

## Migrant Workers' Lives and Experiences Amidst Malaysian Transformations

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**Abstract:** This study demonstrates that movement of people across periods, places and among people has not only existed for centuries but it has also been gaining a significant global attention through the prevailing debates on migration-development thesis in recent years. Most human mobility emanates from various, real and imagined, positive and negative changes and concerns that hit sending communities including the development in the destinations as evidenced in Malaysia, a newly industrialized nation, member of New Tigers, indeed migrants' recipient country of South-East Asia. Malaysia has been experiencing gradual reduction in mortality rate, increase in fertility and influx of migrants for decades but the latter is tied to her positive changes and sending areas' negative changes. It is less arguable that increasing entry of foreign workers into Malaysia exacerbated her economic progress as the origins profit from migrant remittances. The skills acquired by migrants and their exposure to a wide range of socio-cultural practices in Malaysia are beneficial to their sources, especially if they returned home. The payments for goods and services; transit visas, lodging, foods, drinks and transport fares by migrants at transit areas have had influence on the transit economies. Yet, migrants' involvement in breach of rules and regulations are headaches to Malaysia's social order and their readiness to offer cheap labor limit the chances of locals to bargain for and secure high wages and salaries. At times, undocumented migrants' rising volume poses security threat, stresses social amenities earmarked for locals and constitutes extra social and economic costs to government. The degrading treatments unleashed on migrant workers by officials, recruiting agents and employers often stain identity of host among comity of nations. Restructuring Malaysia's regulations on labor migrants, empowering local job-seekers, checking excesses of private industries and reducing migrant workers are needed for addressing these challenges and sustainable economy.

**Key words:** Foreign workers, living conditions, social development, sustainable economy, New Tigers, Malaysia

### INTRODUCTION

The migration flow is not only common in the North but it is also a prevailing phenomenon in the South, indeed in country like Malaysia (Faruqi, 2007). Malaysia is a home to 2-3 million documented and 1-2 million undocumented foreign workers (Huguet, 2008) though she received lesser number of migrants compare to most countries in the North. Perhaps because development is higher in the North and the region has been witnessing great influx of people from the less developed economies over the years and this has widened the gaps between the North and South as the latter remains at the disadvantage position (Craig, 2003). In reality, some of the migrants also constitute nuisance and enemies to develop as they breached legal

provisions in some of their host-countries in the North deliberately or ignorantly. As developed areas like Belgium, Canada, Denmark, France, Germany, Italy, Netherlands, Spain, Sweden, United Kingdom and United States etcetera receive more migrants (Pison, 2010) from developing areas of Africa, Asia, Latin America and Caribbean, more opportunities; remittances are channeled to senders for development, more chances of impacting on the developed areas due to labor, payments for taxes, visas and work permits exist alongside more challenges of containing the other side (crime rates, racial, ethno-religious and cultural mixture) of migration.

While writing on the pool of migrants across the globe, Fix *et al.* (2009) argued that at a regional level, Europe and Asia have the biggest concentrations of immigrants but on a country-based analysis, the US which

has one in twenty world residents, it is home to one in five of the world's migrants. Even the early Asian Tigers, Hong Kong, Singapore, South Korea and Taiwan (Fogel, 2004) that represent the advanced communities in Asia are not left out among recipient migrants from the region and beyond. According to Hugo (2010), Australia and New Zealand are two of the main hosts to millions of migrants in Pacific region. Asides from the Asian Tigers, Malaysia and Thailand are also major recipients of migrant workers in Asia, although each country contributes to each other's pool of migrant workers, still Malaysia received more migrants from Thailand than the latter usually supply to the former. This means that the latter often pull her migrant population from other countries with few from Malaysia.

Malaysia has 9 million labor forces in 1997 and the strength rose to 12 million in 2009. But record has it that migrant workers who are mostly from 12 Asian developing countries made up 2.2 million of her work force in 1997 and 3 million of the country's labor force in 2009. This demonstrates an inflow of workers, more importantly low-skilled and semi-skilled brand from neighboring countries to Malaysia. The increasing number of migrants to Malaysia is perhaps due to her changing status export-driven nature in the region. Other reasons that drew migrants to Malaysia are given by Robertson (2008) who argued that since 1990, she has continue to witness rising full employment, relatively low birth rate, growing aging population and apathy among locals to do jobs being defined as 3-D: dirty, difficult and dangerous. This of course created gaps in the country's work force which need to be filled up majorly by the foreign workers. The societal trends above and others have facilitated the changing status of Malaysia that Lall (2001) referred to as New Tigers. The phrase, New Tigers is also applied to Philippines and Thailand. These three (Malaysia, Philippines and Thailand) countries together with Indonesia are qualified as members of the Newly Industrialized countries (NICs).

Ironically, many migrant workers in Malaysia are from Indonesia, Philippines and Thailand-members of the NICs in South-East Asia (SEA). This seems to have serious implication on the statuses of Indonesia, Philippines and Thailand as NICs because the out-migration of their workers to Malaysia stands to militate against their productive, export-oriented, labor-intensive industries and speedy transformations among comity of NICs while Malaysia enjoys progress. In addition to the countries above, other migration sending SEA countries to Malaysia are Burma (Myanmar), Cambodia and Vietnam including Asian countries of Bangladesh, China, India, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka. Even beyond the shore of

Asia-pacific, migrants flow to Malaysia for manifest or latent reasons. Most migrants work in agricultural plantation, construction, manufacturing and service sectors in Malaysia (IFHR. and SUARAM, 2008). The Malaysian labor force, indeed economy also has migrants who are specially working as security guards and shop assistants in commercial sector and some as domestic helpers in private houses, private companies and public places. Possibly, each generation of people that moved to Malaysia is influenced by particular forces yet few literatures, indeed none connects pre-colonial mobility of merchants to Malaysia with the exodus of migrant workers to the country in colonial and post-colonial eras. This sore gap in literature marginalizes the much required X-ray of diverse trends and factors associated with migration flows to Malaysia. The mixture of happiness and sadness that trailed migrant lives in Malaysia is somewhat inadequately addressed in research and records. Further, migrant workers' contributions in altering the demographic, economic and social political atmospheres of Malaysia are relatively less articulated. Against the backdrop of loose treatments of these concerns in research and literature, this study seeks to re-trace the historical antecedent of migrants in Malaysia: to expound motives for migration, to shed light on the relevance of migration in changing Malaysian society and sending communities and thus to highlight some of the challenges linked to migration.

#### **MIGRANT GENERATIONAL TRENDS: PRE-COLONIAL, COLONIAL AND POST-COLONIAL ERAS**

It is however, pertinent to put the record straight that migration of people to the artificially created enclave known as Malaysia today dated back to centuries. Malaysia like many ex-colonies is artificial, especially when one ponders over the cases of Malays that are cut off to present day Thailand, Indonesia, Singapore and Brunei. The non-natural geo-political entity of Malaysia could be better appreciated if long history of migration is given credence. According to the ASEAN News Network (n.d.) some people who are sea-farers and farmers but of Chinese origin relocated to modern day Malaysia around 2500 BC. These migrants are known as Proto-Malays. The arrival of these Proto-Malays who represent the 1st generation of migrants and starting point of racial, ethnic and cultural mixture in Malaysia, sparked off the movement of Negritos to hills and mountainous areas. History had it that Negritos were the aborigines in Malaysia. Yet, it is not unlikely that Negritos also migrated to this region as Gugliotta's asserted that

modern humans who are dispersed around the world, owed their origin to Africa. The next groups of migrants to Malaysia are the merchants. Drabble (2010) revealed that a lot of merchants of Arab, Chinese and Indian origins had the chance of coming to Malaysia when she was famous as supplier of gold, tin, birds' feathers, edible birds' nests, aromatic woods and tree resins among other favorable articles in international trade. These trading activities allow some of them as voluntary migrants to temporarily settle and later some became permanent settlers. Of course, this trend signals the commencement of 2nd generation of migrants in Malaysia. It is less arguable that the ASEAN News Network's (n.d.) claimed that people-Indians, Chinese, Siamese, Arabs and Proto-Malays that are famous in the art of using iron collectively gave rise to the emergence of new mixed ethnic group known as Deutro Malays. This demonstrates the relevance of merchant settlers in structuring modern Malaysia, although the birth of relatively new ethnic group called Deutro-Malays was impacted upon by inter-racial marriages, social interactions, cultural exchange and ideal sharing among people of varied origins including Indonesians and all these have some impact on the formation of the present day racial group, Malays in Malaysia.

Centuries later as Drabble (2010) argues Europeans, particularly the Portuguese nailed their presence in the region in 1511 while the English East India company took off operation in 1600 and the Dutch East India company kicked off in 1602. By implication, these sets of Europeans are migrants in Malaysia, 3rd generation of migrants and their activities constitute the spring-board for the introduction and establishment of colonialism. As these Europeans settled in this region, they did not only interact with the indigenes and other ethnic groups but also married from the locals and other non-Europeans. The inter-racial marriages account for new set of people called the Eurasians in Malaysia. Aside from this new ethnic group whose emergence is credited to the Western migrants, the European companies also impact on Malaysian economy as their companies became competitors for pepper and other spices in the region. But the Dutch company finally moved to Indonesia in late 18 c, so the British company remains the dominant foreign investor in Malaysia having acquired Penang in 1786, Singapore in 1819 and Malacca in 1824.

The British extended her influence on Sarawak (North-West Borneo in 1841) and other parts of Malay Peninsula in 1870 as well as Sabah (North Borneo in 1882). Economic histories also showed that the British interests in tin mining including rubber, coffee, gambier, opium, pepper, sugar and tapioca in Malaysia and her nearness

to trade routes to Europe sustained colonialism (Drabble, 2000; Kaur, 1998). However, major capital and expatriates needed for the agricultural, mining and trading activities were from Europe, except few Chinese capital and large amount of migrant laborers from China and India which supported the British commercial exploration and benefited migrant manual workers and host's economic development. Most of these laborers that work on gold and tin mining sector, rubber and spice farms were invited, some attracted by the colonialists. They therefore represent the 1st generation of migrants in Malaysia. Kaur (1998) argued that from 1900-1920, each year approximately 61,000 Indian migrant workers arrived in Malaysia from Indian sub-continent and some even came from Netherlands Indies which is the modern Indonesia. The discovery of oil, few years before the commencement of its production in 1907 in Sarawak by a subsidiary of royal dutch-shell was a significant water-shed in the history of Malaysia and Asia as Chinese and Javanese migrant workers trooped into Malaysia for greener pasture. It is noted in the research of Skeat and Blagden (1906) and Drabble (2000) that the indigenous population equally participated in mining and agricultural activities at extremely low-scale level but they including Malays refused to serve as wage workers for the British. This refusal of the indigenous people and Malays to work for the British coupled with labor shortage and British inordinate ambition to exploit as many resources as they could within a limited time for the benefit of the West influenced their decision to invite/attract more migrant workers.

Aside from the people that arrived and settled in Malaysia in pre-colonial and colonial eras many also came as migrants in the post-independence period. Those that came in post-colonial era, specifically between August 31st, 1957 and mid 1980s fitted into the 5th generation of migrants in Malaysia while the foreigners that came in from mid 1980s to date fitted into the 6th generation of migrants in the country. However, the 5 and 6th sets of immigrants were unlucky to be considered as nationals, seeing that their arrival was after the country achieved independence from the British in August 31st, 1957. This expresses that no matter how long the 5 and 6th sets of immigrants lived in Malaysia there is no provision in Malaysian constitution which accord them recognition as citizens. These last two groups are mostly Indonesians (Omar, 2005), Filipinos (Peters, 2005) including Bengalis, Indians, Pakistanis and Nepalese. The implication is that the migrants contributed in swelling up the country's population. Judging from the economic reason for their relocation to Malaysia and their diverse origins, it is right to point that the migrants must

have altered the economic, social, political, religious and cultural values and practices of Malaysia. However, need arises to examine in depth the changes that occurred in Malaysia owing to immigration.

### **MIGRANTS' IMPACT ON DEMOGRAPHIC, ECONOMIC AND SOCIO-POLITICAL STRUCTURES**

The contributions of migrant workers to societal structure are dynamic and diverse in contents and contexts as the whole global community continually to be shaped by the activities of humans, especially those on the move and settlers. Hugo (2010) expresses that international migration exerts a significant influence on the economic, social and demographic development of all Asia-pacific nations in contemporary world. According to Kurus *et al.* (1998), most ASEAN countries have substantially boosted and are still boosting their overall national development due to migrant workers. Thus, Malaysia (Huguet, 2008), like other migrant receiving areas; Australia, New Zealand (Hugo, 2010) and Singapore (Yeoh, 2007) in Asia-pacific region and Nordic countries of Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Sweden as well as Middle East countries of Kuwait, Qatar, United Arab Emirate. Pison (2010) has witnessed a quite number of changes in her social, human and economic capitals indeed structures due to the labor of foreign workers.

The migrant workers in Malaysia cut across all strata (skilled, semi-skilled and unskilled) of workers in the society. The size of skilled workers is small compare to semi-skilled and unskilled workers who are commonly found in low ranks within farm settlements, restaurants, road, bridge, building construction sites, manufacturing industries and residential houses, private as well as public settings across Malaysia. This does not obliterate the facts that some of the migrants are suffering as they impact on the development of the country while some are law breakers. This is especially when some Filipinos sneaked into Malaysia with institutional support (Sadiq, 2005) and others came in through Thailand-Malaysia borderline. It is however, fair to argue that Malaysia has witnessed a substantial degree of changes since her independence in 1957, although relatively little development was recorded during colonial period. In reality, the progress gained amidst British colonial administration is far less than the resources that the colonialists exploited and exported from the country's agricultural and mining sectors. Owing to the stunted growth recorded in the colonial regime, the nationalist leaders worked tirelessly in seeing that the country shade off most of her colonial-oriented development features

and obstacles while moving towards modern development economy though Kassim (2007) revealed that she was obstructed by the mid 1970's recession. Of particular interest is the adoption of 1980s' development policy that favored Eastern economic model but it was initially weakened by the mid 1980s' global economic recession and later the country picked up at a very high speed (Sundaram, 2006). The success of the policy enlisted Malaysia among the league of world's NICs and New Tigers, indeed respected member of comity of nations, although the discourse of development process in the country will forever remain relatively incomplete and unfair without the inclusion of the participatory activities of foreign workers. Therefore, it is pertinent to examine the relationship between international migrant workers and the changing structure of Malaysian society from 3 major angles, viz. demography, economy and social politics yet more emphasis will given to migration and economic change.

### **MIGRATION IN SOCIETAL DEMOGRAPHIC RESTRUCTURING**

The demographic structures of societies are often determined by 3 key variables; fertility, mortality and migration, though each of these forces has sub-items within it. In the case of fertility, economic, social and cultural factors (Davis and Blake, 1956) so also indexes of marriages, contraceptives, induced abortion and postpartum infecundability (Bongaarts, 1978, 1982) including dating, sexual intercourse, female and male fertility.

According to Cutler *et al.* (2006) differential historical antecedent, access to improved nutrition, public health, medicines, incomes, wealth, education, social status, health-related behaviors, occupational ranks, racial affinities and geographical locations are few determinants of mortality rate in the world. Beyond these factors given by Cutler *et al.* (2006), other strong factors that are likely to influence mortality are differentials in sex, age, genetic traits, peaceful environment, accidents and levels of infrastructural facilities around the world. Yet, variation in mortality which exists among regions and countries is another element that has been shaping population strength and structure of every human society including Malaysian society.

Malaysia has been witnessing gradual population growth for years as indicated in the 1991, 2000 and 2010 population censuses (Table 1). Of particular interest in the Table 1 is shown the July-August 2010 population and housing census that shows her population strength as 27,565,821 (GeoHive, 2011). This figure is not only being

Table 1: Population censuses, 1991, 2000, 2011 in Malaysia by administrative units

States	Capital	Area (km <sup>2</sup> )	Population 1991-18-14 census	Population 2000-07-05 census	Population 2010-07-06 census
Johor	Johor Bahru	19,210	2,069,740	2,584,997	3,233,434
Kedah	Alor Setar	9,500	1,302,241	1,571,077	1,890,098
Kelantan	Kota Baharu	15,099	1,181,315	1,287,367	1,459,994
Melaka	Melaka	1,664	506,321	605,239	788,706
Negeri Sembilan	Seremban	6,686	692,897	829,774	997,071
Pahang	Kuantan	36,137	1,045,003	1,229,104	1,443,365
Perak	Ipoh	21,035	1,877,471	1,973,368	2,258,428
Perlis	Kangar	821	183,824	198,288	227,025
Pulau Pinang	George town	1,048	1,064,166	1,231,209	1,520,143
Sabah	Kota Kinabalu	73,631	1,734,685	2,468,246	3,120,040
Sarawak	Kuching	124,450	1,642,771	2,009,893	2,420,009
Selangor	Shah Alam	8,104	2,291,429	3,941,316	5,411,324
Terengganu	Kuala Terengganu	13,035	766,244	880,234	1,015,776
Federal territory of Kuala Lumpur	Kuala Lumpur	243	1,145,342	1,305,792	1,627,172
Federal territory of Labuan	Victoria	91	54,241	70,871	85,272
Federal territory of Putrajaya	Putrajaya	49	5,730	11,501	67,964
Total		330,803	18,379,655	23,274,690	27,565,821

GeoHive (2011)

determined by the relatively rise in birth rate and decline in death rate for years but also by the growing number of foreigners. The migration flow has therefore, enriched the country's demographic structure in terms of mixed compositions of people that came from different racial, ethnic, socio-economic, religious and cultural backgrounds and along mixed educational, marital and age categories living across diverse residential places in Malaysia's rural, sub-urban and urban areas.

It is pertinent to express that the population of each of the 13 Malaysian states above including the 3 federal territories have been on increase since 1991-2011. The rising number of people living in each of these states is likely to be swelled up by both internal migrants (rural-urban, urban-urban, rural-rural, urban-rural) and international migrants. The latter are mostly from Asia, indeed South-East Asian countries. Although, cross-border migration suffered from institutional attacks that are often justified by government's effort to beef up security and protect citizens' interests and other issues highlighted in Malaysian migration policies.

According to Kaur (2006) strict migration regulatory policies which were not in operation many years ago existence are now imposed in South-East Asia. Situating the issue on Malaysia, Huguet (2008) said in 1970s and 1980s, migrants' issues, especially irregular immigrant cases are somewhat neglected. It was in 1991 that Malaysia introduced policies of regularizing, regulating and controlling migration through the terms and conditions guiding recruitment of migrants. For example, there was an introduction of special levy for migrants' workers with a view to stem down the country's dependency on migrant workers. Few years later, specifically in April, 1993 the government froze the recruitment of migrants, so as to encourage the

participation of locals in labor force, although the ban was lifted in June of the same year, 1993. As some years rolled on, around August, 1997 the government imposed ban on renewal of work permits but those migrants that are interested in staying were given option to pick job in either agricultural sector or they return to their countries. Then in September, 1997 government opened her merciful door for recruitment of domestic workers and prospective migrant workers with interest in other sectors were allowed to be absorbed in October, 1997. Shortly after 1997, stricter migration policies came on board for economic, social and security reasons (Huguet, 2008). The intermittent changes in government regulations on recruitment and treatment of migrant workers above are never unconnected with the serious economic and social transitions which the country was going undergoing at the time. The wind of change which blew in Malaysia, ultimately touched upon the trends of migrant workers in the country (Table 2).

The migration record of the country indicates that in mid-year 1990, Malaysia has 1.014,156 million (5.6% of 18.103 million population) migrant workers while figure rise to 1.192,734 million (5.8% of 20.594 million population) in 1995 as well as 1.553,777 million (6.7% of 23.274 million population) in 2000.

In 2005 and 2010, the proportion migrants in the country were estimated to have increased to 2.029,208 million (7.9% of 25.633 million population) and 2.357,603 (8.4% of 27.914 million population), respectively. Though, these are projected figures yet they indicate a gradual rise in the country's migration population.

Beyond the estimated numbers of international migrants given by the UN DESA (2009) in Table 2, Malaysia has been battling with cases of undocumented migrants for long (Kassim, 2005; Omar, 2005; Peters,

Table 2: The 1990-2010 population and international migration profile of Malaysia

Indicators	Values
<b>(1990, 1995, 2000, 2005, 2010)</b>	
Estimated no. of international migrants at mid-year	1,014,156
	1,192,734
	1,553,777
	2,029,208
	2,357,603
Estimated no. of refugees at mid-year	62,672
	5,293
	50,502
	29,299
	35,122
Population at mid-year (thousands)	18,103
	20,594
	23,274
	25,633
	27,914
Estimated no. of female migrants at mid-year	453,265
	532,051
	696,096
	913,014
	1,065,349
Estimated no. of male migrants at mid-year	560,891
	660,683
	857,681
	1,116,194
	1,292,254
International migrants as a percentage of the population	5.6
	5.8
	6.7
	7.9
	8.4
Female migrants as percentage of all international migrants	44.7
	44.6
	44.8
	45.0
	45.2
Refugees as a percentage of international migrants	6.2
	0.4
	3.3
	1.4
	1.5
<b>(1990-1995, 1995-2000, 2000-2005, 2005-2010)</b>	
Annual rate of change of the migrant stock (%)	3.2
	5.3
	5.3
	5.3
	3.0

UN DESA (2009)

2005) across her states of Sabah and Sarawak including other parts of the country that shared border lands and seas with neighboring countries. This influx of undocumented migrants is one of the side effects of development and it poses grave threat to national security (Kassim, 2007). What is more, it costs the country fortunes because more personnel were recruited, trained, equipped and paid to checkmate the activities of the unwelcomed migrants in the country.

More so, border patrols, raiding of worksites and living quarters pave ways for official and voluntary security agents to engage in human rights abuses including corrupt practices which give bad impression about the country in the global arena.

The arrival of migrants from Bangladesh, Cambodia, India, Indonesia, Myanmar, Nepal, Pakistan, Philippines, Sri Lanka, Thailand, Vietnam in Malaysia (IOM, 2008) has implication on the ethnic and racial composition of the country. Although, the changing structure of demographic identity of Malaysia dated back to the pre-colonial era when social relations among Arabs, Chinese, Indians, Siamese and Proto-Malays led to the birth of Deutro-Malays and the colonial period when European (Portuguese, Dutch and British settlers) settlers inter-married with non-Europeans in Malaysia influenced the emergence of Eurasian. These combined promotes the existing multi-racial and ethnic structures of Malaysia as social relations and inter-racial and ethnic marriages between the locals and post-independence foreigners occurred. In this light, the erstwhile purity of existing racial and ethnic cultural principles and practices as well as national culture stand the chance of being altered through the racial and ethnic mixtures caused by migrant population in the country. This constitutes a stepping stone towards building of cultural diversity as envisaged by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation which asserts that:

Migration has become a key issue in today's globalised world both for the host countries and countries of origin. Policy maker are nowadays expected to implement new policies in order to protect the rights of migrants and to promote their integration in the society while safeguarding cultural diversity

The key challenge which is linked to cultural diversity centers around the management of the new values and ideals that migrants brought to the country.

### MIGRATION AND NATIONAL ECONOMIC PROGRESS

As part of the changing structure in Malaysian society, there exists a replacement of agricultural-based activities with industrial-based economies coupled with rising principles and practices that are linked to open-market economy; free trade with other states within the Asian region and beyond. The increasing engagement of the national corporations, like PETRONAS in operation around the world has been adding value to Malaysia's economy. The skyrocketed Foreign Direct Investment (FDI), a sort of strong capital investment in Malaysia by foreign countries and nationals facilitated the economic growth, rapid industrialization and indeed inflow of migrant workers which are much-needed for sustainable production and distribution of goods and services.

According to Ariff (1991), the fast growing economy of Malaysia owes much to the country's looking heavily

towards East and lightly towards Europe and America for trade, investment and other development-oriented ideals. This policy affords Malaysia the opportunity of becoming export-oriented and natural resources-based economy which are supported by well-cultured and tutored educated elites and transparent bureaucratic environment. The actualization of this policy was aided by the country's practice of open market economy that facilitated development of private sector, international trade and investments within and beyond Asia region. The initiated and executed government idea of less dependent on the Atlantic partners eat deep into Malaysia's macro-economic policies account for her rapid and regular trade expansion, industrialization, foreign investors in manufacturing sector, indeed regional and global recognition. In addition to the changes recorded above, Carmel (2003) argued that Malaysia has earned further recognition as one of the Tier-3, emerging software exporting nations. Most countries that are in this category are considered to earning between \$25-200 million annual incomes from exporting software products, although members have one or more, indeed Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) and possibly with few large enterprises that engage in the production of software with their borders and its distribution beyond their borders. This includes some enterprises which are subsidiaries of large Multi-National Corporations (MNCs) or home grown software firms. It is however impossible to rule out the contributions of migrant workers in making the existing software enterprises in Malaysia grow and develop. Kassim (2007) pointed out that in spite of Malaysia's unfortunate experiences during the mid 1970's recession and 1997's financial crisis, she has made a giant stride in realizing substantial portions of her economic development plans through increased infrastructure, urban transformation, replacement of agriculture-based and mining-oriented economy with manufacturing activities that attracted large amount of formal employees and mass poverty reduction. These laudable achievements pulled in many foreigners to the country as observed by Kassim (2007) that:

The inflow which began in the early 1970s, increased exponentially in the nineties as Malaysia became enamored with and became entangled in the web of globalization, the Malaysian labor force began to be infiltrated by foreign nationals and accordingly, their number among the population increased

It is of course true that Malaysian development enticed the trooping of foreigners into the country but for balance assessment of the migration trend in the country, need arises to recognize the fact that the substantial ideas

and capitals that were used in building the economy itself originated from outside. Specifically, the location and localization of manufacturing industries in the country were not only promoted by foreign investments and investors but also the industries were mostly labor-intensive and their survival largely depends on adequate supply of labor force. This was provided by not only the local work force and investors but also by migrant workers that are often ready to offer cheap and quality labor to the industries for productive and distributive activities which sustained Malaysia's economy.

The active involvement of documented and undocumented migrant workers cleaning, tree branches' trimming, grass cutting, garbage disposing, cooking, house building, road and bridge constructing, gardening, agricultural/plantation manual/merial labor, hotel and restaurant jobs which most locals detested enhanced the changing structure of Malaysian economy and society at large. This is in agreement with the submission of the FIDH-SUARAM that various members of civil society confirmed that the viability of the Malaysian economy is deeply related to this illegal immigration. The migrants usually influence Malaysian economy, seeing that some of the migrants did not only have their community shops such as Arab restaurants or mini-markets in different parts of the country but also a quite number of them patronized these shops to buy commodities that were imported into Malaysia from their homelands. As the migrant engage in commercial activities, they live and make payment for renewal of visa, work permits and services related to banking, housing, electricity, health, water and transportation. In sum, the participation of many migrant workers in diverse sectors of Malaysian economy like agriculture/plantation, manufacturing and construction, food processing and service industries have positive effect in improving the country's economy and development (Huguet, 2008; Project Maje, 2007). On this point, most migrants including investors, expatriates, semi-skilled and unskilled as well as those that came to study in various Malaysian educational institutions are financial, material and labor assets to the country's sustainable economic development, though some bad eggs among them are curse to the stability, growth and development of the country.

#### **MIGRATION AND SOCIO-POLITICAL LANDSCAPE**

The country experienced dramatic change in the body politics, a kind of transition from British colonial administrative and political hegemony to nationalistic-driven administrative system that somewhat speed up degree of respects for fundamental human rights. This transition gives the country the chance of enjoying

relative development. According to Ahasanul and Khatibi (2006) Malaysia's sustainable economic growth, political stability, diverse ethnic compositions and pluralistic cultures made her one of the most buoyant, wealthy and pleasant economies in the Southeast Asia. This of course, implies that harmonious social relations between citizens and residents that occurred in the country through stable and strong political leadership at home and the exercise of political leadership role and influence outside home are components of the changes that greeted the structure of Malaysia since independence. The above would not have been achieved if not for what Pandian (2010) observed that each of the country's six prime ministers since 31 August, 1957-independence has personal charismatic values and authority desirable to accommodate the needs and surroundings of which they led while in power. This perhaps, creates the opportunity for the government to develop the ability to manage social tension and migrant population to a greater extent, although Sundaram (2006) argues that the political leaders' attempt to maintain regime stability, led to allocation of national cakes to support the broad-based consociational ruling coalition of interest primarily organized along ethnic lines. Notwithstanding the limit of the political elites, Malaysia's social political strengths represented not only positive changes in the country but also contributed in attracting migrants who came in through diverse transport routes, air, water, land and through different modes of transportation like airplane, ship/boat/canoe and motor-vehicles. It is noteworthy that these developments also facilitated the trooping of undocumented migrants who are sources of threats to national security to the country. Although, Almselati *et al.* (2011) reported that Malaysia's fast growing economy account for rising urbanization and increases peoples ownership of private vehicles which ease transportation and movement of people within and beyond the country's border. This development is rooted in the successive national plans which the country had for decades. According to Kassim (2007), a quite number of development plans that Malaysia implemented in her post-independence era yielded positive results which possibly together with globalization contributed in the attraction many foreigners into the country.

#### **MIGRANTS' EXERTION OF INFLUENCE ON THE TRANSIT COMMUNITIES AND THEIR HOMELANDS**

The migrants also exposed the transit areas to unexpected benefits as they pass across the communities on their ways to the targeted destination. For example, it is not uncommon that some migrants paid for transit

visas, made payments for lodging during a brief stay at transit communities. At times, the migrants usually buy foods, drinks and some other articles which they desire during transit thereby impacting on the transit areas. Even, some of the migrants have to pay transport fares at transit areas which also symbolized their widow's mite contributions that often went unnoticed in most migration researches and literature. According to Gnisci and Tremolieres (2006), there are instances where transit migrants engage in using and paying for goods and services from hotels, itinerant trading and transportation. They also influenced the population of temporary settlements in the transit areas. De Haas (2008) revealed that during migration which is often along three interdependent and interrelated routes that spread through the origins, transit and destination, some spent a month to years as they moved and settled temporarily in various transit areas (towns located on migration hubs). During the movement, they engage in income-earning activities. The proceeds are used to further the journey, no matter the cost, burden and risk involved at each stage of migration to counter obstacles. Of course, these are largely influence of migrant workers on the move towards the development of transit communities, although they are rarely associated with the progress at the transit zones. At the origins, migrants are said to have wielded great amount on influences which culminated into transformation of the lives of those whom they left behind.

The migrant labors have had a significant impact on their home communities in number of ways, especially by sending of remittances home for the family upkeep. Even the acquired skills in foreign lands are often useful for setting up business by returned-migrants while the social exposure gained in abroad could be profitable in handling home affairs during problem situation. According to Chappell *et al.* (2010), migrants have steered global development in different forms as their real disposable incomes increased they send funds to their households members, distant relations and friends back home. This act impacts on the beneficiaries living standards, stabilizes their business and allows those without jobs to get something doing to improve their lives. Further, Tacoli (2008) argued that migrants influenced their communities of origin by reducing the unemployment rates at home and increasing the quality of life of their families through remittances. For instance, DeLancey (2007), Faist (2008) and Raghuram (2009) expressed that the influx of people from hamlets, villages and small towns to African urban centers have contributed to the economic, social, political, cultural growth and sustainable development of the communities of origin and the receiving communities for decades. The



impact of migrant workers in shaping the world is tripartite in nature as they contribute to not only the receiving and transit areas but also greatly to the sending communities.

### **CHALLENGES OF MIGRATION AND DEVELOPMENT**

It is happiness as most of the migrants are developing personally for meeting some of their basic social needs and their labor, payment for goods and services and social interaction with people are shaping the structure of Malaysia while their acts of sending remittances and commodities to their origins enriched their sources. But the sadness accrues from the abuses that they regularly encountered in the hands of government officials, vigilantes, outsourcing agents and employers. Rahman (2009) posits that most migrants in Malaysia are from weak socio-economic group as such pose threat to the host. This is because they could do anything outside the conventional wisdoms and ideals of the destination to survive. For example, the crime commissions being traced to migrants, especially those that lose their jobs due to retrenchment, incapacitation and societal frictions is a bottleneck to pathway to progress. Reports of Hedman (2008), Huguët (2008) and Project Maje (2007) have shown that many migrant workers in Malaysia are subjects of exploitation, torture, harassment, molestation, health hazard and deportation. Xavier said in addition to migrant workers vulnerability to exploitation by outsourcing agents, employers and state official, the legal system is weak in give them protection and they are disempowered to form a union and thus can not fight for themselves. Gurowitz (2000) argued that denying migrant workers the chance to constitute a union poses a lot of threats to their solidarity and constrained their better opportunities as humans in Malaysia.

According to the Human Rights Watch (2010), raids in worksites and living quarters, stepped-up arrests, deportations, overcrowded state of detention camps, their poor facilities such as unsafe water, inaccessibility to health care, low quality and quantity food that some migrants are exposed to in Malaysia need to be redressed. Other issues revolved around female domestic workers who suffered from delayed payment of remuneration, unregulated minimum wage, long working hours, physical and sexual abuses including denial benefits of Malaysia's Employment Act which limit working hours, guarantee public holidays, recognizes a day off weekly, allows annual/sick leave, offers maternity protections and fair termination of contracts (Human Rights Watch, 2011). The Human Rights Watch (2009) said some of the abuses being inflicted on migrant

workers, especially on suspected undocumented migrants in Malaysia whenever untrained paramilitary force called RELA (Ikatan rakyat or people's voluntary corps) carried out raids with support of police and immigration officials include physical assault, threats, humiliating treatment, forced entry into living quarters, extortion, theft and destruction of identity or residency papers. Yet, Malaysia is a signatory to the January 2007's adopted ASEAN declaration on the protection and promotion of the rights of migrant workers whose article 8 reads that government shall promote fair and appropriate employment protection, payment of wages and adequate access to decent working and living conditions for migrant workers (Robertson, 2008).

The continuous and active presence of migrant workers in diverse sector of Malaysian economy created unhealthy competitive labor markets where the locals are required to strive very hard so as to blend and survive. More so, over supplied of labor which is influenced by the increasing number of migrant workers in the country could lead to stagnation or reduction in remunerations of and incentives for workers and this is unlikely to augur well with the locals. The migrant workers, more importantly the so-called undocumented ones have the potential of stressing the social amenities, since their population are hardly taken into consideration during budgeting and planning and this poses a lot of danger to the quality and quantity of satisfaction expected by the citizens and other documented migrants in the country. At times, migrants are additional social and economic costs to the government yet their labor are desired for sustainable growth and development. In sum, it is right to point that migrants faced complex lifestyles that are often mixed up with happiness and sadness.

### **CONCLUSION**

The social reality of migration has a long history in Malaysia, seeing that about five to six generations of migrants impacted upon the structural development of the country over the years. Among the migrants are the early sea-farers and agriculturalists, traders and merchants, evangelists, miners, explorers, colonialists, laborers including modern day refugees like Somalis and stateless persons such as Kachins and Roghinyas from Myanmar. It is however, noteworthy that these migrants demonstrated varied reasons for moving to Malaysia and their activities have shaped the country to a large extent. In other words, the complex and dynamic compositions of migrants in Malaysia signified that spatial relocations emerged from real or imagined, positive or negative social changes and environmental concerns

at the sending, transit and receiving areas. For example, the rising status of Malaysia as a component of newly industrialized countries and new Asian Tigers has been an attracting force for migration. The growing influx of migrant workers to Malaysia justifies the country's positive changes in contrast to the origin's negative changes, although the foreign workers are facing institutional restrictive regulations that are frustrating their movements across their artificial geo-political borders to Malaysia for greener pasture. Thus, it becomes imperative for their home countries to neutralize joblessness, low remuneration, poor access to basic services, lack of infrastructure, tense political arena, growing conflicts, youth unrest, corruption, social injustice, rising population and other development threats in order to retain the skills of their nationals for development.

At the receiving country, Malaysia government should re-orient the locals about the negative effect of joblessness and positive effect of working for self-reliance and subsequently encourage them to be embracing the 3-D jobs.

Doing this requires that government, her agents, CSOs, NGOs, Labor Unions among other stakeholders in development should collectively lobby private employers of migrants to restructure conditions of services and upgrade wages and salaries so that unemployed locals could go for the perceived low profile jobs.

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