs) focusing on migrant labour in Indonesia. However, very few NGOs have direct links in countries where Indonesian migrants work – Migrant Care and the Centre for Indonesian Migrant Workers are exceptions.

Many NGOs dealing with migrant workers handle individual cases of abuse ranging from human trafficking, rape and torture, to unpaid wages. Migrant Care and the Consortium of Indonesia Migrant Workers Advocacy focus almost exclusively on pushing for policy change, using media campaigns and engaging in dialogues with the government. Others, such as Solidaritas Perempuan, Indonesia's first migrant labour NGO, do both.⁵⁸

There is a high level of fragmentation in the services provided to TKIs due to the large number of NGOs operating in Indonesia. This fragmentation is higher in Jakarta, with fewer services available in other areas of the country. While there are hundreds of organizations in Indonesia acting as pressure groups and direct aid sources for female TKIs, there is outright neglect of how feminized migration affects families.



DEFINING
THE
PARAMETERS

Target Audience

The target audience for our project consists of female TKIs living in or near East Java and going to Saudi Arabia, as well as their families and communities.

A significant proportion of migrant workers originate from the eastern half of Indonesia.⁵⁹ The most populous province is East Java, which has a population of approximately 39 million, which is nearly one-fifth of Indonesia's total population.⁶⁰

The incidence of poverty in East Java is 18.5% to 20% greater than the national average.⁶¹

East Java's poor economic conditions are further exacerbated by the province's geographic misfortune of being located along the confluence of the Indo-Australian and Eurasian tectonic plates, increasing the risk of natural disasters such as volcanic eruptions, earthquakes, and tsunamis.⁶²

Also, the working poor have low levels of education and productivity.⁶³ This is as a result of inequality in access, particularly in rural areas. These same accessibility challenges of poor infrastructure, long travel distances, and high costs of transportation apply to migrant worker programs.

Despite being the largest source of migrants, East Java remains critically underserved as compared to other parts of the country, especially Jakarta.⁶⁴ Although we may find that operating in East Java is more challenging than operating in Jakarta, we will have the capacity to affect each individual more profoundly. Operating in East Java will also decrease the risk of adding to the fragmentation in the civil society sector.

Limitations on Scope

There are two limitations on our scope that are important to identify.

The first is that this project does not directly address the violence that women face while they are working abroad. This is not a policy change-oriented project that will stop employers from abusing their migrant workers.

Secondly, this project does not aim to provide women with alternate options for income generation in Indonesia. Many NGOs and organizations are already working to provide such solutions.

Our project instead aims to build adequate family and community support for those who do decide to migrate for work, and then face challenges while doing so.



INNOVATIVE
CONTRIBUTION



We recommend opening a resource centre that caters to TKIs and their families.

This would require a physical space that could hold and present information on the process of applying to work abroad; resources and information on working conditions, legal assistance, rights, and financial literacy; and information on destination countries. The centre should aim to serve as a community hub and central space for migration-related concerns.

To this end, it will also include newspapers from popular destination countries, book exchanges, and similar services that families will find useful. The centre would remain open to allow women, their spouses, their children, and the broader community to access its services and resources on a drop-in basis.

Program staff will be thoroughly versed on the issues and resources available for TKIs moving to Saudi Arabia as the pilot project is launched, but we wish to establish an inclusive centre that supports all migrant labourers' concerns.

We have identified three services that should be offered by the resource centre: pre-departure family-centred training, a communal cell phone for use while female TKIs are abroad, and programs targeted at re-integration upon return. Each of these services will be provided in the context of building a community of affected families. Such a community will be able to provide additional personal support that a resource centre cannot formally provide.

Pre-Departure Family-Centred Training

One of the primary initiatives of the centre will be to provide a workshop that will assist families in the negotiation of many of the challenges they might face when a woman leaves for work abroad. Including the larger family unit in the discussion is important to facilitate a holistic solution that recognizes the changing family and gender dynamics that occur with TKIs. The family will be able to talk openly about the changes that have yet to occur, and to develop problem-solving solutions that are feasible and desirable for everyone involved. This will not only mitigate against many of the negative effects of labour migration by addressing the concerns head-on and before they happen, but it will also relieve much of the burden experienced by women who internalize these problems and blame themselves for the issues associated with their migration.

Although the value-added of the resource centre is the focus on family dynamics, women and their families may not want to go through multiple trainings. As a result, the centre will also provide the basic training that is offered through other recruitment agencies. The topics covered in the workshop will mirror the main challenges that women face when they migrate for work. The focus will be on those challenges that act as stressors on the family unit. Because the family will be involved in the workshop, the family unit should leave the training modules with an understanding of how their lives will be affected when the woman leaves for work, and personal strategies for how to deal with these changes.

An important aspect of the training modules will be the delivery of financial management skills. Women do not always retain control of their remitted earnings, and many do not make wise financial decisions to save, invest, or create a business to sustain their families at home and prevent the need to re-migrate. We will base our financial literacy training on a program developed by the ILO entitled “Budget smart: Financial education for migrant workers and their families.”⁶⁵ It includes content as well as several training aids that could be used immediately upon translation. It utilizes brainstorming activities, role-playing, and other activities aimed at providing a varied and interesting learning experience.

Spouses that remain behind may find that they have to take on child-care responsibilities that they have not been responsible for before. A child-care module will therefore be included in the workshop, and will include a detailed conversation on current childcare processes and future childcare needs. This may require developing skills such as cooking, cleaning, and medical care. We will provide information on resources in the community such as after-school childcare. One crucial topic will be ensuring that children can continue their education. This will be especially important for female children, who may feel pressure to stay at home and fill the roles left open when their mother leaves for work.

Our training program will also offer a module for communication, as this is a significant challenge that female TKIs face while they are abroad. This is especially important given that the woman's free time and access to a phone may be limited while she is abroad. In this module, the trainers will encourage participants to be realistic about the resources that will be available while abroad, while educating participants on their rights and options.

Mental health issues will be addressed in a separate module. Women and their spouses may feel isolation, stress, and many other pressures that could have mental health implications. Such pressures may or may not be related to particular traumatic events.⁶⁶ This module will be developed in collaboration with mental health professionals who will provide insights into contextualized, culture-specific self-care and coping mechanisms. One important resource is a recent "train the trainer" pilot project that focused on how to provide care for migrant workers.⁶⁷ We will provide the training to the entire family unit, and then split the group to allow migrant workers to develop coping mechanisms while family members learn to better support the worker.

Another training module will focus on effective responses to emergency situations. On the side of the worker, this may include a medical emergency or a conflict in the workplace. At home, an emergency may include the death or serious illness of a close family member.

Both the worker and her family should leave with an idea of the resources available in the home and host countries, potential steps that could be taken in emergency situations, as well as ways that communication may be facilitated.

Children are also an important part of the family and there will be a module dedicated for children old enough to participate. Children will be informed of potential issues they may face such as the loss of interaction with one parent, the potential additional responsibilities they may need to assume, the changing roles of family members, and how these might impact their day-to-day lives. They will also be given coping strategies and formal instruction for duties such as laundry, cooking, and childcare of younger siblings. This will also help children become familiar with others in similar situations, and this interaction can create a support network and community to prevent feelings of isolation and loss.

Finally, a module will be dedicated to discussing changing family dynamics during the migration process. The relationships between family members will be addressed, including a discussion on spousal relationships to tackle the issue of higher divorce rates amongst TKI couples. The relationship between parents and children will also be an important component to this module, as female TKIs often feel alienated from their children. Because these relationships are interdependent, they should be discussed holistically, as a family unit.

As our program expands beyond the pilot project in Indonesia, the topics covered by these modules will remain constant, although the content covered can differ substantially based on the context. For example, religion may play a larger role in dealing with emotional stress in certain locations. Therefore, the modules will be developed with sufficient space for the participants to lead the direction of the discussion. The solutions that participants develop should be realistic for their own lives.

Communal Cell Phone

To address the challenge of a lack of communication between families, the centre will provide a cell phone that can be shared by multiple families. Only 63% of Indonesians own a cell phone, while an additional 16% have access to a cell phone owned by someone close to them.⁶⁸ Providing an accessible phone will allow family members who cannot afford a phone to communicate with their loved one who has migrated for work.

Having a communal cell phone will also give female TKIs a stable phone number that they can contact, as well as staff personnel who will be able to take a message for their families. They can call or message whenever is convenient for them, which will accommodate those who may only have limited access to a phone. If the women do have their own phone in their destination country, family members can use the shared phone to initiate contact as well.

The centre will ensure that the cell phone is well maintained. If it is prepaid, it will have sufficient credits to send and receive calls, and it will have voice-mail to ensure that messages can be relayed and replayed.

It is important that the phone is cellular to ensure that it has SMS capability. It is easier to budget for text messages, which have a standardized cost, and they are often cheaper than making phone calls. SMS is also more discrete and may therefore be easier to use for women working domestically who do not want to make phone calls while their employers are nearby, or who need to transmit messages clandestinely.

The centre will also record the phone numbers of women and family members who use the centre's resources. This will allow the centre to facilitate communication in cases where someone has lost a phone number. An added benefit is that additional information can be relayed to TKIs and their families – for example, updates can be sent out regarding new rules on migration or new services offered by the resource centre.

Returnee Women

The resource center will also tailor support mechanisms specifically for returnee TKIs to smooth the transition from Saudi Arabia to Indonesia. This will include training on how to deal with altered family dynamics and sustainable financial management.

We have seen the success of remittance-linked financial products in cooperation with financial institutions in the Philippines. As the top receiver of remittances, the Filipino government introduced a Financial Literacy Campaign (FLC) involving the Central Bank of the Philippines (BSP).⁶⁹ Since February 2006, the BSP has been teaching about entrepreneurship, investments, and different financial instruments in 24 cities and provinces.⁷⁰ A similar financial literacy program could help returnees utilize their resources effectively.

Ensuring Accountability

One important aspect of running this resource centre will be accountability and ensuring that TKIs and their families have an active voice in the services offered. This will ensure that the services being provided actually fill a need.

For example, the BSP developed a feedback mechanism to improve the coverage and content of the FLC by surveying participants about the effectiveness of resource speakers, as well as giving them the opportunity to provide suggestions on how to improve the program.

Resulting from this were suggestions such as relaying success stories of enterprises that started small and made it big; providing information about business registration and licensing requirements for micro-enterprises; and presenting micro-entrepreneurship alternatives, such as credit facilities that a migrant worker or his/her beneficiary may avail of, prior to setting up a business.⁷¹ This will provide us with an avenue for future growth while maintaining our relevance.

What Sets Us Apart

Our approach empowers women by incorporating the family unit and the community in the migration process. Women alone should not be responsible for improving the negative effects associated with female migrant labour. Engaging the family unit and the community has much more potential to address the root causes of the issue by acknowledging the role that each actor plays in the life of the female TKI.

The many problems associated with female labour migration require a solution that addresses all of the issues in their entirety and complexity. In addition to working with female TKIs, we will work with their husbands, children, extended families, and the wider community. This is in recognition of the fact that changing gender and familial dynamics require engagement with the entire family unit, and that support for women must exist both internally – by providing women with the training and confidence necessary to support themselves, and externally – by providing their families and communities with valuable knowledge and resources to deal with their absence and support their return.

By providing women with the information and tools to understand the difficulties they will face and methods to deal with these issues, we hope to mitigate the violence, seclusion, and abuse they suffer abroad.

By informing women of their rights, providing access to communication, and creating a community willing to provide support in times of need, we will empower female migrant workers to stand up for themselves and create working environments that are healthy and profitable.

By engaging the families and communities of migrant female workers, we will reduce the stigma associated with their absence, and in the process, their internalization of their supposed inadequacies.

By supporting families and communities, we will empower these individuals to support the women that leave, and to deal with their absence in healthy and productive ways.

By opening this communication, we will initiate a narrative that does not brush these issues under the carpet but instead confronts the problems head-on to provide solutions that work for the entire community.

Further, our approach is dynamic: the educational workshops and facilities made available to female TKIs, their families, and the community can be easily modified to the context in which they operate. The pilot project we are proposing is specific to female migrant workers moving from East Java to Saudi Arabia, but the broader concept of providing holistic educational resources to female migrant workers and their families is applicable to many other situations. Our project has the capacity to move countries and contexts without losing its purpose.



LOGISTICS

Faith-Based Partnerships

In building new narratives of women’s empowerment, discourses of female domesticity and nationhood can be challenged from within by effectively partnering with faith-based organizations. This builds on “the emotional vocabularies and imagined geographies of gendered piety”⁷² that substantially affect the migration relationship between Indonesia and Saudi Arabia, two countries where Islam is both materially and symbolically pervasive.

The Asia Foundation has developed an interesting model of partnering with faith-based local organizations. It has contributed a great deal to women’s empowerment for development by working with pre-existing networks of faith-based community leaders, such as the Syarif Hidayatullah State Islamic Institute, Fahmina Institute, Women’s Coalition, and the Islamic University of Indonesia, among others.⁷³

We can employ a similar model, either through partnership with the Asia Foundation, seeking funds from the Asia Foundation, or garnering our own support through pre-existing community networks.

We aim to reflect a respect for local context, wherein there is an appreciation of “the catalytic role that individuals, communities, and governments play in the development of their societies.”⁷⁴ In Indonesia, this local context is fundamentally rooted in the values and principles of Islam, and our approach will be accordingly guided by the role that religion plays in the lives of female TKIs.

Government Partners

We would ideally want this program to be incorporated as an additional component of the pre-departure training that TKIs must undergo. Therefore, it is important for us to engage with government agencies. Prior to this, working with governments will engage critical stakeholders who have a vested interest in advancing the rights of migrant workers.

Nationally, the relevant ministry is the MoM.⁷⁵ Under the MoM, BNP2TKI is the body that is responsible for coordinating labour migration programs and functions. Therefore, we hope to engage BNP2TKI on some level, either as a partner or a potential funding source. The organization is comprised of representatives from all departments, agencies, and institutions relevant to migrant work, and answers directly to the President.⁷⁶

At a sub-national level, there are provincial MoM offices that operate under the authority of the governor and the Agency for the Service, Placement and Protection of Migrants Workers. Labour migration functions are also coordinated at a regional level. Finally, district-level MoM offices exist that report to city mayors.⁷⁷ Each of these government agencies is a potential partner for this project.

Funding

Similar programs have historically been funded externally by foreign government aid agencies. A sample of potential funding sources include: USAID, Australian Government Agency for International Development, Canadian International Development Agency (now a part of Canada's Department of Foreign Affairs, Trade, and Development), and the UK Department of International Development.⁷⁸

Conclusion

This report outlines the substantial problems that exist with the migration of females from Indonesia to Saudi Arabia for work. Female migration affects husbands, children, the broader family unit, and the community. These issues are not limited to Indonesia, but occur in many areas around the world.



What we have proposed is a pilot project that will address these problems in a targeted and culturally appropriate manner.

We have developed a program that is holistic, dynamic, and scalable to empower women and their families through skills development, education, and resources.

This support will not only come directly from the project we are proposing, but also by engaging the wider community. With the success of the pilot initiative in East Java, our program can be easily expanded to support women, their families, and their communities in a much broader global context.

With time and support, we hope to combat the negative effects associated more broadly with the issue of female labour migration, such as the double burden of working women as tradition-bearers. In the interim, we are committed to disaggregating the problems faced by female TKIs and providing manageable and scalable solutions to improve lives and empower women.

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