"Reaching the unreached": The role of civil society in providing access to education for migrant children from Myanmar in Thailand

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ABSTRACT— In the last twenty years, the focus on human rights has only increased, resulting in a series of international and regional agreements for countries to take responsibility to improve their citizens’ lives. Marginalization is often the result of political, social or cultural disparities, and the issue of human rights evolves into complex and diverse tendencies. Studies have been done to find obstacles in gaining equality; the issues have been recognized and acknowledged and awareness that the goal of Education for All cannot be achieved without collaboration between governments and non-governmental institutions has taken place. In 1990 the Thai government ratified the UNESCO agreement on Education for All and is currently taking part in the Southeast Asian Ministers of Education’s program Reaching the Unreached.

Introduction

Although Thailand has hosted migrants from neighboring Myanmar for several decades, many migrant populations in Thailand continue to be excluded from social participation and the realization of basic human rights. Among these is the universal right to education for children and adults. According to the Thai state, children from Myanmar are considered stateless or illegal immigrants (Huguet and Chamratrithirong 2011). The Southeast Asian Ministers of Education Organization (SEAMEO) considers this group as part of the “the unreached,” a description used for groups who have been historically or culturally excluded due to economic and political trends. According to SEAMEO, the unreached “are in the lowest range in the indicators of education participation and performance, and they lack or have no access to educational opportunities and services” (SEAMEO 2008).
This article examines educational opportunities for child migrants from Myanmar in Thailand and draws attention to tools that could be used to strengthen cooperation between various actors to improve access to quality education for this “unreached” population.

The right to education is firmly grounded in international human rights law. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights states that everyone has the right to free, compulsory, and non-discriminatory primary education (United Nations General Assembly 1948, Article 26, Section 1). Similarly, the UN Convention of the Rights of the Child in Article 28 recognizes “the right of the child to education...on the basis of equal opportunity.” It thus requires availability and access to free primary education, regardless of background or additional circumstances of a person. States that are party to the Convention, including Thailand, vow to achieve progressively the full realization of these rights given available resources (UN General Assembly 1989, Article 4).

Governments and organizations across the globe recognize education as an important development strategy. In 1990, the participating countries at the World Conference on Education for All in Jomtien, Thailand, acknowledged the need to improve education by making it more relevant and universally available (World Conference on Education for All 1990). The resulting declaration articulated a commitment to meet basic learning needs of every child, youth, and adult through strategies of “universalizing access and promoting equity; focusing on learning; broadening the means and scope of basic education; enhancing the environment for learning; [and] strengthening partnerships” (World Conference on Education for All 1990). Thailand adopted the Jomtien Declaration on Education for All in its own National Plan of Action for 2002–2020, articulating, “Thailand has seen education as a fundamental right of all citizens as well as an important instrument to improve quality of life and a basis for community development” (Chandavimol 2002).

Despite these commitments, many barriers to education persist for children of migrants. In Thailand, migrant children from Myanmar have limited Thai languages skills and are often denied health, educational, and other social benefits because they lack legal documents. Despite restrictions on where they can travel, some move frequently from site to site and accompany their parents to work, often working
alongside them (Huguet and Chamratrithirong 2011). In 2005, the Thai Cabinet passed the Cabinet Resolution of Education for Unregistered Persons, which allows children in Thailand with no legal status to enroll in public schools certified by the Ministry of Education (Ministry of Foreign Affairs 2011). This marked a turning point in Thai policy around migrant rights and education. Since then, the government has made some efforts to enable implementation of this policy. For example, the Thai Ministry of Education allocated 2.5 billion baht over three years, from 2008 to 2010 to provide a standard education to children of migrant workers and ethnic minorities (IOM 2011). Nevertheless, the formal education gap for migrant children remains significant. The International Organization for Migration (IOM) estimated that approximately 128,000 migrant children from Cambodia, the Lao People’s Democratic Republic, and Myanmar resided in Thailand in 2008 yet in 2011, the official number of migrant and stateless children attending formal schools in Thailand was merely 75,000 (Huguet and Chamratrithirong 2011, 70).

Assuring fair and equitable access to cultural resources and support can be seen as part of “cultural democracy.” This concept was deliberated by Ramirez and Castaneda (1974) as a means to promote ethnic diversity in a society in which mainstream culture is adopted at the same time:

Cultural democracy was perceived as a philosophical precept that recognizes that the way a student communicates, relates to others, seeks support and recognition from his or her environment, and thinks and learns is a product of the value systems of his or her home and community. When students are allowed to use their preferred cultural and cognitive styles, they achieve success and can proceed to learn their nonpreferred learning style...[they] retain their identities with their original cultures (Salkind 2008).

Ramirez and Castaneda (1974) consider encouraging individuality within a multicultural, global age, focusing on the individual country’s education system as a particularly important arena where this practice should find its place. They see that equal educational opportunity is denied when educational policy and practice favor one teaching and cognitive style over another. In particular, this most commonly affects
children from ethnic minorities because the school and home environments represent two distinct sociocultural systems. Successful functioning of a multiculture depends on the development of the total person; to achieve this, a country's education must promote flexibility in cultural and cognitive styles (Salkind 2008).

In response to this gap and to address ongoing social, cultural, and political barriers to education, migrant learning centers have been established by NGOs throughout the country, particularly in regions with high concentrations of migrant workers. Although the learning centers are not formally recognized by the Thai Ministry of Education, they offer an education alternative that caters to the unique educational needs of children of migrants from Myanmar. Against this backdrop, the present study highlights the strengths and shortcomings in the educational opportunities available in Thailand to migrant children from Myanmar. It examines collaboration between NGOs and elected local governments in three Educational Service Areas in Thailand, and draws attention to tools that could be used to strengthen cooperation between government institutions and NGOs in Thailand in order to achieve the goal of Education for All.

**Methodology**

Qualitative interviews were conducted in Phuket, Ranong and Phang Nga provinces with individuals working in various areas of education and migration. The three provinces were chosen because they are home to substantial numbers of families from Myanmar and have a long history of accommodating migrant workers. Out of the total population of Ranong (approximately 300,000), it is estimated that 130,000 are migrant workers from Myanmar. They comprise such a large proportion of the workforce that researchers observe, “it is very clear that the local economy of Ranong can no longer be sustained without these Myanmar workers” (Fujita et al. 2009). Both Phuket and Phang Nga have high demand for migrant labor in construction, rubber plantations, fishing, and fishing-related industries. In 2008 there were over 80,000 new registered migrant workers from Myanmar in these two provinces combined (Mekong Migration Statistics 2008).

This study utilizes the vertical case study approach described by Vavrus and Bartlett (2006). These authors argue that conducting
research with multiple NGOs and different local actors is the most effective way of analyzing and interpreting educational issues. Such a methodology "helps to counter the tendency to view local knowledge as an add-on to the knowledge that 'really counts' by making comparison among micro- and macro-levels the centerpiece of the research endeavor" (Vavrus and Bartlett 2006). This study thus aims to emphasize the importance of local knowledge in order to "develop a thorough understanding of the particular at each level and to analyze how these understandings produce similar and different interpretations of the policy, problem, or phenomenon under study" (Vavrus and Bartlett 2006). The interviews in this study were conducted in early 2012 with representatives from NGOs and learning centers. The NGOs selected for inclusion are characterized by long-term involvement in supporting migrants in the respective provinces, their connections to larger, international efforts in education, and the multiple dimensions in which they support Myanmar migrants in Thailand. In all, the researcher interviewed five NGO managers and education coordinators (see Annex A).

In addition, the researcher conducted interviews with teachers and head teachers at three public schools and one representative from each local authority in the research areas. These actors were chosen based on their involvement in community social development matters, including support for health, education, and protection of migrant children in their respective Thai communities. Information from these interviews was used to triangulate the reality of education provision to migrant children in the three provinces.

The results of this research are presented anonymously given the sensitivity of the issue of education and social welfare of migrants in Thailand. Such sensitivity stems from historically tense relations between Thailand and Myanmar and conflicting viewpoints of migrants in Thailand as a social versus national security issue. Actual names of the research areas are omitted in the data below; instead, each province has been randomly assigned a number represented as Research Sites 1 to 3.

This study assesses the quality of education for migrant children using the Four As framework, originally proffered by the United Nations Special Rapporteur on the right to education, Katarina Tomasevsksi, and a similar analytical framework put forth by the Committee
on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights to analyze the rights to adequate housing and food (CESCR 1999). The framework sets out four essential features of education, namely: availability, accessibility, acceptability, and adaptability. In doing so, the framework proposes that not only is it important that educational opportunities exist for migrant children, but the quality of education is equally important. Satisfactory school environments must include proper buildings, sanitation, and the availability of teaching materials. Children ought to attend school at a reasonable distance from their homes and school fees should be affordable. The curriculum must be of quality, relevance, and suitability to its learner audience. Additionally, discrimination is unacceptable; schools and their staff must take responsibility to adapt to the needs of learners and be flexible (CESCR 1999). The results of this study are presented according to each of the four dimensions of the Four As framework at each of the research sites, followed by a discussion on the quality of education available to Myanmar migrant children.

Each of the three provinces has at least one learning center providing educational opportunities for migrant children from Myanmar. This is consistent with the situation throughout Thailand, with some provinces having up to 13 different learning centers administered by different NGOs. Although none of the learning centers have been standardized by government, the children (aged three to seventeen years) have access to kindergarten, elementary school, and vocational schools. There are, however, variations in the length of experience and development between the learning centers in each province.

**Results: availability of opportunities**

According to the Four As framework, functioning educational programs are to be “available in sufficient quantity within the jurisdiction of the State party” (CESCR 1999). There are four key factors that should be in place for full availability of educational opportunities: a sufficient number of skilled teachers; proper school buildings; available health services; and a diverse and quality curriculum. Each is discussed in turn below.

**Teachers**

The availability of qualified teachers is a common challenge in each
of the three provinces. One major concern is in ensuring a sufficient ratio of teachers to students. At a learning center in Research Site One, older children are responsible for caring for the youngest children while the teachers rotate among the different classes. Occasionally, the older children abuse the responsibility assigned to them (Learning Center teacher, Research Site One: 28 February 2012). Despite having access to education at learning centers, poor teacher to student ratios prevent migrant children from receiving adequate education. This makes the process of enrolling migrant children into public schools more difficult. Interviewees from the public schools that admitted students from Myanmar note that those enrolled students tend to have insufficient Thai language skills (NGO manager, Research Site One: 24 February 2012).

A public school in Research Site Two with a significant number of students from Myanmar has collaborated extensively with NGOs in the province to respond to this deficit of qualified teachers. School expertise on migrant children was lacking among the staff, funding from local government was limited, and the public school could not afford extra teachers. To improve this situation the school collaborated with an NGO to hire teachers from Myanmar whilst the NGO paid their salaries. Migrant children and their parents are thus able to communicate with school staff without worrying about language barriers (Public School teacher, Research Site Two: 20 March 2012).

Many teachers have limited understanding of the human rights issues faced by migrant children from Myanmar. In Research Site One, teacher training is provided by the Educational Service Area (ESA). Staff from the ESA train teachers on pedagogical methods, human rights, and other issues pertaining to Myanmar migrants in Thailand. During such training, teachers review the children’s living situations and discuss the importance of mutual respect. To be properly equipped with a focus on migrant children’s interests and needs, teachers are encouraged to learn and adapt accordingly (ESA official, Research Site One: 2 March 2012).

We want, and try, to teach them the importance of respect. Not only to be respected as an adult but that the children also deserve respect just because they are human beings. As a teacher we believe you will gain much more respect from your students if you start the school
year by showing that you respect them. This will create self-confidence in the children, mutual understanding and a better school environment (ESA Official, Research Site One: 2 March 2012).

According to the management at an NGO in Research Site One, collaboration between public schools and ESA has vastly improved over the last two years since Thailand adopted laws entitling all children to education. Learning center representatives believe that the teacher training provided by ESA helps give the children academic knowledge in an atmosphere of equality and human dignity (NGO Manager, Research Site One: 24 February 2012).

Learning facilities

Common to all the learning centers included in this study is that their teaching facilities are supported by an NGO. Neither ESA nor other authorities provide buildings for learning centers, thus the quality of the school building depends solely on the amount of funding provided by the NGO. Interviews revealed that the learning environments are varied. One learning center in Research Site One has a poor learning environment with a one-story building housing more than two hundred students of all ages, from three- to seventeen-years old, with no division among levels. A noisy and chaotic environment is evident, and low roofing and overcrowding result in poor air quality. The staff work arduously, yet the headmaster of sixteen years questions how much the children are indeed learning (Learning Center headmaster, Research Site One: 28 February 2012).

Other learning centers have more suitable environments for learning. For example, another learning center in Research Site One had the most classrooms. These classrooms were clean and spacious, with adequate air quality, and could accommodate a reasonable number of students per class (Learning Center, Research Site One: 28 February 2012).

Health services

The requirements outlined in the Four As framework do not only include academic standards, they factor in the availability of health services as well. Many migrant students come from poor homes, often characterized by poor living conditions, malnutrition, and hygienic deficiency and lack access to health services in Thailand.
An NGO in Research Site Three provides social services to both Thai children and migrant children living in poverty, yet it attests to the difficulties of providing services equally due to limited financial support from the municipality. The NGO hopes to establish matching medical benefits, but whilst they offer monthly visits from a doctor, a dentist and access to hospital services to Thai children, the director still awaits an answer for similar arrangements for migrant children. When an accident occurs and a migrant child is injured, the NGO manager says,

"We have to arrange a fundraiser to collect the money needed. One of our Burmese children was in a traffic accident and was in desperate need of medical attention. After many hours on the phone we managed to collect the money needed to give him medicine. We do not have a long term health plan and have to handle every issue as it happens. It is stressful and an unsuitable situation for the children and us" (NGO manager, Research Site Three: 28 September 2011).

For the NGOs in the two other provinces, cooperation with local health services is improving. Furthermore some learning centers have access to larger NGOs that offer health centers to migrants. In Research Site One there is a health clinic run by the same NGO that manages the learning center, so migrants can bring their children there to receive medical care (NGO manager, Research Site One: 24 February).

At Research Site Two, it is an NGO that mostly arranges for doctors and medical attention when needed, although there is one local hospital that supports migrants living close by (NGO manager, Research Site Two: 20 March).

These findings highlight the differences across provinces and institutions, and how the ability to provide services depends on the size and capacity of the NGO in charge of the learning center. At all the learning centers it was clear that the financial sufficiency and scope of work by the NGO determined whether medical aid was available or not. A lack of government support was evident in all the learning centers interviewed and there were no policies being promoted for equal access to health services nor any encouragement for equal medical treatment.
Materials

The administration of school materials is in the hands of the learning centers in all three research sites, although the process of collecting books and other materials varies. At Research Site Three, the teachers bring books from Myanmar themselves. It is difficult to gain access to educational materials, however, and the learning center is mostly dependent on private donors (NGO manager, Research Site Three: 28 September 2011).

At Research Site One, a curriculum collaboration network provides each learning center with one book per subject. The network consists of representatives from ESA, administrative personnel from public schools, and management from NGOs. Together they develop teaching materials that are based on the Thai national curriculum. This makes it easier for migrant children to transfer to public schools and it is part of the process for learning centers to be standardized by the Ministry of Education as formal schools. The final materials prepared by the network are copied by each learning center and distributed to the migrant students (NGO manager, Research Site One: 1 March 2012). There is also an NGO that supplies a public school with materials each year, as the school enrolls approximately twenty migrants from one of the learning centers. This kind of collaboration eases financial pressure and speeds up the process of transferring migrant children to public schools (NGO manager, Research Site One: 1 March).

Results: accessibility

According to the CESCR, educational institutions should be accessible to all without discrimination, especially to the most vulnerable groups. Accessibility in this regard is also defined in terms of physical accessibility and economic accessibility. The distance from learners’ homes to school should be reasonable and within “safe physical reach” (CESCR 1999). Furthermore, education should be affordable to all if not made available for free.

Distance to school

For migrants, the distance of travel between locations is important because many families feel insecure about moving alone. Some
employers prohibit workers from moving outside the workplace and in some cases, night curfews are in place. Establishing the school at a close distance to migrants’ homes allows easier access to education for their children. Learning centers are usually located in or near migrant communities. In Research Site Three, the learning center is located near the harbor since many migrant workers are settled there (NGO education coordinator, Research Site Three: 5 October 2011). In the other two provinces, a similar arrangement exists as the placement of the centers is vital for access and convenience.

One learning center in Research Site One, however, does not have an ideal location as it is in a Thai middle-class community. To compensate for the length of travel, the NGO provides free round-trip transportation for learners (NGO manager, Research Site One: 1 March 2012). Such an arrangement seems to be common among learning centers in Research Sites Two and Three as well, although provision of free transportation is costly for the learning centers. The learning centers that are not funded by large NGOs cannot afford to provide free transportation and instead collect a monthly fee from migrant families to cover transportation costs (NGO manager, Research Site Two: 20 March 2012). At a public school in Research Site Two most of the migrant children live far away and have to pay between 300 and 700 Thai baht per month for transportation, travelling for over one hour in each direction (Public school teacher, Research Site Two: 20 March 2012). Public schools typically are not located near migrant communities. From the data collected, it is more common for public schools in remote areas to accept migrant children, yet the great distance between public schools and migrant communities creates challenges for students to attend classes.

Even so, there is at least one example of transportation collaboration between an NGO and a public school in Research Site One. Here, when migrant children transfer from a learning center to the public school, the support for transportation continues, namely the truck that brings students to the learning centers also stops at the public school. This is an arrangement that has been sustained since children from Myanmar have started to enroll in this public school (NGO manager, Research Site One: Feb-March 2012). The availability of transportation is an essential aspect to be considered when transferring a student from a learning center to a public school. However, this
type of arrangement between an NGO and public school at Research Site One is the exception rather than common practice among the study sample.

Affordable payments

The second factor for full accessibility of education is affordable cost, where quality education should be offered at a cost bearable for migrant families. The data collected reveals varied fees and payments required by learning centers. One learning center in Research Site One requires 30 baht per student per month, but with a discount if siblings are enrolled in the same learning center. For the other learning centers, usually only a small fee for transportation is required, except in Research Site Three where there are no charges at all.

In all provinces, there is no financial support from the authorities, contradicting the promise from the Office of the Basic Education Commission (OBEC) of increasing financial support to migrant schools. The budget for learning centers depends fully on NGO funding and donations, which in turn shapes what can be offered to the migrant students:

We do occasionally have children who come to us and cannot pay the fee. Some of the children's parents might be out on a boat and cannot pay before they are back. Others are prevented from receiving a salary each month. But we also have children that simply cannot afford to pay. In any case we make an arrangement for them to pay when they have money. We do not deny any child to attend school, even though they cannot pay (Learning center teacher, Research Site One: 28 February 2012).

The tendency towards short-term planning among learning centers emerges from dependency on external, often international, funding. Recent trends have shown diminishing international interest in providing aid funding to Thailand, due in part to the country's economic growth. The global public's eye appears to be turning its attention to Myanmar instead (NGO manager, Research Site Two: 16 March 2012). An interview with an NGO headquarter in Bangkok, which provides funding to provinces in the south, implied that there are planned reductions and even a complete cessation of support in
the future since the Ministry of Education had promised to increase its support to learning centers by the end of 2012. However, according to a government official, no money in the ESA budget is earmarked to supply learning centers yet the support needed to standardize a learning center must come from the ESA.

As long as learning centers are not standardized they will not receive any funding from us (ESA official, Research Site One: 2 March 2012).

**Discrimination against migrant children**

The final aspect for accessibility to education is discrimination (CESCR 1999). The Oxford Dictionary defines discrimination as, "The unjust or prejudicial treatment of different categories of people, especially on the grounds of race, age or sex" (2014). According to the deputy mayor in Research Site Three, there are cultural differences between Thailand and Myanmar that bring about difficulties for the teachers to accommodate migrant students:

Public schools do not get extra funding when admitting Burmese children. This makes it challenging for our staff when they eat different food and have distinctive customs. When our teachers do not know their culture and the children do not like Thai food, it creates complications. We need funding and means to be able to adjust and gain knowledge (Deputy Mayor, Research Site Three: 3 April 2012).

Even if one were to define these matters as excuses, they are reasons given to not accept migrant children into public schools. Language barriers are also often cited as concerns. In all three provinces the learning centers stated that public schools that do not accept migrant children blame language for their decisions, although oral or written tests are not administered.

NGO management in Research Site One cites bad behavior and concentration problems in the classroom as reasons why public schools are hesitant to enroll children from Myanmar.

If the child learns quickly at the public school, they can stay. But
if the teacher observes that the child has difficulties following the subjects; the students will be asked to leave (NGO manager, Research Site One: 24 February 2012).

It remains common that migrant students, due to their legal status, their background, and lack of legal papers will not receive a diploma upon graduation. Also none of the learning centers visited have had any success collecting the Regulation on Evidence of a Child’s Birth for School Admission. Yet, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs stated in 2011 that nationality should not be a determinant for a student’s struggle towards achievement.

In the event where the afore-mentioned evidence is missing, parents, care-takers, or non-governmental organizations can present personal history records of a persons and children, or the educational institute concerned can conduct an interview to note down details related to the personal history of the child concerned (Ministry of Foreign Affairs).

According to interviewees from the learning centers, public schools and local ESA, data show that children from Myanmar in public schools tend to achieve above average grades, and their academic levels tend to rise above those of Thai students as soon as their language skills are proficient (NGO management, Research Site One and Two: February–March 2012, ESA official, Research Site One: Public school teacher, Research Site Two: 20 March 2012).

The Ministry of Education (MOE) has adopted the universal Education for All policy, and also has been a very active participant in adjusting and developing a set of Southeast Asian education goals and aims for ASEAN collaboration. The MOE has further restructured its organization and distributed responsibility and workload to provincial ESAs. Without pressure and demands from the government, however, public schools can continue acting as they see fit. An ESA official from Research Site One illustrates the province’s current situation:

Corruption is a common issue in Thailand and sadly the education sector is also affected by this. It is a division inside the department. On the one side you have the ones truly working to improve the
migrants’ rights and who are willing to implement laws and regulations. On the other side there are people really working against people from Myanmar gaining their entitled rights. In addition, there are the ones willing to be bought to close their eyes, or who are not interested in helping certain groups of people because it is of no personal profit (ESA official, Research Site One: 2 March 2012).

The deputy mayor in Research Site Three said that most migrant children are either sent back to Myanmar to attend school or do not want to study at all. He continued that no proper means are available to accommodate migrant children in their schools since the MOE in Bangkok does not provide enough funding (Deputy Mayor, Research Site Three: 3 April 2012).

An NGO manager in Research Site One concludes:

After years of working here we have realized that not much is being done without knowing the right people. We need contacts high up in the system. The collaboration itself has not improved, but now we have more relationships and communication with important people (NGO manager, Research Site One: 1 March 2012).

The ESA official in Research Site One believes that Thai teachers in learning centers only half-heartedly support and help migrant children. He also notices a hierarchy between the Burmese and Thai teachers, in addition to biased attitudes towards the children (ESA official, Research Site One: 2 March 2012). He added that this might also explain the slow progress amongst the migrant students wanting to transfer to public schools and continue their studies.

As described by Castles and Miller (1998), in many countries the many negative attitudes towards migrants stem from national security concerns. This is then used as a justification for exclusion and exploitation. The recurring reference to the issue of national security is also another obstacle faced by learning centers: there are claims that learning centers use their premises to distribute drugs, allow gambling and provide teachings that are harmful for the nation state (NGO manager, Research Site One: 1 March 2012). Despite this, the deputy mayor in Research Site Three believes there is a growing acceptance towards migrants from Myanmar:
Because here we have welcomed a lot of new migrant workers from Bangladesh and Cambodia, we feel more alike the Burmese. They dress like us and they are Buddhists; meanwhile, a lot of crime is committed by the Cambodians and the culture difference with Bangladesh is considerable (Deputy Mayor, Research Site Three: 3 April 2012).

Attitudes and behavior of this type can be explained as stereotypes and misplaced fear as a result of lack of awareness and knowledge. It is an indication of improving conditions for migrants from Myanmar where growing awareness and interaction leads over time to decreased misconceptions and enhanced mutual respect.

Results: acceptability

According to the criteria of acceptability, students should be taught subjects that are relevant, of suitable design, and have content of respectable quality (CESCR 1999). There should be a variety of topics meeting the requirements of an acceptable curriculum which provides students with the foundation of knowledge to foster a critical and multifaceted mind. Most learning centers visited emphasize the importance of language skills, namely Burmese, so that the students are well equipped to return to Myanmar. Thai is also taught to prepare students for the possibility of attending public school, as well as to make life and work in Thailand less troublesome and more prosperous. Some learning centers follow the official Thai curriculum with additional language classes whilst others adapt the curriculum to students’ needs and the complex living situations of migrant children.

All the learning centers aim to improve migrant children’s Thai language skills, as they believe this is the most vital study area they can provide. This aim, however, is hampered by Thai teacher deficiency as there is both a general lack of teaching staff with adequate teaching skills. The local ESA at Research Site One alleviates this issue to a degree by providing language classes for teachers. This is an example of governmental support for learning centers in resolving common challenges.

In contrast to Research Sites One and Two, the NGO in Research Site Three has shifted away from the goal of getting children enrolled
in public schools as a result of recurring rejection. At this learning center, children are being taught Burmese, basic mathematics, and some English.

**Results: adaptability**

The fourth and final criterion for education according to the framework is that the system is designed to meet students' needs (CESCR 1999). In other words, a child should not have to change nor make sacrifices to be able to attend school. The school system also should be cognizant that no society is static; hence, teachers, curricula, and additional factors that amount to the education provided follows changes and continues advancing in accordance with society (CESCR 1999).

According to the experience of the ESA in Research Site One, when migrant children return to school after a long school break, it is often necessary to retest their language levels because they do not speak enough Thai outside school (ESA official, Research Site One: 2 March 2012). Adapting to this situation, the ESA provides language classes during the school break. At Research Site Two, there are presently four public schools that accept migrant students from a particular NGO, and there is also close collaboration between three of the public schools and the learning centers. When a child is admitted to a school, the NGO arranges to give the students documents verifying at which learning center, where, and for how long the child already has studied, in case the family has to move to work in another province. This is intended to make it easier for the child to keep studying whilst traveling (NGO education coordinator, Research Site Two: 19 March 2012). This demonstrates the recognition of migrant children's living situations and benefits the children in the long run.

In another example of adaptation and collaboration, an NGO education coordinator tells of a student with specific vocational interests:

We had a Burmese student at one of our learning centers that really liked making food. He was doing well in school and improving his language skills but it was only so much we could do for his interest. So we contacted a public vocational center and today he works as a chef at a five-star hotel in the province (NGO education coordinator, Research Site Two: 19 March 2012).
Despite these successes, challenges of continuity and progress persist for some NGOs in partnering with local governments. Some NGOs in Research Site Two find that after elections they have to restart the process of being heard and acknowledged by the new government representatives. It appears more important to build relationships rather than develop tangible plans for the overall system and its continuity beyond regular elections (NGO manager, Research Site Two: 16 March 2012).

Analysis

The interviews conducted for this study reveal varied educational opportunities for migrant children from Myanmar. In Research Site One it is clear that teacher training, curriculum development and network meetings are major strengths of current educational opportunities and future cooperation between educational institutions. Through these three activities there appears to be general coverage of the Four As, though the Site still lacks full access to health and other social services; discrimination and exclusion of migrants are still issues of significance; and most educational opportunities are provided by the NGOs alone.

Although network meetings are present in Research Site Two, they do not cover the Four As as well as Research Site One. The quality and quantity of the network meetings are satisfactory, however they are still in development. The curriculum has yet to reach a sufficient level where standards in learning centers meet those of local public schools, and there are fewer schools admitting migrant students than in Research Site One.

Analysis of Research Site Three reveals the greatest deficiencies of the three research sites in covering the Four As. The learning center visited gives the impression of standing alone in educational provision to migrant children. It supplies its teachings with materials from gifts and donations, it relies on fundraising to provide medical care, and it has been told by government officials in the province to stay rather quiet about its work to avoid difficulties with authorities. Through interviewing a headmaster of a public school it was revealed there was no recognition of migrant children in need of education and no information from the local government regarding policies on the right to
education for stateless children or migrants.

The learning centers are, in general, experiencing growing acceptance and recognition today from both authorities and public schools, and the centers that are cooperating with public schools see an improved relationship. However, the data collected suggest there are disparate levels of governmental support, policy implementation and regulation from the Educational Service Areas.

Table 1 summarizes the progress towards the goal of the Four As at the three research sites visited, based on the data collected. It is a three-level ladder where the lowest level is “static,” implying that there are no changes or improvements in government cooperation for the learning centers visited. The second level is “improving,” indicating a somewhat growing collaboration albeit at a slow pace. The third and highest level, and closest to reaching the Four As, is “succeeding” that suggests that development is steady, maturing and achieving clear benefits for migrant students from Myanmar.

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The following two figures are based on the findings of this research. Figure 1 highlights the aspects considered by this study as the focal points of progress, namely in collaboration, in the three provinces visited. Figure 2 highlights deficiencies in the educational services.

Studies conducted by the MOE identify important points of success and factors for improvements in providing education to migrant children. This reveals what appears to be strong awareness of the current situation and methods for enhancing the policy implementations in practice, within MOE. Yet, the development of the education systems in Research Sites One, Two, and Three give the impression that these insights are not pursued on the ground. To varying degrees, the learning centers visited have seen improved collaboration with local authorities and attitude changes among the communities.

The correct policy and regulations are present but there is a lack
of implementation and enforcement. According to the deputy mayor interviewed, the reason for not being able to adapt to migrant children's needs is a lack of funding, suspicion of personal interests among learning centers' teachers, and lack of consistency in planned projects and activities (Deputy Mayor, Research Site Three: 3 April 2012). From the experience of the study's interviewees they interpret that relevant information that could be useful to enhance the education system has not been shared with participating institutions, resulting in educational inactivity in terms of quality and quantity of the public schools and learning centers.

Although the study found traces of increased awareness and an understanding of the pressing need for migrant children's rights to prosper in their education, inconsistency and recession are present. The policy practices seem to be decided by each ESA individually instead of following a shared and common set of practices, making the situation confusing and unstable whilst elected government changes limit projects and planned activities.
Suggestions for future planning and conclusion

This article suggests three key policy recommendations to meet the gaps in implementing educational procedures in accordance with Thailand’s national plan 2002–2020 and advancing education for migrant children in Thailand.

Although NGOs play an important role as advocates for migrants in vulnerable positions in society, they should also have a role in contributing to public services, at least temporarily. Education is a public matter and at presently there does not seem to be any perspective of sustainable educational opportunities. First, this study suggests that more actors should become involved in the network platform already created to promote understanding and mutual respect. The network should emphasize a decrease in harassment and bullying by government officials from different security departments. Second, there needs to be more awareness around the struggle of migrants from Myanmar and their roles in Thai society. Increased awareness can decrease negative attitudes towards migrants. A sense of belonging and unity can be created by bringing society together around the common goal of caring for the community. Local and provincial governments in particular should strengthen their agendas on improving the lives of migrant workers from Myanmar.

One way to address this is to provide education on the issue of migration within public schools. Some academics, such as Supang Chantavanich of Chulalongkorn University in Bangkok, are addressing this issue already. Chantavanich (2003) wrote an analytical paper on how migration is being taught in schools and how migrant issues are presented. It includes advice on how to erase myths and increase knowledge by teaching younger generations about internal, regional and international migration. This can help Thai learners grasp the situation within which migrants are coerced to live and consider their participation in Thai society.

Finally, this paper emphasizes the importance of continued progress, even in a step by step manner, to ensure that all planned policies and projects that have been proposed are executed in practice, rather than simply remaining as plans on paper. Regular shifts in the political wind often weaken the incentive for long term investment in education for migrant workers’ children. Simply put, policy implementation and
law enforcement should not be affected by changes in political institutions, and the MOE has a substantial responsibility to ensure this. The MOE must demand that ESAs follow the guidelines for implementation of existing policies. There needs to be a strict and clear protocol for the provincial agencies and ESAs to act in accordance. This study assumes that by linking these procedures with efforts and initiatives from NGOs more sustainable educational opportunities will evolve for migrant children from Myanmar in Thailand.

Notes

1 This study is part of a M.A. Thesis, Graduate School, under the supervision of Dr. Supang Chantavanich, October 2012, Chulalongkorn University, Bangkok.
2 See http://www.seameo.org for more information
3 Thailand acceded to the Convention in 1992
4 Educational Service Areas (ESAs) are administrative divisions at the provincial level and allow for decentralized education administration throughout Thailand. As of 2008, there were 185 ESAs in Thailand (MOE 2008).
5 There are no newer statistics available for these provinces in. However, there were 210,182 stateless people in Thailand by end of August 2011 and a total of 1,079,991 new registered migrant workers from Myanmar by the end of February 2010. For other migrant statistics go to http://www.mekongmigration.org/?page_id=26 (Last visited June 2014)
6 For more information on the Ministry of Foreign Affair’s position towards the Education for All goals and schooling for migrants, see http://www.mfa.go.th/humanrights/implementation-of-un-resolutions/72-right-to-education-for-migrants-refugees-and-asylum-seekers- (last visited June 2014).
7 For more information on the different projects and activities in the ASEAN community see http://www.seameo.org (last visited February 2013).

References

Bangkok: Asian Research Center for Migration, Chulalongkorn University.


**Annex A. Personal Interviews**

Deputy Mayor, ESA Research Site Three. Interview. 3 April 2012

ESA official, Research Site One. Interview. 2 March 2012

Learning Center headmaster, Research Site One. Interview. 28 February 2012

Learning Center teacher, Research Site One. Interview. 28 February 2012

NGO education coordinator, Research Site Two. Interview. 19 March 2012

NGO education coordinator, Research Site Three. Interview. 5 October 2012

NGO manager, Research Site One. Interview. 24 February 2012

NGO manager, Research Site Two. Interview. 19-20 March 2012

NGO manager, Research site Three. Interview. 28 September 2011

Public school teacher, Research Site Two. Interview. 20 March 2012