

Way to Measure the Concept Precarious Working Conditions in Oil Palm Plantations

Dileep Kumar M.¹, Noor Azizi Ismail¹ & Normala S Govindarajo¹

¹Othman Yeop Abdullah Graduate School of Business (OYA-GSB) Universiti Utara Malaysia, Sintok, Malaysia

Correspondence: Normala S Govindarajo, Othman Yeop Abdullah Graduate School of Business (OYA-GSB) Universiti Utara Malaysia, Sintok, Malaysia. E-mail: gnmala@yahoo.com

Received: July 7, 2014 Accepted: August 15, 2014 Online Published: October 30, 2014

doi:10.5539/ass.v10n21p99

URL: <http://dx.doi.org/10.5539/ass.v10n21p99>

Abstract

Oil palm plantations are the backbone of the Malaysian economy, since day immemorial. When you look into the past, the workers in the oil palm plantations were dominated by Indian and Chinese communities. Later due to the stigma associated with oil palm plantations jobs viz., dirty, dangerous and distance, the Indians and Chinese workers moved away from the oil palm work and they were replaced by Indonesians and Philippines. These foreign workers whom having the legal and illegal status under enforcement in Malaysia, have been living in remotely located inhabitations engaging in 'dirty, dangerous and distance' wise oil palm plantations. Though the larger oil palm plantation companies ensure minimum living and working conditions for the foreign workers, vastly located small holding plantations never follow such minimum and fair working environment. These conditions to be correlated with the term "precarious working conditions" in small holding oil palm plantations. Due to lack of availability of the locals to engage in oil palm work, the plantations have to depend on foreign workers do all these 'dirty, dangerous and distance' workers in oil palm plantations. Except a few literature available from Amnesty international and local NGOs, there is less evidence to prove the existence of such exploitative working conditions in oil palm plantations. In order to explore precarious working conditions in oil palm plantations thus a qualitative research study is conducted in the Sabah region of the Eastern Part of Malaysia. The study followed, triangulation method through interviews with the migrated foreign workers, (legal and illegal), focus group discussions and Delphi technique with the identification of experts in the field to arrive at the factors and categories related to the theme 'precarious working conditions' in oil palm plantations. The outcome of the study fixes the variables that need to be concentrated for a higher level research through quantitative research.

Keywords: living conditions, working condition, plantation, foreign workers

1. Introduction

Malaysia is facing problem of labor shortage in oil palm plantations and the country is highly dependent on foreign workers coming from Indonesia and Philippines. Contextualizing the topic to the eastern part of Malaysia, the Sabah region of Malaysia, which is having 62.74% (268,992 people) foreign workers working in oil palm plantations, in comparison with the total Malaysia (450,396 people, in plantations). To improve the average annual plantation yield to 26.2 tons per hectare will require the harvesting of over 5 million hectares of mature trees by 2020; assuming harvester productivity of 1.5 tons per hectare, the industry will require 289,000 workers. There are currently 187,000 harvesters in the country and hence, the industry would have required a net addition of 102,000 harvesters to meet the targets if there was no replacement in mechanization or an increase in worker productivity. The locals in the regions are not willing to engage in the oil palm plantation since because they work in the plantations is labeled as dangerous, dirty and distance job. Moreover, the working and living conditions of the oil palm plantations are very much pathetic and majority large and smallholdings are filled with foreign workers. Even though an awareness of working conditions and foreign worker deployment in the oil palm plantations are available, very less literature that to support this issue providing evidence to the policy makers. In order to explore the factors related to the precarious working conditions prevalent in the oil palm plantations an exploratory study has been conducted in the Sabah region of the eastern part of Malaysia. This exploratory study made use of direct interviews, focus group discussions and Delphi technique to arrive at factors and categories related to the working and living conditions of the foreign workers in oil palm plantations

in Sabah region. Analysis based on the Delphi technique was made and appropriate factors related to working and living conditions of the foreign workers in oil palm plantations has been made. The study provides better insight into the precarious working conditions prevalent in oil palm plantations in Sabah region.

2. Review of Literature

2.1 Scenario of Plantations in Malaysia

Malaysia is currently the world's largest producer and exporter of palm oil. The plantation sector dates back to 1896, with the start of the rubber industry. Oil palm cultivation began in 1917, but growth was initially very slow. It was only during the last 50 years that plantation development was accelerated through large-scale investments in the cultivation of the oil palm as one of the approved crops for diversifying the country's agricultural development. Areas under oil palm increased from 54,000 hectares in 1960 to 4.05 million hectares in 2005, reflecting a compound annual growth of 10.06%. Production increased from 94,000 tons in 1960 to 15 million tons in 2005, or by almost 160 times within 45 years – this represents a compound annual growth of 11.93% per year (Yusof Basiron, 2007). One of the reports from Tirtosudarmo (2013) indicates that Malaysia turned to be the second largest exporter of palm oil across the world. As it is cited, almost 60% of the palm oil is exported to China followed by countries from Europe and Pakistan. In general when looked into the total agrarian sector. Malaysia has produced around 17.7% million tons of palm oil from 4.5 million hectares of oil palm plantations. It is reported that Malaysia has roughly 153 oil palm estates. Out of these 153 estates, 67% of them are located in the peninsular area. Indicating the migrant labor force volume the report further indicates that out of 580 thousand laborers in the plantations, 350 thousand of them come from different countries. Purportedly, 90% of the workers in Sabah state are Indonesians.

2.1 Why Foreign Workers?

It is a well-known fact that the country Malaysia is highly facing issue related to skill as well as unskilled labour shortage, which is also estimated at 20% of total industrial manpower. There are various reasons behind it, which include the nature of work in estate and alarming number of alternative jobs availability across industries in various sectors. Added to that, low rate of mechanization in various activities like harvesting, collection and transportation, planting, land preparation, nursery etc, which invite more manual labour for all these activities (ETP roadmap, 2010).

2.2 Migrant Worker Statistics

The foreign workers come from twelve countries in the region (ASEAN countries and neighboring countries) (CARAM, 2005) supplying a much needed workforce in Malaysia's agricultural, construction, manufacturing and services sectors. Of the 1.8 million persons registered in the statistics by the Ministry of Home Affairs, the largest number of migrants come from Indonesia (1.2 million) and works mainly in the plantation sector (381,582 of them) followed by Nepali (192,332 persons registered) mostly represented in the manufacturing industry (159,990). According to the figures, Indian workers (134,946) are legally employed in the same sector (34,685) but also in the services (61,273) and in the plantations (27,759). Other sending countries include Burma (88,573), Vietnam (81,194), Bangladesh (55,389), Philippines (21,694), Pakistan (13,296), Cambodia (5,832), Thailand (5,753), Sri Lanka (3,050) and China (1,295) (UNESCAP, 2006).

2.3 Key Challenges of Plantations

In order to explore, the key challenges of plantation these particular study has adopted qualitative as well as quantitative research approaches to arrive at the grounded facts. This particular research has to adopt grounded theory approach as well as content analysis to explore the challenges of oil palm workers. It has reported by Abdullah (2010), that the people working in plantation especially the rural committees lack many basic infrastructure like school, hospital, market, commercial business, utilities and most important factors safety and security in their working and living conditions. He further reported that, it is challenges create workers committees, making provision of appropriate infrastructure facilities. Some of the research report correlating the situation of Malaysia is coming from the observation of Robertson (2008). He report that, in Malaysia the sector oil palm is not at all attractive to local population since the oil palm work is dangerous, difficult and relatively low compensation package in comparison with other service industries. The report further indicate that, due to the shortage of local workers roughly 70% of the total labour force are foreign migrants and especially these migrants workers are from neighboring country Indonesia.

Contextualizing the topic to precarious working condition in Malaysian oil palm industries, the United States department of state, and 2012 report pointed out that many of the workers in oil palm plantation especially the migrants workers from neighboring country are subjected to serious labour exploitation. These migrants'

workers have to work as bonded labors and force to work under extreme level of exploitative living and working condition, suffering abuses treat from plantation management and subjected to child labor.

As it is pointed out in Amnesty international report 2010, the workers of oil palm plantation are susceptible to exploitative working condition without having any human right in oil palm plantation. As it is pointed out, due to the nature of labour intensive work in oil palm plantation, especially in Malaysia the workers are recruited from various neighboring countries like Indonesia, Thailand, and Bangladesh in order to achieve higher income and more consistence work. The major objective behind the translocation from their home countries is to get better income and sending back that money for daily sustains. Considering the nature of work, these migrant workers are living in remote location within the close plantation complexes. This migrants planation's worker are completely under the whims and fancies of plantation owners or plantation managers whose priority to maximize the productivity by making provision of little working and living condition and by removing their right and privileges as plantation workers. Due to these precarious working condition these employees would like to leave the plantation; however they are unable to do so because of remote location and close nature of plantation.

Detailing the exploitative labour practices existing in oil palm plantation among migrant workers, the Amnesty International 2010 further report that in order to join this plantation work the employees are often compile to submit the work permit, visas and passport to their management that makes them difficult to legally living travel back to their home country away from plantation. However, the workers are aware of the consequences of living the plantation they often engaged in eloping from oil palm plantation. The other side of such eloping oil palm plantation invites many hurdles like extortion by local police, whose primary objective is to return these workers to the plantation where they are employed. Contextualizing the topic to Malaysia, those migrants who competently except from the plantation unable to find any legally structure job in Malaysia. The report further indicate that incase these migrants workers successful enough to find employment elsewhere, it is only in small and independent plantation that draw little attention from government regulatory groups further making these migrants workers susceptible to high level of exploitative labour practices.

The research on Variety 2008, the workers in oil palm plantations could face many venerable like pattern of abuse male practice, and various stages of recruitment, migration and employment process. They work long hours for extremely low wage and do engaged in physically demanding job leading several work place injuries and poor general health. Further the use forced, child and traffic labour is usually reported in Malaysia and Indonesia oil palm plantation (world vision, 2012).

Further studies of Guereña, et al (2013) indicate that palm worker including man, woman and children are higher susceptible to several risk of health and safety. The workers may face exposes to the sun, injuries from falling palm fronds, cut from sharp instrument, poisons snake or insect bites, exposes to toxic or herbicides or pesticides, the use of heavy equipment or transport accident.

Last but not least, the report from Amnesty International on Malaysia oil palm workers further indicate that these migrants workers are under precarious job conditions their susceptible to labour exploitation by non-renewal of work permit, nonpayment of wages, work without safety equipment, lack of medical facilities , verbal and physical abuses of supervisors, poor accommodation facilities and especially the venerable state of woman who are sometimes subjected to sexual harassment and assault including rap.

3. Problem Formulation

There have been frequent policy shifts to accommodate demands from employers to ease critical labor shortages, as well as to document and legalize the large number of undocumented migrant workers in the country. Several analyses on foreign policy have diagnosed these policy shifts as “stop-go”, inconsistent and lacking in clear policy directions to reduce the reliance on foreign workers (Azizah, 1995 & 1996; Pillai, 1992 & 1995; World Bank, 1995, p. 79; Edwards, 1997). They contend that the policy swings to “allow, restrict and ban” migrant workers contradict national objectives to foster quality growth based upon “high path” structural transformation to generate high-productivity high-skill employment. It has been speculated that the relatively easy access to the large pool of low-skilled workers tends to distort domestic factor prices, retard industrial upgrading, and trap the economy in low-skill equilibrium. Yet, there is little empirical analysis on whether foreign labor competes (displaces) or compliments (augments) local labor.

As we know, the oil palm industry is very much labour intensive and depending on availability and productivity of skill as well as unskilled manpower especially upstream activities. It is report in the ETP roadmap that in order to improve an annual plantation yield up to 26.2 tons per hectors, it is in need of the harvesting of over 5 million hectares of mature trees by 2020, while hypothising that harvester productivity of 1.5tonnes per hectare, than the oil palm industry is in need of 289,000 workers. As the present statistic, 187,000 harvesters are in the

country and henceforth, the oil palm industry in total required an addition 102,000 harvesters to be targets provided there is no mechanization possibility or an increase in worker productivity (ETP Roadmap, 2010).

Even though, the foreign workers' presence in plantations is well accounted into, and are more required in the coming days to sustain an oil palm economy, seldom any change in their poor living condition is envisaged. The government has given the moratorium to implement the minimum wage policy and better living condition, the note coming from NGOs and field sources, indicates that the foreign workers living condition are still pitiable as it is. Today, the social issues that beset the palm oil industry pertain more about the quality of life and working conditions of laborers in the plantations and mill factories. Sensitive to issues of wages, compensations and migrant workers (from Indonesia) are among the main problems and subjects of the debates and campaigns. It is rather difficult to obtain some concrete and unbiased information about these social issues in palm oil plantations but accounts of some reports (typically by journalists and NGOs) provide some insights about those sensitive issues. Although such accounts of journalists and NGOs may contain some biases, some interesting accounts are taken here to provide some perspectives to the issues. There is not much documents available to dig for these social issues or even if such documents exist, it is difficult to judge the credibility and truthfulness of the claims about the plight of the workers in different palm oil plantations in Malaysia (and even Indonesia). Conducting actual plantation visits, interviews and observations could help this information dilemma, yet it is a limitation of this research. Nevertheless, based on the aforementioned accounts, it is hard to dismiss the claim that social problems exist in oil palm plantations. Hence contemporarily a study to be conducted with a mixed methodology that explore the right variables and quantify the factors related to precarious working conditions and related human and work issues.

4. Problem Statement

Various reports from the researchers thus indicate that the oil palm plantations in Malaysia, especially the smallholdings are having precarious working conditions. However the literature provides seldom evidence to this condition considering the sensitivity of the topic. Though these foreign workers turned to be inevitable in running the oil plantation operations, little information is available to us regarding the precarious working conditions, that all are reported by various sources. These foreign workers are turning to be the backbone of the oil palm industry and further supporting the Malaysian economy directly or indirectly. The decision retains or detain these workers are up to the decision from the government. But ensuring their decent working condition that induces motivation and better employee engagement is a need of the hour to sustain the economy.

Hence, this particular study identifies the topic of this research as: **Can we conjure up precarious working condition?**

5. Research Questions

1. How do you define precarious working condition?
2. What are the factors that closely related to precarious working conditions in oil palm plantations in general?
3. What are the factors that closely related to precarious working conditions in oil palm plantations in Malaysia?

6. Research Methodology

This particular study followed Delphi method as it design of method to explore categories and factors related to precarious working condition in oil palm plantations. As it is known, the Delphi method is one of the methods, which started its usage in 1950, in order to get consensuses, which is linked to real world knowledge coming through experiences on the area related to research topics. It is pointed out by Dalkey (1972) that the consensus on decisions which is coming from heads is better than one, or... n heads are better than one. Delphi technique is considered as one of the effective communication process with the objective of making deep analysis base on deliberation on a specific problem in order to set the goal, undertake a probe into the policy or to make effective prediction on the occurrence of future events (Kumar, 2013). Delphi technique is conducted in the form of semi structure interaction and interview. High concentration on the process is envisaged to ensure the rigorous.

During June 2014 to July 2014, Delphi process organized among the resource people carefully selected based on the expertise knit with precarious working conditions and interviews thereby.

Based on the suitable time for the resource person interviews were arranged, during June 2014 to July 2014. Direct interviews are conducted to gather information from the respondents. 20 experts from the Plantation Managers, Plantation Workers, Mandors of Plantations, Officers of Consulate Indonesia, Officers of Detention Centers, Officers of Immigration, Humana (NGO), Schools for Migrant Workers, Trade Union Leaders,

Contractors of Housing, Faculty Members and Dean of Social Sciences Universiti Malaysia, Sabah (UMS), and Research Scholars were identified and approached by email or telephone and were invited to take part in the study. Telephonic interview is conducted to gather information from the respondents. 40 experts from the industry and academia were identified and approached by email or telephone and were invited to take part in the study. All the clarifications related to the objective of the study were made by the researcher. However, 30 respondents were being interacted and communicated, only 20 respondents shown their willingness to participate in the discussion. Finally, 20 participants were interviewed by telephone and through email. The conversations taped recorded, and manually analyzed. The procedural steps in adopting the Delphi technique were as follows.

Expert panel identification: The group of professional was made from specialists having high knowledge and expertise in plantation related. They are closely associated with plantation, as consultants, government body, Top level managers, NGO, Consulate, Professors, Researchers and Academicians. The specialized areas of these expert members include, 12 male members (60%) and 8 female members (40%). These dynamic groups of panel of experts are knowledgeable and familiar to give relevant opinions and an admissible understanding of the living and working conditions.

7. Observations/Analysis

7.1 Rounds

Round 1:

In the first round, the Delphi process traditionally begins with an open-ended questionnaire. The open-ended questionnaire serves as the cornerstone of soliciting specific information about a content area from the Delphi subjects (Custer, Scarcella, & Stewart, 1999).

The questions:

1. How do you define precarious working condition?
2. What are the factors that closely related to precarious working conditions in oil palm plantations in general?
3. What are the factors that closely related to precarious working conditions in oil palm plantations in Malaysia?

Round 2:

The second round concentrate into categories and the items that are more closed to the precarious working conditions concept. Followed by the procedure the Delphi members where received the second questionnaire and accordingly they were required to rate or rank order the items in order to establish first level preferences among item incorporated into. In this stage, based on the decision and deliberation, agreement and disagreement on the items consider in relation to precarious working conditions were make. Care should be taken that, the number on Delphi iteration should be based on how far consensuses have been arrived at effectively on the concept of precarious working conditions in the study.

Round 3:

In the third round, each Delphi panelist receives a questionnaire that includes the categories and items ratings, summarized by the investigators in the previous round and are asked to revise his/her judgments or “to specify the reasons for remaining outside the consensus” (Pfeiffer, 1968). This round gives Delphi panelists an opportunity to make further clarifications of both the information and their judgments about the relative importance of the categories and items. Second level screening of the 128 categories, which were having a high and low influence on precarious working conditions identified with corresponding items. The process further identified 64 categories, which are having high and low proximity of the precarious working conditions identified. Classification of the items in 64 categories of 2 factors was being made with appropriate loaded items. Thematic presentation and the categorization of the items were done.

Round 4:

This round is the last round in which the researchers tried to eliminate the minority opinion in order to capture the maximum level of consensus based on their rating on the categories and items which related to precarious working conditions. Crosschecking of this categories and items were thoroughly make and the suitability clearly ascertained for fixing up the categories and items related the factor precarious working conditions. During third level, screening of the 30 categories of 2 factors which were having items with high and moderately high proximity of precarious working conditions are identified. Sought the expert opinion on the appropriateness of the core factors selected for the study.

Table 1. Delphi application

| PWC S/N | Factors | Categories | No. Items | No of Experts (N=20) | % of Experts |
|------------|-----------------------|-----------------------------|--------------|-------------------------|-----------------|
| 1 | Working Conditions | Low wage | 2 | 18 | 90% |
| | | Forced labour | 3 | 17 | 85% |
| | | Discrimination | 2 | 17 | 85% |
| | | No freedom at work | 3 | 15 | 75% |
| | | Less safety | 2 | 16 | 80% |
| | | Less security | 2 | 16 | 80% |
| | | Hazardous Job | 2 | 16 | 80% |
| | | Physical abuse | 3 | 17 | 85% |
| | | Lack of supervisory support | 2 | 18 | 90% |
| | | Rigid rules regulation | 1 | 17 | 85% |
| | | Remote location | 1 | 18 | 90% |
| | | Long working hours | 1 | 18 | 90% |
| | | Work pacing | 2 | 18 | 90% |
| | | Monotonous Job | 2 | 18 | 90% |
| | | Lack of group cohesiveness | 3 | 15 | 75% |
| 2 | Living Conditions | Remote location | 1 | 18 | 90% |
| | | Poor hygiene | 2 | 17 | 85% |
| | | No electric supply | 3 | 17 | 85% |
| | | No clean water | 2 | 18 | 90% |
| | | Big family | 2 | 18 | 90% |
| | | Low quantity food | 3 | 18 | 90% |
| | | Poor housing | 3 | 18 | 90% |
| | | Frequent illness | 3 | 17 | 85% |
| | | No education to children | 1 | 18 | 90% |
| | | Isolated living | 1 | 18 | 90% |
| | | Indebtedness | 3 | 18 | 90% |
| | | Low social engagement | 1 | 17 | 85% |
| | | Less recreations | 1 | 16 | 80% |
| | | No transport facilities | 2 | 17 | 85% |
| | | Stateless Conditions | 3 | 18 | 90% |

The first factor considered for the study is the precarious working conditions, which divide into two main conditions, which are working conditions, and living conditions in the plantation. The experts acknowledged 33 items for working conditions and 27 items for explaining the living conditions. The major factor working conditions consists of 16 categories. Low wage (90%), lack of supervisory support (90%), remote location (90%), long working hours (90%), work pacing (90%), monotonous job (90%) and stateless conditions (90%) are the major categories in precarious working condition, identified by the experts in relation to imparting appropriate working conditions in the plantations. Second categories like forced labor (85%), discrimination (85%), physical abuse (85%) and rigid rules regulations (85%). Third rank categories are less safety (80%), less security (80%), hazardous job (80%). The final rank categories in working condition are no freedom at work (75%) and lack of group cohesiveness (75%).

The second factor considered for the study is the Living conditions, which interrelated directly to precarious working conditions. Within the second factor, the experts identified 27 items that are closely related to Precarious working conditions. The major factor of living conditions consists of 14 categories. The table showed that remote location (90%), no clean water (90%), big family (90%), low quality food (90%), poor housing (90%), no education to children (90%), isolated living (90%) and indebtedness (90%) as the prominent factor which closely knit with living conditions. Further, the study pointed out the categories like poor hygiene (85%), no electric supply (85%), frequent illness (85%), low social engagement (85%) and no transportation facilities (85%). The final categories are less recreations (80%).

8. Discussion

This particular study was conducted to explore the factors related to precarious working condition prevalent in oil palm plantation of Sabah state of Malaysia. An exploratory study, which follows interview and Delphi technique was supported the research to understand the factors and categories that pertaining to the theme precarious working condition and living condition of foreign workers in oil palm plantation. The study segregates these factors as working conditions and living conditions and further discussions based on the expert opinion was made.

Among the working condition, major factors identify by the expert include the low wage, lack of supervisory support, remote location of work, long working hours, too much of work pacing and stateless condition. The workers of the small holding plantation are getting only lesser wage compared to large oil palm plantations. The large plantation ensures minimized and fair wage to the workers in addition to proper welfare facilities like housing, clean drinking water, hygiene, medical facilities, education of children etc. On the contrary, the workers in the small holding oil palm plantation are devoid of fair wage as well as facilities. It is reported further, during the interview with workers that, these foreign workers are getting only RM500 to RM600 without any additional income or welfare facilities.

These foreign workers are facing major obstacles from supervisor. Being working in the remote locations which are almost 100km inside the plantation these workers is cut off from the external world and the workers have to totally depend on mandor and supervisors of oil palm plantation for their day to day sustenance. The workers do not have any freedom and they are closely monitored by the mandor on their work performance. Verbal abuse and physical abuse is very common among these plantations. The workers have to engage in long working hours and the activities include high mobility from one area to another inviting work pacing. The work is more of hazardous in nature in the area of harvesting, loading and unloading of heavy oil palm fruit, pest control that involve heavy use of chemical, pruning etc. The works are more taxing which invite high physical labor without getting proper leisure, rest and in time food. They work in more monotonous in nature and is challenging and unhealthy foreign worker working in oil palm plantation.

As expert identify, the workers are deprived of any welfare facilities in oil palm plantation. They feel less safety and security feel from the plantation jobs due to low wage, lack of welfare facilities and low security at work. The workers have the feel of high discrimination at work. They consider the work in oil palm plantation as a form of forced and bonded labor. Further, in oil palm plantations, especially small holding, there is rigid rules and regulation which is strictly followed by the Mandor. In addition to that since there is the presence of different ethnic communities, lack of group cohesiveness among the group. The working environment turns to be uncongenial due to this ethnic group conflict and lack of group cohesiveness. Being isolated and devoid of all facilities, which are supposed to get, these foreign workers do not have any happiness in their work or personal life.

The expert also pointed out the precarious factor in relation to the living conditions of foreign workers in oil palm plantation. The 'stateless' condition is 'unique living conditions' of the foreign workers living in remote locations of oil palm plantation. Majority foreign workers are from Indonesia and Philippines. They cross their countries to engage in plantation work long back years. Neither they do have the status of Malaysian citizenship nor do they have their own country passport. These foreign workers are living in small holding plantations keep a distance away from police and other enforcement agencies from Malaysia. Their living condition is unsafe, insecure and highly isolated. The expert further identified variables related to living conditions like poor hygiene, no clean water to poor housing facilities, low level social engagement with less recreation facilities for foreign workers living in oil palm plantation.

These foreign workers have to totally depend on the mandors and plantation manager's support to sustain their life in remotely located oil palm plantation. They are more into bonded labor due to their indebtedness. It has been further opined by the expert that due to big family size and low wage structure these foreign workers are living with exploited living and working condition by the mandor and plantation management in oil palm plantations. They don't have any voice since they have to work their day to day sustenance.

All these factors identified in this exploratory research further would be providing a substantial base for an extensive research relating with appropriate dependent variables using quantitative research method.

9. Implication

This exploratory research on precarious working condition of foreign workers in oil palm plantation has four level implications. The first level implication is related to policy level. The expert identified many factors which are closely knit with working and living condition of foreign workers. These factors are an eye opener to the government to look on oil palm plantation workers that at least to ensure the fair wage and decent living condition. In the second level, the study points managerial implications. The plantation management should take into account these factors which would be providing more productive workforce in the plantation. Healthy and satisfied plantation foreign workers will be providing more productive labor which intent will contribute to oil palm plantation development. The study also paves methodological contributions. By following qualitative research methodology of Delphi, case studies and field observations, the study follows triangulation and leading

the research for an extensive study in oil palm plantation with quantitative research method. Last but not least the study also ensures development of new theory on precarious working conditions in oil palm plantation.

10. Conclusion

It is established through this exploratory research that precarious working conditions are prevalent in oil palm plantations especially in the Sabah region of Malaysia. The wide discrimination and injustice of living and working conditions are more in small holding oil palm plantations compared to large plantations. In large plantations, the workers are avail of minimum wages and all additional welfare facilities comparable to small holding plantation. The role of mandor, subcontractors and contractors, the statelessness nature of foreign workers, poor enforcement of the law of the land, acute shortages of labors among oil palm plantation etc. all contributed to precarious working and living condition of foreign workers in oil palm plantation. The study further supported to fix the variables that are correlated to precarious working and living condition of foreign workers oil palm plantation of the Sabah region of Malaysia.

Reference

- Azizah, K. (1995). From Neglect to Legalization: The Changing State Response to the Inflow of Illegal Labor into Malaysia Paper read at the *Conference on Globalization: Local Challenges and Responses*, organized by the Malaysian Social Science Association at Universiti Sains Malaysia, Penang.
- Basiron, Y. (2007). Palm oil production through sustainable plantations. *European Journal of Lipid Science and Technology*, 109, 289-295. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1002/ejlt.200600223>
- CARAM Asia (Coordination of Action Research on AIDS and Mobility in Asia) (2005). State of Health of Migrants in Malaysia'. The source of these statistics is the Ministry of Home Affairs of Malaysia. These statistics were obtained from the Cambodian Embassy in Kuala Lumpur.
- Custer, R. L., Scarcella, J. A., & Stewart, B. R. (1999). The modified Delphi technique: A rotational modification. *Journal of Vocational and Technical Education*, 15(2), 1-10. <http://dx.doi.org/10.11113/jt.v70.1743>
- Dalkey, N. C. (1972). The Delphi method: An experimental study of group opinion. In N. C. Dalkey, D. L. Rourke, R. Lewis, & D. Snyder (Eds.), *Studies on the quality of life: Delphi and decision-making* (pp. 13-54). Lexington, MA: Lexington Books Edge, Brian; Interview with Daniel Lo of CAMSA (Coalition to Abolish Modern-day Slavery in Asia) in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, on February 28, 2012.
- Economic Transformation Programme. (2010). *A Roadmap For Malaysia Deepening Malaysia's Palm Oil Advantage*. Retrieved September 29, 2013, from http://etp.pemandu.gov.my/upload/etp_handbook_chapter_9_palm_oil.pdf
- Edward, C. (1997). *Foreign Labor in Malaysian Development: A Strategic Shift?*. IKMAS Working Paper, No.6, Kuala Lumpur, January.
- Guereña, A., & Zepeda, R. (2013). *The power of oil palm: Land grabbing and impacts associated with the expansion of oil palm crops in Guatemala*. Boston: Oxfam America
- Kumar, D. M. (2013). *Ways and Means of Research Method*, Research India Publication. New Delhi, India.
- Ludwig, B. (1997). Predicting the future: Have you considered using the Delphi methodology? *Journal of Extension*, 35(5), 1-4. Retrieved November 6, 2013, from <http://www.joe.org/joe/1997october/tt2.html>
- Pfeiffer, J. (1968). *New look at education*. Poughkeepsie, NY: Odyssey Press.
- Pillai. (1992). *People on the Move: An Overview of Recent Immigration and Emigration in Malaysia*. Kuala Lumpur: ISIS.
- Pillai. (1995). Labor Migration in Asia: Malaysia. *Asean Economic Bulletin*, 12(2), 221-23.
- Tirtosudarmo, R. (2013). Indonesian migrant workers: With particular reference in the oil palm plantation industries in Sabah, Malaysia. Citation in: Kato, Y. (2010). Centre for South East Asian Studies Kyoto University, Japan. Retrieved November 9, 2013, from file:///C:/Users/user/Desktop/Plantation/%20%80%9CIndonesian%20migrant%20workers%20%20with%20particular%20reference%20in%20the%20oil%20palm%20plantation%20industries%20in%20Sabah,%20Malaysia%E2%80%9D%E3%80%80%5BDr.%20Ri wanto%20Tirtosudarmo%5D%20%20%20biomassociety.org.htm
- UNESCAP Report. (2006). *See also statistics*. Retrieved December 10, 2013, from http://www.unescap.org/stat/meet/egm2006/ses.4_Malaysia.pdf
- World Bank. (1995). *Malaysia: Meeting Labor Needs: More Workers and Better Skills*. Washington.

World Bank. (1995). Malaysia: Meeting Labor Needs: More Workers and Better Skills. Washington: World Bank. Citation in Kanapathy, V. (2001). International Migration and Labor Market Adjustments in Malaysia: The Role of Foreign Labor Management Policies. *Asian and Pacific Migration Journal*, (3-4), 79.

World vision. (2012). *Forced, child and trafficked labour in the Palm oil industry*. Report of World Vision Australia. World Vision Australia ABN 28 004 778 081.

Appendix

Interviews with worker

In order to explore the issue the investigators have conducted several interviews. Comprehended form of the case interviews is incorporated as follows.

Worker 1

I'm working here almost 4 years now and we are staying in a group of 5 families in one "Kongsi" (long house). I'm originally from Makassar, Sulewasi, we are from bugis clan. I'm having 5 children belonged to the age group of 21, 17, 8, 4,2 years. I'm taking up harvesting work in the plantation and my wife is working as fertilizer and pesticide sprayer. My first and second son (that's 17 and 8 years old) currently helping me in the field. As I'm now 45 years old, it's really tough to work and easily get tired in the evening. I usually stop working and feel exhausted. My previous employer engaged me in more target work compared to here.

Worker 2

I am 22 years, now. I started working in the plantation when I was 8 years old. Helping my father in collecting the lost fruits. I have been in school for 2 months only as it was burdened to my family to pay my monthly fees of RM10 a month at the school that was organized by the committee at the plantation when. I just played and do nothing, until one day father ask me to join him at the plantations. I start with the pay of RM 3 a day for collecting the fruit, year by year increase RM 5, RM 7 and finally Rm15 per day as do hard work as fruit collector. Today I'm having 2 children. First son is currently 10 years old and another 2 years old. I keep my elder son away from the plantation and giving him a good education at Semporna, the place that is 4 hours away from here. I am paying for his accommodation, food and daily care to school. Hoping one day, he will not follow the hardship of life I was going through before. I want to change my next generation to a better one. With the income of RM900 as harvesting still can afford to save and giving a better life to my family compare to my father's generation which only having RM600 to feed 7 of us last time.

Worker 3

I'm Angka, 42 year old, living with 8 children and my wife in plantations. The plantation provides us with wooded housing that having 2 rooms. We are located deep inside the plantation. 4 of my children did not register their birth, I am scared because my wife came with social visit and was staying over here without a pass. My mentor assigned me and my family to a remote location and keeping us away from an enforcement officer. We have difficulty of getting basic amenities from town. My mandor will help me to purchase monthly provisions. We are using the system "masuk buku 555" in which we take thing first and pay after when we get wage. Mandor will automatically cut my wage for the item purchased. Beside that, the price tag is quite higher than normal. For example an instant noodle cost RM2 per pack, where outside it cost RM 0.70.

Worker 4

I am Zaki, 40, working in the plantation for 4 years, but still not having my passport. But my mandor and manager have already taken my thumb print and told me they are in the process of doing the passport "Jaminan". Myself and a few friends are in the same condition and are located at the same housing "Kongsi", I am here without my family. My wife and children are in Indonesia. Every month I usually send more than half of my wage to my family in Indonesia through my mandor, as the town is so far and I don't have my document yet. It is very dangerous for us to go out of the plantation since the enforcement and rules and regulations are very strict here. Every month I order only very basic food from the Mandor such as salt, rice, salted fish, cigarette, instant noodles, sugar and coffee powder. With this order itself my monthly expenses will reach RM120, for one person. Besides that, vegetables we get it from the plantations, during our walk like "pokes" and "Daun ubi".

Worker 5

I'm Ahmed staying with 3 children, my wife, and my children. The children belong to age from 3, 7 and 10 years old. Three of them have not any document so far and out of three two children yet to get their document. All

three of my children are not going to school since the school is very far away from our house. There is Humana (an NGO) in the other plantation, but I cannot afford to send them to that school as I only have one bicycle to go to work. Every morning my wife and me will go together by bicycle to assemble the fruits and it is very dark. During the journey of 30min cycle, she will hold the torch light and sit at the back of my bicycle. My children will be at home and taken care by our neighbor's wife. I do pay her monthly RM20 for here service. My wife prepares food keeps in the kitchen. I do inform my elder son to look after the sister and brother. My wife and me have to work hard to earn more money to live a better life since we long to go back to our own country. My wife earns RM15 by daily bases for her work in fertilizing section. I'm doing the loading work by following one of the tractors, with the earning range from RM600 to RM900, maximum depending on the seasons of the month too. I am working here almost 4 years now. During the peak time, I will bring my son (10 years old), to field to collect the lost fruit. At least he can get RM7 to RM10 at day depending how many sacks collected.

Worker 6

Since the day I started working in plantations, I have never been to the nearby town. All my basic necessities will be purchased by the Mandor. I'm working with a contractor and not direct under the plantation. We are placed at a rundown housing "Kongsi yang banyak bocor" we are in the group. Every morning 5am we will assemble in front of the "Kongsi" and my Mandor will take us by Hilux to the block that need to harvest and loading fruit. We are monitoring closely for high productivity and sometimes, we do fall sick but we are forced to go to work as we have target to achieve. Our Mandor will just give us Panadol for relief from sickness. The Mandor will take us to outside Clinique's only when only in case of high fever/suspected Malaria happens.

Worker 7

I am Razak, working with a subcontractor. Our job ranges from planting, harvesting, loading, pesticide spraying, fertilizing, and pruning. We do change from one plantation to another plantation according to the contract we get. We work together with plantation workers but we will get less benefit and our check roll will be monitored by Mandor. Bad words will be shouting at us if the target did not meet up to their expectation. Mandors usually work as terror in plantations. They made us to work long hours starting from 5 am to 3 pm. Further we are living in poor condition. The housing provided is not equipped with safe drinking water. The workers have to highly depend on the rainwater that they would be saving. During summer, season water supply will be from the adjacent river. Sometimes water smells chemical and as it is contaminated.

Worker 8

I'm Azzal, 46 working in the plantation. My health is losing day by day. I cannot do harvesting job due to poor health. Now I am undertaking spraying job. It is almost 3 months I am engaged in the pesticide-spraying group. Everyone has to work as a group. Workers have to work on the stipulated working hours without having any consideration of pregnancy or illness. Many are fall in sick due to the chemical spraying and lack of good water facility in plantations. The washed away water causes danger to our skin. The chemical spray causes problems to our lungs, as we smell the toxic substance. Every day I am having back pain. It may be due to my age. Walking with the "pom" spray tank of 15kg to a long pacing also give muscle pain. During night sleep muscle pull will always occur. My passport renewal is depending on the company and is uncertain.

Worker 9

Myself and a group of people came to plantations from the same Indonesian province in Sulewasi (Bugis Endrekan clan) and stay in same old long housing "Kongsi" made of wood. Our food style is depending on what ever available in the plantation since we cannot go out frequently for food provisions. We live with chicken goose and duck. We plant some vegetable near to our housing area that to for save of daily expenses and we also collect wild vegetable like "pakis", "pucuk ubi kayu" and tapioca. My wife currently pregnant for my first baby so I don't allow her to work her till my kids grows. I earn only RM600 monthly as fertilizer. I am still waiting for a harvesting vacancy so that I can earn more. I did extra jobs like collecting lost fruit and pruning, during off season. Let me tell you, in my housing area many people are affected by Malaria recently due to poor hygiene. I am just worried about my wife's health; we do sleep inside mosquito netting "kelambu" to safeguard our health. Every month I will take debt "Masuk Buku 555" from the shop nearby, around RM250 monthly. We never saved more than RM50 monthly. All provisions and amenities are really expensive.

Copyrights

Copyright for this article is retained by the author(s), with first publication rights granted to the journal.

This is an open-access article distributed under the terms and conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution license (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/3.0/>).