




International labour migration by women from Vietnam to Taiwan: policy and practice

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ABSTRACT

This article aims to investigate the efficacy of the Vietnamese government's policy to use international labour migration, specifically domestic workers, as a tool for the economic development of women. Several context-specific factors, including social and cultural, were found to limit the size and duration of the development impact of such a policy. The article concludes that international labour migration cannot be a substitute for government policies and programmes supporting skill development and industrial investments in the poorer provinces of Vietnam, which are home to many of the labour migrants.

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Introduction

In a review of international migration, including labour migration, Massey (1999) highlights the importance of policies in sending states that have encouraged the growth of such migration. Expected national benefits from such policies include reduced unemployment, skill development and earning foreign currency. Support included establishing facilitating intermediaries, training, treaties with labour importing countries, and even financing the costs of such migration. Countries such as the Philippines, Indonesia, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, India, Pakistan, China, and Vietnam have all pursued such policies (Hugo 1995; Battistella 1995).

There has been a considerable divergence in the theory and evidence of the development impacts of international migration. De Haas (2012) provides a review and integration. One positive view is that the movement of labour from developing to developed regions causes wages to rise in the developing regions and consequently leads to such regions' development. The negative view argues that migration deepens underdevelopment in developing regions through the brain and brawn drain. The process of outward migration continues until only those incapable of migrating are left behind. Over time, research has come to acknowledge the difficulty of mapping the heterogeneous factors which link international (and internal) migration and its development impacts. There is an additional challenge of defining the meaning of development impact.

According to De Haas (2012), the heterogeneous factors linking migration to its development impact can best be understood only when they are "studied in the development context of which they are an intrinsic part". Identification of such factors requires acknowledgment of the role of structure – the constraining or enabling of the general political, institutional, economic, social, and cultural context in which migration takes place – as well as agency, the capacity of individuals to navigate the structure.

A government's policy to use international labour migration as a tool for development is an aspect of structure which is likely to be enabling. However, other aspects of arising from the social and cultural contexts could constrain international labour migration. For example, women aspiring to migrate alone to work in another country would have to deal with the social constraints imposed

by norms that expect her to be the caregiver at home. The development impact would be the result of the interplay between the structures and individual agencies, as they operate in the specific developmental context.

Ratha et al. (2011) highlighted the diversity of the measurable/observable indicators of the development impacts of international labour migration in the sending countries. Indicators of development impact used in prior research include increased income from remittances, higher consumption, and more new businesses established in sending communities. The knowledge and resources provided by the international community of the migrant diaspora, and higher investment in healthcare and education, are also used as indicators of the development impact. The exploitation of migrants by unscrupulous recruiters or employers, the stress of separation from family, and the debilitating effects on the sending countries of large-scale emigration of non-disabled men and women have been used as indicators of the negative development impact of migration. Aside from this diversity of indicators, there is also diversity in the levels at which such development impact is assessed: national, provincial, community, family, or individual level.

While governments in developing countries such as the Philippines, Indonesia, Sri Lanka, and Vietnam have adopted policies to use international labour migration as an instrument for their development, the development impact of such policies remains the subject of empirical examination. Such examination requires the study of both the structure and agency in the specific context of development.

This article focuses on the Vietnamese government's policy of promoting international labour migration by the country's women, specifically from the poorer provinces, to Taiwan as unskilled domestic workers. We shed light on how this policy works in practice through a field study. We assessed the development impact of this policy at the family level, by addressing whether international migration as domestic workers provides such Vietnamese women and their families with a sustained and long-term increase in income, the opportunity for work, and access to a better quality of life.

Migration and development in Vietnam

After the fall of the former Soviet Bloc, Vietnam began to reshape its international labour migration policy by securing bilateral treaties to allow access to markets across a diversified pool of countries. In line with this change, Vietnam's Council of Ministers passed Decree No. 370/HĐBT in 1991, which highlighted the generation of employment and income by migrating workers, as well as increasing hard currency inflows to the country, as the expected benefits from such policy.

By the late 1990s, the Government's attempts to use international labour migration as a tool for its development efforts gathered momentum. Decree 152/1999/NĐ-CP issued in 1999 detailed the rights and responsibilities of the brokers, related ministries, departments, provincial authorities and migrant workers.

In 2008, the Government issued Resolution No. 30a/2008/NQ-CP to achieve sustainable poverty reduction in 61 of the country's poorest districts. These districts, which had 50% of their households living below the poverty level, were in 20 provinces. Phu Tho, the site of our study, is one such province. Following this resolution, the then-Prime Minister of Vietnam approved Decision No. 71/2009/QĐ-TTg, the Project Supporting the Poorest Districts in Promoting Labour Sending for Sustainable Poverty Reduction 2009–2020. Under this Decision, the Government would provide financial support for aspiring international labour migrants. Such support would cover the costs of the language/skill training course, transportation, and living costs while attending the training course, and fees for the passport, health check, and criminal record clearance certificate.

Although Vietnam has signed bilateral treaties with many countries for exporting its labour, Taiwan, Japan, South Korea, and Malaysia receive over 80% of the Vietnamese labour migrants. Of these, Taiwan recruited both factory and domestic workers from Vietnam, while the other countries have mainly recruited factory workers. In 1999, Vietnam negotiated a bilateral treaty with Taiwan

covering, among other things, legal matters and the working conditions of Vietnamese migrating to work in Taiwan (Truong 2009).

According to Lan (2003), the Taiwanese Government started granting work permits to migrants as “domestic caretakers” to help with severely ill or disabled family members. Following that, a quota to recruit “domestic helpers” was granted to households with children under 12 years old or seniors above 70 years old. These policies were a necessary response to the country’s aging society combined with the declining birth rate (Jennings 2013). An additional factor supporting the demand for migrant domestic workers was the trend by Taiwanese women to pursue demanding professional careers, creating a care deficit at home. The labour export treaty between Vietnam and Taiwan included a quota for the export of domestic workers. This treaty created employment opportunities for Vietnamese women from the country’s poorest provinces.

In addition to secure support from the state, the high rate of female literacy (96.4%) (General Statistic Office 2011), strong tradition of women joining the workforce, and a cultural climate that is permissive of women going abroad alone to work, have all contributed positively to Vietnamese women availing themselves of the opportunity to work in Taiwan.

Despite these support factors, the number of female Vietnamese labour migrants in Taiwan has seen only modest growth. Data from the Ministry of Labour of Taiwan show that the number of female Vietnamese labour migrants in Taiwan increased from 46,772 in 2003 to only 64,452 in 2016. In comparison, female labour migrants from Indonesia working in Taiwan increased from 49,466 to 189,119 over the same period. Over this period, Taiwan imposed a temporary ban on Vietnamese domestic workers, citing reasons such as the high incidence of “runaways”, a phenomenon we discuss later. However, this does not fully explain why the response by Vietnamese women to this government-supported development through labour migration programme has been lukewarm. This seemingly lukewarm response raises questions about whether the Government’s policy of development through international labour migration has achieved the expected positive development impact in practice.

Research methodology

Site selection

Phu Tho province is about 80 km from Hanoi, the capital of Vietnam. This province, among other poorer provinces, was chosen by the Vietnamese Government to promote its policy of development through international labour migration. Phu Tho is among the top ten labour-sending provinces in Vietnam (IOM 2017), and 12.57% of the population live below the poverty line. The province is the home of many migrant workers. Additionally, the lead author’s family home is in this province, which eases what would otherwise be a very difficult process to access interviewees.

Selection of the respondents and sample description

The chain referral sampling technique was adopted, where interviewees provided introductions to others. This method is more practical than random sampling given the study focus is for the migrant a personal issue. We found that access to interviewees required a personal introduction by “insiders”, and even then, such access was only available very selectively (Biernacki and Waldorf 1981).

If a Vietnamese migrant wishes to work as a domestic worker under a labour export scheme, Taiwan is currently the only legal destination. We interviewed 29 women who had migrated as domestic workers to Taiwan from Phu Tho province. At the time of migration, one was divorced, two were single and the rest were married. They ranged from 21 to 37 years old, and the median number of children each woman had was two. Each contract was for three years.

Data collection and analysis

The language used in interviews was Vietnamese. Interview transcripts were translated by the lead authors and later analysed by all the authors. Following Creswell (2007), we adopted an approach to the data analysis that aimed to uncover any broad patterns in the interviews' responses. The authors discussed their analyses to reach consensus on the observed patterns in the responses.

In addition to primary data through interviews, we also collected data from governmental publications and relevant websites to gain an understanding of the Vietnamese Government's policy related to international labour migration, and the practices adopted by the brokers facilitating the flow of labour migrants from Vietnam to Taiwan.

Results

We present the results as broad patterns identified by all three authors from the interview data. Our aim is to assess the efficacy of the Vietnam Government's policy of using international labour migration as a tool for development from the perspectives of the migrants. In identifying the patterns presented below, we attempt to assess how individual migrants experienced their migration. In each pattern, we discuss how the policy impacted migrants and their decisions. In the final part, we consolidate the overall impact of the policy on the migrants.

Interviewees' responses fell into four broad categories. The ability and propensity to migrate describes what we found to be the structure, both supporting and inhibiting, at work and how Vietnamese women's agency worked to negotiate these as they prepared to migrate and work in Taiwan. Migration experience refers to their experience of working as domestic workers in Taiwan within the confines of the structure, as defined by the contracts, working conditions, brokers, and employers, and how Vietnamese women negotiated these factors. Duration refers to the observed total migration period to Taiwan as domestic workers before they returned to Vietnam. We described how the interplay of structure and agency determines the duration of migration. Under life after return, we describe how our interviewees experienced life back home in Vietnam after completing their working period in Taiwan.

Ability and propensity to migrate

State policies in Vietnam support international migration by women as domestic workers, in contrast to the policies of some other countries that restrict or prohibit women's migration (Oishi 2002; Silvey 2004). Support by the state also lent legitimacy to the women's decisions to migrate abroad and alone for work.

There was an announcement on a public loudspeaker in our village that the Government was sending women to Taiwan for work. My husband heard it and immediately came home and asked me to apply. (Ms X, 37 years, married, six years abroad)

Community values were ambivalent. They discouraged single women from migrating as domestic workers but encouraged married women to do so. As noted earlier, almost all the interviewees were married when they migrated to Taiwan.

The community both mocks and empathises [with the idea of women migrating abroad for work]. (Ms D, 35 years, married, six years abroad)

Working for companies in Taiwan was OK, but there were many bad rumours about women working as domestic workers over there. Finally, I decided to work in a nursing home. (Ms N, 29 years, single, three years abroad)

At the individual level, Vietnamese women's self-perception was of being breadwinners on a par with their menfolk and having a duty to support the family.

Vietnamese women have more responsibilities [than men] for their household's financial situation ... They work harder [than men]. It's the norm. Just like what uncle Ho [a reference to Ho Chi Minh, considered the father of the nation] said, Vietnamese women are "Bravery – Staunchness – Faithfulness – Resourcefulness". It's normal for [Vietnamese] females to take on the male's work. (Ms D, 35 years, married, six years abroad)

Men were willing to take on socially reproductive roles to support the women assuming the role of the breadwinners.

When I was away working in Taiwan my dad and my husband took care of our kid. My husband stayed at home. (Ms H, 36 years, married, four years abroad)

Women, for the most part, were able to make independent decisions on their migration, and they did so in consultation with the family.

Both of us [she and her husband] decided that I migrate to Taiwan. I could not decide this on my own. (Ms H, 36 years, married, four years abroad)

The above responses suggest an overall climate that was supportive of the women's decision to migrate abroad and alone as domestic workers. State backing in communist countries such as Vietnam is a valuable source of legitimacy and support for such decisions. We also found that community values and widely accepted notions of gender roles supported Vietnamese women's international migration as domestic workers.

Migration experience

Interviewees' descriptions of their migration experiences highlighted: (1) the large investment required to migrate internationally; (2) the difficult working conditions in Taiwan; (3) exploitation by brokers; and (4) the stringent terms and conditions of employment.

The migrants had to make what for them was a large investment to migrate to Taiwan for work as domestic workers, in the form of upfront costs required to migrate internationally. Wang and Bélanger (2011) found that "authorised costs" borne by an international labour migrant from Vietnam, which included fees for pre-departure training, visa, health checks, insurance, airfare, and passports, were on average US\$3851. According to the same study, "unauthorised costs" borne by such migrants are appropriated by a combination of six types of intermediaries, and can be high as US\$3600 per worker. In a similar study, Ho (2012) reported figures of between US\$5000 and US\$7000 as the upfront costs of migration. These studies cover both factory workers and domestic labour.

Based on our interviews, covering only domestic labour, we estimated that this investment could vary between VND 42.62 million and VND 55.62 million (US\$2583 to US\$3371). This investment is between 3.6 and 4.7 years of the average income in Phu Tho of VND 11.8 million per person per year in 2010 (Phu Tho Department of Foreign Affairs 2014). Investment in international labour migration from Vietnam can therefore be considered large for women from Phu Tho who migrate as domestic workers. To support such a large investment, migrants had to either take out bank loans using assets such as the family's house or land as security, or draw on the family's savings. The size of this investment was an important factor that compelled migrants to stay in their jobs even in the face of difficult working conditions or exploitation.

Working conditions for immigrant domestic workers in Taiwan were poorly defined. As a result, most workers were overworked or poorly treated, but they did not have access to suitable avenues to complain. They were also afraid of losing their job and being forced to return home without having completed the contract.

I worked as a caregiver for an old couple. One of their sons paid my salary. The old woman had a mental health issue and one of her legs was paralysed. The old couple ate nothing except plain congee without any salt nor meat. I had to eat the same thing for almost a year. I was locked inside the house and hardly allowed to see sunshine ... I was afraid to run away as I had a big debt at home. (Ms T, 33 years, married, eight years abroad)

Ms N, 29 years, single, three years abroad, recounted:

I worked in a nursing home. As migrant workers, we were often put on a night shift. I worked as many as 20-night shift a month. I lost almost 20 kg in the first year and felt so sick that I thought I could not make it home.

The brokers, both Taiwanese and Vietnamese, engaged in several exploitative practices. Brokerage fees varied between VND 32 million and 45 million. This has to be viewed in light of the wages earned by the domestic workers in Taiwan. Most migrants were surprised by how small the salary was in the first year of their employment relative to what they had been promised. This difference was due to the large deductions for the brokerage fees. Our analysis of the salary statements shared by the interviewees showed that the net income received by a migrant domestic worker was only 25% of her gross income in the first year. The average of the net to gross income over 36 months, a typical contract period, was 50%. The brokers front-loaded their fees so that the risk of early termination of a contract was fully transferred to the migrant.

When I arrived in Taiwan, they gave me the schedule for my salary. There were so many deductions, and I earned very little in the first year. My first two months' salary was almost nothing. (Ms X, 37 years, married, six years abroad)

Ms DD, 30 years, married, six years abroad, said:

When you work abroad, all you earned in the first year was only enough to pay back the money you had paid to go. Your income would be higher in the second year, but then the brokers earned nothing. That was why those brokers tried to send workers home after one year and recruited new workers so that they could continue to get their commission.

Phuong and Venkatesh (2016) elaborate on several other forms of exploitation of Vietnamese international labour migrants by brokers.

When I left Taiwan, my employer gave me a signed and stamped paper saying I completed my contract so I could bring this to the [broker] company in Hanoi for a refund of my deposit. I went there but they said this and that reason like they only return when they close their company. After some attempts, with the cost of going there from home, I gave up. (Ms X, 37 years, married, six years abroad)

There have been several reports of Vietnamese labour migrants in Taiwan escaping their contracts to "runaway" and work illegally in Taiwan. One interviewee blamed exploitation by brokers as a reason for the high incidence of runaways:

When I was there [in Taiwan], I knew many Vietnamese running away from their employers. They paid a high fee to the brokers [in Vietnam] and received so little salary there [in Taiwan]. (Ms DD, 30 years, married, six years abroad)

The high incidence of runaways can also be related to stringent employment conditions. For example, sickness or pregnancy would result in the early termination of employment.

I was working in a nursing home where I met my future husband ... Later I got pregnant and I had to return home. (Ms Y, 22 years, single, two years abroad)

I went to Taiwan and worked for only 10 months. Before I left Taiwan, I got smallpox. My health was already weak, and I was not familiar with the weather over there. I was very sick. (Ms N, 32 years, married, one year abroad)

Ms N had to return home without completing her contract. Changing an employer was restricted.

I worked as a caregiver for an older woman. After she passed away, I was transferred to care for another [elderly] person. I was allowed only three chances to find new employer ... otherwise I had to return home. (Ms T, 33 years, married, eight years abroad)

The responses above suggest that, for migrants, upfront costs were substantial and sometimes had to be financed by debt. These large upfront costs were mostly responsible for the Vietnamese women enduring harsh and exploitative working conditions. Exploitation was practiced by both employers and brokers. Working hours were long, conditions harsh, terms of employment were stringent,

and violations could result in the migrant being sent home. Our interviewees endured these adversities since they had to bear the burden of the heavy investment made by their families to support their migration to Taiwan.

Duration of the migration

International labour migration is expected to result in the acquisition of financial and non-financial capital by the migrants. Such capital investment may lead to improved living standards of migrants, families and their community. The size of such accumulated capital depends among other things on the duration of the migration.

Duration of migration is how long our interviewees worked in Taiwan under successive contracts before returning home to settle down with no intention of repeating their migration. We found that only three of our interviewees had migrated as domestic workers for more than six years, and nearly half had spent three years or less working in Taiwan. This is in contrast to what has been observed in the Philippines, a country with a long history of migrant domestic workers who spend many years working abroad, often more than 20 years (see, for example, Parreñas 2005).

We asked our interviewees what factors influenced the duration of their migration. Caring for children was an important reason to shorten the duration of migration.

When I wanted to migrate a second time, my children were grown up, and my husband was feeling lonely. My kids were at a critical stage of their education, preparing for graduation from middle and high school. (Ms HA, 34 years, married, three years abroad)

She explained further:

When I returned, our first daughter was preparing for the entrance exam to high school [a critical stage in Vietnam's education system]. In our minds, there is only one route, which is providing education for our children. Our parents did not encourage us to study. We must guide our children to have a better education.

Caring for parents was another important reason to shorten the length of time abroad.

My original plan was to go on a second contract, as I was familiar with living there. However, my mother would not let me leave. (Ms N, 29 years, single, three years abroad)

Women also cut short their international migration to save their marriage.

My husband liked gambling and going out with friends. I [tried to persuade] him on the phone not to go out but failed. I was worried and decided to return home. (Ms T, 33 years, married, eight years abroad)

Women returned home early to bear children.

I would prefer to work a bit longer in Taiwan [for a second contract of three years]. However, my husband complained that we had only one child [daughter]. He wanted one more [a son]. (Ms TA, 35 years, married, three years abroad)

International labour migrants can accumulate more capital, both financial and non-financial, if they work abroad for longer. Working conditions and terms of employment can potentially cut short the duration of international migration. We also found that often Vietnamese women chose to cut short the duration of their migration to fulfil responsibilities arising from their gender's defined role in society. Vietnamese women's international labour migration is relatively much shorter than women from other countries, such as the Philippines (Parreñas 2005). This shorter duration implies less capital accumulation from the migration. As a consequence, Vietnamese women have limited opportunities after they return home to build a sustainable livelihood that can pull them and their families along the path of development.

Life after return to Vietnam

Many return migrants could not secure work opportunities back home based on the skills they had acquired abroad. The savings from working abroad could be used to support various initiatives, such

as their children's education or launching their own business, which can further their development trajectory. Accumulated capital could be used to move to a richer province in their home country (internal migration), providing them and the family access to improved work opportunities and amenities, such as education or healthcare.

For our interviewees, domestic work abroad did not lead to any significant skill accumulation that could be used to find work opportunities back home in Vietnam.

Working as a domestic worker, I did not have many opportunities to communicate with people [outside the employer's family]. I did not learn anything useful to have a profession. (Ms D, 35 years, married, six years abroad)

Permanent internal migration in countries such as Vietnam is restricted by the state (Deshingkar 2006) and circumventing these restrictions requires capital investment. For example, getting permanent residence status in Hanoi for someone from Phu Tho is only possible by investing in a house in Hanoi. Most interviewees found that the investment required was very large compared to what they had saved through their international migration, and most did not undertake internal migration after returning from Taiwan. They returned to their home province and settled down. Many had considered moving to a bigger city, such as Hanoi, for work and to access improved amenities, such as a better quality of education for their children. However, after careful consideration and for a variety of reasons, they often chose to settle in their home province.

My remittances were used to buy a house here [in Am Thuong town, Phu Tho province]. If I did not go [to Taiwan], we would not have had the money to move here. My husband is a state employee with a fixed salary ... (Ms NT, 36 years, married, six years abroad)

One reason for settling in their home province on return from Taiwan was ownership of assets, such as land or a house, which is an important source of wealth for many in rural Vietnam. Giving up such property can be difficult. Ms N migrated to Taiwan for six years. She was gifted land in her hometown by her parents before getting married. After returning from Taiwan, she was able to build and invest in a bakery in her hometown. Having done this she was not considering internal migration.

If I didn't open this bakery shop, my children would have been out of school. We are running this business for the third year now. We used to have a charcoal oven bakery in the town. After I returned from Taiwan, I used my savings to invest in a gas oven, which is more hygienic and uses less labour. (Ms Ng, 29 years, married, six years abroad)

Many interviewees received financial support from their parents, siblings, or relatives to pay the broker's fees and other upfront costs required to migrate to Taiwan. Once they returned, they were expected to support their family members, a norm in collectivist societies such as in Vietnam.

... when I migrated to Taiwan, my parents used their house ownership certificate as the guarantee, and my brother paid the broker's fee ... My elder brother told me that one of us had to take care of our parents [in their old age]. He is now living in Hanoi and has his own company. I decided to stay here [in my hometown] and take care of our parents. (Ms H, 30 years, single, six years abroad)

Age is another factor influencing people's decision to migrate internally. People tend to migrate less as they get older. The emotional cost of breaking social ties and establishing new ones can be harder for older people from rural areas.

I am used to living in a small town, half of my life has been spent here. In Hanoi, people know only their own house. In the countryside, everyone can walk into a neighbour's house for tea and a talk. Life in Hanoi would be very difficult, it is only suitable for younger people. (Ms K, 39 years, single, five years abroad)

Domestic workers, all of whom are women, returning home from Taiwan found that they had not acquired any special skills which were in demand in Vietnam. In the poor provinces they came from, there were no opportunities to make a living as domestic workers. Barriers to internal migration in Vietnam are high and require a substantial investment, which was often beyond the returnees. As a result, only a few of the returnees used their savings to invest in moving to bigger cities, such as

Hanoi, to embark on a new career. Given the relatively short duration of their migration and small earnings after various deductions and broker's fees, most returnees did not save enough to launch their own business, even within their home province. Savings from international labour migration were used to repay debts, build or extend their home, and invest in their children's education. Most returnees were under 40 years old when they chose to return and settle down. They returned to farming and household work.

Discussion

The Vietnamese government's policy to promote migration by women as domestic workers to richer neighbours, such as Taiwan, may have been prompted by similar policies in countries such as the Philippines and Indonesia. Data from the Ministry of Labour of Taiwan shows a relatively lukewarm response by Vietnamese women compared to, say, Indonesian women, to such policies. We have identified three main factors that appear to limit the positive development impact that migration internationally as domestic workers was expected to deliver for Vietnamese women.

The first factor is that the upfront financial investment is relatively significant, but the size of the financial benefits is limited, both the amount and the length of time over which such benefits accrue. The second factor is that the length of time for which Vietnamese women can migrate as domestic workers is much shorter than, say, their counterparts from the Philippines. This is a result of both regulatory/contractual restrictions and the social and cultural norms to which Vietnamese women subscribe. A third factor is that there are no clear policies or programmes that help domestic workers returning to Vietnam from overseas to secure jobs or start a new business. They are left to fend for themselves, but have little knowledge or financial capital to do so.

Regarding the first factor, we see the need for the Vietnamese Government to better regulate the brokers and intermediaries. Elsewhere, we have detailed how brokers systematically exploit the international labour migrants from Vietnam, and how such exploitation is likely to persist given the asymmetries in the contracting capabilities between brokers and migrants (Phuong and Venkatesh 2016). Caveat emptor does not and will not work in this market. Domestic labour migrants from Vietnam get a once in a lifetime, but limited time, opportunity to work, earn, save, and invest in developing their lives and those of their families. Exploitation by brokers crushes this opportunity irreparably. It also severely limits the migrants' earnings and savings.

Concerning the second factor, we note that Vietnamese women, barring radical changes in social and cultural norms, are unlikely to spend extended lengths of time working abroad. Whether it is to save their marriage, or to help their children through high school, or to return home to bear a second child, Vietnamese women seem to choose to return home to fulfil such demands over staying and working for longer periods abroad. These cultural and social norms are far more powerful than the regulatory/contractual restrictions that induce an early return. The inherently limited duration of migration will limit their earnings, savings, and investments. In turn, the potential positive development impact for a migrant's family is also limited. The inevitability of the shorter duration of migration by Vietnamese women is all the more reason for the Government to protect their earnings from exploitation, and to create meaningful opportunities for such women to work or start a micro-enterprise on their return.

Finally, we found that the opportunities available to Vietnamese domestic workers on their return home are limited. Vietnamese women are not fluent in English as are Filipinas. This limits access by Vietnamese women to opportunities in the English-speaking markets with a demand for domestic workers. Opportunities are also limited by the small number of countries with which the Vietnamese Government has negotiated labour export treaties. None of our interviewees had undertaken internal migration before migrating internationally to work in Taiwan. Upon their return home, most chose to settle in their home province. Migrating internally was not favoured, as the barriers to internal migration were considered too high, and several social and personal factors inhibited internal migration. Their decision not to migrate internally limits their access to opportunities in more

prosperous provinces in Vietnam. The lack of employment opportunities in their poorer home provinces, which were partially the push factors for their migration as domestic workers to Taiwan, persisted on their return. International labour migration, especially as domestic workers, can at best be a temporary and short-term opportunity. The Vietnamese Government should nurture employment generating investment in these poorer provinces.

Conclusion

Government policies that are supportive of international labour migration of unskilled workers, such as domestic workers, are unlikely to deliver lasting and positive development impact in developing countries like Vietnam. The Vietnamese migrating to Taiwan as domestic workers are all women. Social and cultural factors can be supportive of their aspiration to work abroad, but other social and cultural factors compel them to return after a relatively time period. Domestic workers from Vietnam do not work long enough in Taiwan to accumulate savings that can positively impact their and their family's development over a lifetime. Earnings are not large enough due to the broker's exploitative fees. The accumulation of widely employable skills from such migration is minimal. Exploitation can be addressed through better implementation of regulation by the government. But the propensity of women to return early from their migration is likely to persist given social and cultural norms. The accumulation of skills will continue to be minimal due to the nature of domestic work.

In poorer provinces, such as Phu Tho, industrial development has lagged behind the rest of Vietnam. The Government needs to create better opportunities for return migrants, either by preparing them to run small businesses or by stimulating large-scale industrial investment. This is essential, if women such as our interviewees and their families are to find a sustainable path to development. Promoting international labour migration alone will not deliver the development impact that the Vietnamese Government should be aiming for to help the country's poorer provinces.

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