

The 6th Point Nusantara Framework: Policy Initiatives for the Education of Children of Perantaus and Indonesian Migrant Workers (IMWs)

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Introduction

Educational Disadvantage of Indonesian Migrant Workers' Children in Malaysia

Indonesian migrant workers (IMWs) constitute a significant portion of Malaysia's labour force, particularly in sectors like construction, agriculture, and domestic work (Kurus, 1998). This reliance on IMW labour, which predates the formation of modern Malaysia (Cleary, 1996; Lee, 1962), has resulted in a substantial migrant population. However, the children of these workers face significant educational barriers (Loganathan et al., 2022) that hinder their future prospects and well-being.

Several factors contribute to the limited access to formal education for these children. The undocumented status of many IMWs (Ahmad, 2019; Wahyudi, 2018) poses significant challenges in enrolling their children in schools. Bureaucratic hurdles (Asrobudi, 2018) and a lack of parental awareness regarding their children's right to education (Christie, 2016; Hartati & Andawiyah, 2020) further exacerbate the situation. Additionally, financial constraints (Siswanto & Rudiati, 2024), cultural and social isolation, and the transient nature of migration create additional obstacles for migrant families. As a result, many children of IMWs are either excluded from education entirely or drop out prematurely.

The lack of educational opportunities for these children perpetuates a cycle of poverty and marginalization, limiting their potential for social and economic integration in both Malaysia and Indonesia. To break this cycle, it is imperative to address the underlying issues and provide comprehensive support to these children.

A pressing need exists for inclusive policies that guarantee access to quality education for the children of IMWs in Malaysia. These policies must consider legal, social, and financial barriers, while fostering a supportive environment in schools, communities, and workplaces. Collaborative efforts involving employers, NGOs, volunteers, media, and both Indonesian and Malaysian governments are crucial to ensure that these children can realize their full potential and contribute meaningfully to society.

The educational disadvantage faced by the children of IMWs in Malaysia remains a critical issue. By implementing effective policies and programs, it is possible to address the barriers to education and empower these children to overcome challenges related to legal status, language, finance, and social integration.

In order to contextualize the discussion, the present chapter also highlights the case in the state of Sabah, where Community Learning Centres (CLCs) are a viable loci of manifestation of social realities vis-à-vis the proposed Nusantara policy framework.

KEY POINTS

Malaysia as one of the most favourite host countries among foreign worker seekers due to the demand in particularly in sectors such as construction, agriculture, and domestic work has resulted in a substantial migrant population. This policy brief aims to address the underlying issues and provide comprehensive support to the children of Perantaus and Indonesian migrant workers (IMWs). The report suggests the 6th Point Nusantara Framework of Policy Initiatives to the stated community:

1. Employers, Especially Large Companies:

- Large companies in Malaysia should be encouraged to establish partnerships with educational institutions to provide scholarships, financial assistance, or other forms of support for the education of migrant workers' children.
- Employers should be incentivized to include educational support as a component of their employee welfare programs. This could involve establishing on-site schools or providing transportation for children to attend local schools.
- Companies can contribute to the education of migrant workers' children through Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) initiatives, such as donating to schools in migrant communities or providing mentorship and after-school programs.

2. Local Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs):

- NGOs focused on migrant communities should receive adequate funding and support to implement effective educational programs, tutoring services, and language classes for migrant children.
- NGOs can play a pivotal role in raising awareness among migrant families about their children's right to education and the available resources and support. This includes developing educational outreach programs to guide migrant families through the complexities of the education system.
- NGOs should be empowered to advocate for policy reforms that improve educational access and outcomes for migrant children at both the local and national levels.

3. Volunteers, Local Community Members, and Counsellors:

- Volunteer programs should be established to provide academic tutoring, emotional support, and career counselling for migrant children. Local community members can be trained to assist in these efforts, fostering a sense of community and belonging.
- Pairing local students with migrant children can facilitate academic and social integration. Local community members can serve as mentors and coordinators to support these peer relationships.
- Counsellors should be trained to provide culturally sensitive and trauma-informed support to migrant children. This includes addressing issues related to language barriers, cultural adjustment, and emotional well-being.

4. Indonesian and Malaysian Governments:

- The Indonesian and Malaysian governments can establish bilateral agreements that applies to whole Malaysia after thorough research to ensure that children of Indonesian migrant workers (IMWs) within West and East Malaysia have access to quality education. These agreements could include provisions for school recognition, language support, and accreditation.
- Facilitation of the legal regularization of migrant workers' status can provide them with greater stability and security, ensuring that their children's access to education is not interrupted due to immigration-related issues.
- Both governments can collaborate to implement awareness campaigns to inform Indonesian migrant workers about their children's educational rights and the available resources and support in Malaysia.

The 6th Point Nusantara [1] Framework

To enhance the educational outcomes and well-being of the children of Indonesian migrant workers (IMWs) in Malaysia, a multifaceted approach involving various stakeholders is necessary. Key stakeholders, including employers, government bodies, local NGOs, and media organizations, must collaborate to implement supportive policies and initiatives. The proposed 6th Point Nusantara Framework is a set of policy recommendations proposed to address the specific challenges faced by these children. This Nusantara policy framework is most relevant to two behavioural typologies of Indonesian migrant workers or perantau[1], namely those practicing rantau gedang and (to a certain extent) rantau ulang.

Rantau gedang refers to the behavioural typology whereby the migrant workers come to a host country, in this case, Malaysia, to work and in the process establish a home outside their home country (Indonesia), and bringing along their families or/and have families or children in the host country. This particular typology is frequently performed within Nusantara particularly at the early times prior to nation state replication in the region. One of the interesting parts of this typology is that the rantau gedang actors significantly impact the current migration flow as it creates such social connection. Studies on Bugis ethnic in Sabah found that the said ethnic has four phases of migration, in which the first phase was in the 19th century where forest products trading was the main purpose. The migration did not stop during the era of new products until today. Studies pointed the last phase of Buginese migration to Sabah is the post-1963 until present (Hassan et al., 2015; Mahadi, 2016). The availability of migration phases creates a chain of social connection because the Bugis who settled in Sabah in the time of first phase during 19th century, second phase during Japanese Imperial Army invasion before 1945, and third phase during the British company took Japanese owned plantations between 1945-1963. The said migration phases became the main key for the current Bugis in Sulawesi Island who wants to seek fortune in Sabah since post-1963.

As for rantau ulang, it is the behavioural typology of migrant workers or perantau who travel back and forth between their homeland and host country and have made this a significant part of their life. It should also be noted that these six policy initiatives are framed to benefit stakeholders of both countries and is seen as part of an empowering win-win solution for the Nusantara eco-system. The following are the six policy initiatives:

Policy Initiative #1: Policy to Support and Encourage Employers, Especially Large Companies

Policy Focus: Education

- **Corporate Sponsorship and Support Programs:** Large companies in Malaysia should be encouraged to establish partnerships with educational institutions to provide scholarships, financial assistance, or other forms of support for the education of migrant workers' children.
- **Incorporation of Education into Employee Welfare Programs:** Employers should be incentivized to include educational support as a component of their employee welfare programs. This could involve establishing on-site schools or providing transportation for children to attend local schools.
- **Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) Initiatives:** Companies can contribute to the education of migrant workers' children through CSR initiatives, such as donating to schools in migrant communities or providing mentorship and after-school programs.

Policy Recommendation:

To incentivize corporate social responsibility and improve the educational outcomes of migrant workers' children, policymakers should consider implementing the following policy recommendations: Firstly, providing tax incentives to companies that invest in educational programs for migrant workers' children can encourage their participation in such initiatives. Secondly, facilitating collaboration between companies and local schools can help ensure that these children receive quality education that aligns with national standards.

Examples of in Malaysia:

- **FGV Holdings Berhad's Investment in Education:** Felda Global Ventures (FGV) Holdings Berhad has demonstrated a significant commitment to the education of migrant workers' children by investing approximately RM5 million in 2020 to establish 15 Community Learning Centers (CLCs) in the regions of Sahabat, Kinabatangan, Kalabakan, and Yapidmas (FGV Holdings, 2020). FGV has also collaborated with the Embassy of the Republic of Indonesia in Malaysia to provide teaching and educational resources to these CLCs.
- **Nestlé Malaysia's CSR Initiatives:** Nestlé Malaysia has actively supported educational initiatives as part of its Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) programs. This includes sponsoring educational opportunities for the children of migrant workers in regions where the company operates. Additionally, Nestlé has partnered with local schools to provide scholarships and school supplies to the children of its employees, including those from migrant backgrounds.

Examples beyond Malaysia:

- **Singapore's Employer-Supported Education Initiatives:** Large companies in Singapore have collaborated with schools and community centers to support the educational needs of migrant workers' children. The government incentivizes companies to offer educational support, including providing school fees and additional resources. Companies such as DBS Bank and Singapore Airlines have been actively involved in such initiatives through their CSR activities.

Policy Initiative #2: Policy for Local NGOs

Policy Focus:

- **Capacity Building:** NGOs focused on migrant communities should receive adequate funding and support to implement effective educational programs, tutoring services, and language classes for migrant children.
- **Community Education and Awareness:** NGOs can play a pivotal role in raising awareness among migrant families about their children's right to education and the available resources and support. This includes developing educational outreach programs to guide migrant families through the complexities of the education system.
- **Advocacy for Policy Change:** NGOs should be empowered to advocate for policy reforms that improve educational access and outcomes for migrant children at both the local and national levels.

Policy Recommendation:

To enhance the impact of NGOs in providing quality education to migrant children, policymakers should consider the following recommendations: Firstly, providing financial support and training to NGOs can strengthen their capacity to implement effective educational programs. Secondly, funding collaborative projects between NGOs and schools can facilitate the integration of migrant children into the mainstream education system and ensure they receive the necessary support to succeed.

Examples in Malaysia:

- **Malaysian Industrial Relations and Human Resource Management (MIHRM):** MIHRM has collaborated with local schools to facilitate the integration of migrant children into the mainstream education system. Additionally, the NGO conducts community education programs to inform migrant workers about their children's right to education and assists families in navigating the complex registration process.
- **Persatuan Pendidikan Kanak-Kanak Matakana Sabah (Matakana):** Since 2009, Matakana has established educational institutions, including Etania School, to cater to the educational needs of marginalized children, including stateless children and the children of migrant workers. The NGO operates both Alternative Learning Centers (ALCs) for non-registered children and Community Learning Centers (CLCs) for registered children.
- **Pertubuhan Bantuan Kanak Kanak Humana, Sabah (HUMANA):** Known as Humana Child Aid Society, this NGO is established by two Danish citizens in 1991 which specifically supports the value of 'education for all' since it was introduced by the UNESCO, UNDP, UNFPA, UNICEF and the World Bank during World Conference on Education for All in 1990. The Humana Aid concerns the 'invisible children' particularly in Sabah who could not access the educational institutions. Andita et al. (2016) stated that 9,000 from 24,199 children of IMWs receive education access educational institutions established by HUMANA.

Examples beyond Malaysia:

- **Save the Children (Indonesia):** In Indonesia, Save the Children implements programs to support the education of children left behind by migrant workers who have migrated to countries like Malaysia. These programs focus on providing educational materials, scholarships, and community awareness campaigns to ensure that these children can continue their education.

Policy Initiative #3: Policy for Volunteers, Local Community Members, and Counsellors

Policy Focus:

- **Volunteer Training and Capacity Building:** Volunteer programs should be established to provide academic tutoring, emotional support, and career counselling for migrant children. Local community members can be trained to assist in these efforts, fostering a sense of community and belonging.
- **Peer Mentoring Programs:** Pairing local students with migrant children can facilitate academic and social integration. Local community members can serve as mentors and coordinators to support these peer relationships.
- **Cultural and Psychological Support:** Counsellors should be trained to provide culturally sensitive and trauma-informed support to migrant children. This includes addressing issues related to language barriers, cultural adjustment, and emotional well-being.

Policy Recommendation:

To enhance the support system for migrant children, it is crucial to provide funding for volunteer and community programs that offer essential services such as tutoring, counselling, and social integration. Additionally, developing training and certification programs for community members and counsellors can ensure that they are equipped with the necessary skills to effectively support migrant children and their families.

Examples in Malaysia:

- **Volunteer Programs in Malaysian Schools:** NGOs such as Tenaganita have implemented volunteer-driven programs to provide tutoring and language support to migrant children. These programs often engage university students and community members to offer extra-curricular academic and social support to children from migrant families.

Tenaganita has launched volunteer-led initiatives to offer tutoring and language assistance to migrant children. These programs frequently involve university students and local community members who provide additional academic and social support to children from migrant backgrounds (Tenaganita, 2023).

Examples beyond Malaysia:

- **United Nations Volunteers (UNV):** In countries with significant migrant populations, such as Qatar, the United Arab Emirates, and Saudi Arabia, the United Nations Volunteers (UNV) program has facilitated the establishment of volunteer networks to provide education and counseling services to migrant workers' children. Volunteers support these children's learning and social integration through after-school programs and cultural exchange events (United Nations Volunteers, n.d.).

Policy Initiative #4: Policy at the Level of Indonesian and Malaysian Governments

To address the educational challenges faced by the children of Indonesian migrant workers in Malaysia, both governments should collaborate on the following policies:

- **Bilateral Agreements on Education:** The Indonesian and Malaysian governments can establish bilateral agreements that applies to whole Malaysia after thorough research to ensure that children of Indonesian migrant workers (IMWs) within West and East Malaysia have access to quality education. These agreements could include provisions for school recognition, language support, and accreditation.
- **Regularization of Migrant Workers' Status:** Facilitation of the legal regularization of migrant workers' status can provide them with greater stability and security, ensuring that their children's access to education is not interrupted due to immigration-related issues.
- **Joint Awareness Campaigns:** Both governments can collaborate to implement awareness campaigns to inform Indonesian migrant workers about their children's educational rights and the available resources and support in Malaysia.

Policy Recommendation:

To enhance educational opportunities for Indonesian children in Malaysia, a bilateral framework should be established to ensure mutual recognition of educational qualifications. This framework would facilitate the seamless transition of these children between educational systems in both countries. Additionally, establishing channels for the exchange of information on educational opportunities can empower migrant families to make informed decisions about their children's education.

Example of Malaysia-Indonesia Cooperation:

While Malaysia and Indonesia have not established formal bilateral agreements specifically targeting the education of migrant children that compass of all parts of Malaysia, existing bilateral agreement which only applies in Sabah and Sarawak can be leveraged to address this issue. For instance, the 11th Joint Commission for Bilateral Cooperation (JCBC) has led towards agreement between both governments and plantation estates in Malaysia to establish educational institution inside the plantation estates to accommodate the children of migrant workers (Wong et al., 2021). These provisions can potentially be extended to include the educational needs of their children beyond Sabah and Sarawak with further research.

Example beyond Malaysia - Indonesia:

The Philippine government, through its Overseas Employment Administration (POEA), has established arrangements with host countries, including Malaysia, to ensure that Filipino migrant workers' families, particularly their children, have access to education. These agreements include provisions for social welfare and education benefits, which have been particularly beneficial in countries like Saudi Arabia and Malaysia.

Policy Initiative #5: Policy for Local Kindergartens and Private Schools

Policy Focus:

- **Inclusive Education Policies:** Local kindergartens and private schools should adopt inclusive education policies that accommodate the diverse needs of migrant children. This may involve implementing language support programs, providing cultural sensitivity training for teachers, and offering flexible enrollment options for children who may have experienced educational disruptions due to migration.
- **Language Support Programs:** Language support programs, such as Bahasa Malaysia and English language classes, should be provided to facilitate the integration of migrant children into the local education system. Bilingual education models can also be considered to cater to the linguistic needs of these children.
- **Subsidized Education Options:** To ensure affordability, governments can provide subsidies or tax breaks to private schools that enroll children of migrant workers. This can help alleviate the financial burden on migrant families and promote access to quality education.

Policy Recommendation:

To enhance the inclusivity of private schools and kindergartens for migrant children, policymakers should consider providing financial and logistical support to these institutions. This support could include funding for teacher training, curriculum development, and infrastructure improvements. Additionally, offering training programs for teachers on intercultural competence and language pedagogy can equip educators with the necessary skills to effectively support the diverse needs of migrant children.

Examples in Malaysia:

- **Non-Governmental Schools for Migrant Children:** Several private and semi-private schools in Malaysia, such as the Migrant School of Malaysia, have been established to cater to the educational needs of migrant workers' children. These schools, often initiated by NGOs like Tenaganita, provide basic education in the local language and prepare students for integration into the formal education system.

Examples beyond Malaysia:

- **Thailand's "Education for All" Policy:** Thailand has implemented an inclusive education policy that guarantees access to education for all children, regardless of their nationality or immigration status. This policy has been particularly beneficial for migrant children from countries like Myanmar, Cambodia, and Laos, who are often enrolled in local public schools at no cost.
- **Cambodia's Community Schools:** To address the educational needs of migrant children, particularly those in transit, Cambodia has established community schools. These schools often receive support from international organizations and local NGOs, providing bilingual programs that facilitate the transition into the local education system.

Policy Initiative #6: Policy for Media Practitioners (Media Campaign to Educate Local Communities on Immigration Issues)

Policy Focus:

- **Public Education Campaigns:** The media can play a crucial role in promoting public understanding and empathy for migrant communities through targeted public education campaigns. These campaigns should highlight the contributions of migrant workers and the importance of education for their children.
- **Positive Media Representation:** Media outlets can contribute to fostering social inclusion by featuring positive stories of migrant children who have excelled in the education system. Such narratives can challenge stereotypes and promote a more inclusive society.
- **Fact-Based Reporting:** Media practitioners should be encouraged to report on immigration and labor issues in a factual and objective manner, avoiding sensationalism and promoting a nuanced understanding of the complex issues surrounding migration.

Policy Recommendation:

To enhance public understanding and support for the education of migrant children, it is crucial to facilitate collaboration between government agencies, NGOs, and media organizations. By launching targeted media campaigns, these stakeholders can raise awareness about the challenges and opportunities faced by migrant children. Additionally, establishing guidelines for media coverage can ensure that portrayals of migrant workers and their families are fair, accurate, and balanced, promoting empathy and understanding within the broader community.

Examples in Malaysia:

Non-governmental organizations (NGOs) such as Pusat KOMAS and Tenaganita have played a crucial role in advocating for the rights of migrant workers and their families through media campaigns. These campaigns aim to educate the Malaysian public about the positive contributions of migrants, the challenges they face, and the importance of providing educational opportunities for migrant children. By challenging negative stereotypes and promoting empathy, these campaigns contribute to a more inclusive society.

Examples in Malaysia:

- **The "I am Migrant" Campaign (Global):** Launched by the International Organization for Migration (IOM), the "I am Migrant" campaign utilizes various media platforms to raise awareness about the experiences of migrants, including their educational needs. By highlighting the importance of education and addressing issues such as discrimination and exclusion, this campaign fosters a more inclusive and understanding global community.
- **"The Migrant Voices" Campaign (European Union):** The European Union has supported campaigns that promote the integration of migrant children into local communities, particularly in countries like Spain and Italy. These campaigns employ television, radio, and social media to educate the public about the challenges and successes of migrant communities, emphasizing the benefits of integration through education.

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