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Rural-Urban Migration In Malaysia

By

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RURAL-URBAN MIGRATION
IN MALAYSIA*

by

*Migration
Malaysia*

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RURAL-URBAN MIGRATION IN MALAYSIA

There is no doubt that the phenomenon of rural-urban migration in Malaysia is here to stay and will continue to increase further despite government efforts to halt this movement through our rural development programmes. Based on this premise I would like to focus my discussions primarily on the younger migrants - namely the youth, since statistics show that there has been a steady decline in the rural population particularly among the 18 - 30 age group.

Numerous research studies and seminars have addressed themselves to the plethora of problems plaguing the rural migrant in the urban environment - their socio-psychological problems of adjustment and adaptation to urban life, economic problems relating to low paying jobs, under employment, unemployment, etc. I feel that the time has come for us to look at another dimension of this phenomenon of rural-urban migration. Tunku Shamsul has made mention of the contributory aspects of the rural migrant towards the process of restructuring Malaysian Society. I would like for use to take a step further and look at the rural migrant particularly the youth migrant as a potential source of human resource which when given the necessary training and guidance, can contribute towards the economic development of our country. Thus instead of viewing the rural migrants more as liabilities we should think of pragmatic and creative ways of tapping this resource and turning them into assets.

There needs to be therefore a reorientation of our thinking and attitude regarding the impact of rural-urban migration. We need to think in terms of a strategy or a more positive approach to this phenomenon.

Before we can do this however, we have to be clear in our minds as to which groups or categories of migrants we are referring and which need aid or help.

For purposes of this discussion I don't think that we need worry about the "elite migrants", that is those who are holding executive positions in the government and the private sector and whose Mercedes, BMWs or Alfas contribute to the traffic congestion in the city.

Our attention needs to be focussed on three other migrant groups:-

1. Those youth who come to the cities because they have secured jobs either with the government mainly as office boys, drivers or clerks or in the many factories that abound in the Free Trade Zones of the various urban centres. These comprise mainly women workers and other factory hands.
2. Those who come in search of jobs.
3. Those who come to the city lured by the bright lights and the desire to experience the glamour and excitement of city life.

I will not delve into a discussion of the push and pull factors or whether one set of factors is more important than the other but suffice to say that an understanding of the various motivating factors that bring in the different categories of migrants into the cities will help us think of a strategy or approach for each of these groups.

All these groups are beset by a number of social as well as economic problems which sometimes manifest themselves in the form of dadah addiction, immoral behaviour, mass hysteria and other symptomatic or other psychological ills. These incidentally are presenting problems and are merely symptoms of a more serious cause. Thus tackling the symptoms will not necessarily wipe out the root of the problem.

Apart from these problems, these groups also lack skills such as work skills, academic skills as well as life coping skills, the latter of which are necessary for survival in a competitive and demanding urban environment. Some of the life coping skills are interpersonal skills, decision-making, dealing with physical separation from the family, budgeting of time and money, personal discipline, use of leisure time, etc.

LIVING-LEARNING CENTRES

For the first category of youth migrants i.e., the employed group, I would like to suggest that employers, both the government and the private sector set up hostels in various urban centres for which the youth are charged a minimal monthly sum.

These centres should provide not only dormitories or sleeping and cooking facilities but they are also be learning centres. These living-learning centres can be run by the youth themselves with help from members of the community, related government and private agencies to provide the necessary learning component to these centres as counselling services, tutorial groups for those wanting to improve their education, religious guidance as well as agencies such as the Ministry of Youth to run leadership and personality development type of programmes or courses. These living-learning centres, if properly managed will not only help alleviate most of the socio-psychological and economic ills of our employed migrants but will surely turn them into productive and loyal citizens of the country.

YOUTH AID AND INFORMATION BUREAUS

For those in categories II and III i.e. those who come in search of jobs and these who are attracted by the bright lights of the city, I would like to suggest that the government establish Youth Aid and Information Bureaus in all our cities and big towns, particularly in Kuala Lumpur which experience the greatest influx of migrants. These Bureaus would perform the following functions:

- i) They would register all in-coming youth under the 2 categories mentioned. This would provide planners with a valuable data bank on the characteristics of the migrants and help formulate policies and programmes based on actual needs instead of mere theoretical assumptions and guesswork.

- ii) These Bureaus would also provide the necessary information that would aid a first-timer into the city - the what, where and how - to of city - the what, where and how - to of city life; occupational information; religious and other Help-type of organizations, etc.
- iii) Counselling forms and third function of the Bureau. Trained professional Counsellors should help those youth, particularly those who were merely lured by the bright city lights to appraise themselves in terms of their interest, values and skills that they have and to explore other alternatives to city living - such as working on our land schemes and in our plantations or working in new growth centres.

Here I feel that the media can play a very important role in nurturing and creating an interest and a pride particularly among our youth to work on our land **instead** of aspiring to be an office boy or an attendant in Kuala Lumpur.

We need to read about more success stories of young, local small holders, Felda settlers, successful farmers and enterprising self made businessmen. Youths need to model themselves after someone whom they can admire and aspire to be. So far we have had too much exposure to the urban "elite" type of models through our media.

Coming back to the Youth Aid and Information Bureaus, these should **comprise** staff from related agencies such as the Ministries of Labour, Youth, Welfare Services and Information and assisted by the youth themselves as well as interested members from the community.

In conclusion I would like to reiterate that there is a need for a new strategy to the growing phenomenon of the rural-urban migration - particularly the youth migrant. I have suggested a multidimensional approach in the establishment of the Living and Learning Hostel Centres as well as the Youth Aid and Information Bureaus. Finally I would like to add that the problem of the youth migrant cannot be looked at solely as it relates to the phenomenon of rural-urban migration but it should be integrated into the total or overall concept of the development of youth in this country as a whole.