

## CHAPTER III

### PROFILE OF THE CASE STUDY AREA IN MYANMAR AND THE CASES

#### 3.1. Profile of Nya Na Kone Village in Mawlamyine, Mon State, Myanmar

The community chosen for this research is a village located in the southern part of Mawlamyine suburb area. The case study area is in the capital of the Mon state. This province is sandwiched between Kayin (Karen) State on the east and the Andaman Sea on the west. It has a short border with Thailand's Kanchanaburi province at its south-eastern tip. Its capital, Mawlamyine, is located at the western end of the Greater Mekong Sub-region East-West Economic Corridor. Throughout 26 years of Socialist period, Mawlamyine used to be a major black market for Thai commodities. It used to be a secret door through which the people transported Thai products smuggled across the Thai border routes to the whole Burma. Most of the people from Mawlamyine rely on the black market and the town itself is well-known for this business. Although the black market could not bring any tariff and custom duty to the state government, it used to be the rice bowl for the local people. Old trade route between Thai border area and this province has facilitated the flow of migrant people from Myanmar to Thailand in the following decades.

After the military coup in Myanmar in 1988, the State Law and Order Restoration Council (SLORC), the country's ruling government, introduced limited market oriented economic policies. The changes in macro-economic policy diminished the role of the black market in Mawlamyine from this time onward. Although military government has made efforts to reform the country's economy, these measures have brought no substantial benefits to the population in general in Myanmar. The living standard of the whole Mon province as well as its capital remains as low as it was when the country was closed off from the outside world. The policy failure at the macro level has impact on the local people of the whole region. The local people remain dependent on subsistent agriculture. Due to lack of new business opportunities expected from even limited policy changes by the current military regime, the economic condition in this once-thriving informal black market

economy is getting worse year by year. Since the decline of the black market, business people started to leave for big cities like Yangon and other places in search of better business opportunities. Lack of employment and the increasing population in the region have led to a rising number of migrants who look to Thailand with its dynamic national economy as a greener pasture.

The respondents participating in this study were selected from a village named Nya Na Kone, which is located at the Southern most part of Mawlamyine. The Thanlwin (Salween) River flows by the village and terminates at the Andaman Sea. A group of islands deposited by the Thanlwin River are found opposite the village as serve as the agricultural land for the villagers. The village area on the map is 4,670 acres, with 802.18 acres for agricultural land. The village has a more crowded population relatively than its neighboring villages. The number of total population is 5,258 but the figure is changeable because the new born children of the people who are residing temporarily outside of the village are not counted in the list of villagers. In total, 766 houses accommodate 1,001 households.

The new administration under the State Law of Restoration Council (SLORC) extended the old village in 1989. One more main road has been constructed for the basic infrastructure of the extended village area. Today, only two main roads which are already constructed in the old village area are tar-paved, with the remaining two stone-paved. The government has provided electricity to the villagers since October 1972. However, the number of people who are allowed to use electricity meter is very limited and there are currently only 303 meters in place. While the population is increasing steadily, the electricity is no longer sufficient to meet the demands of the entire village. Many electricity users are shared illegally by the owner of the meter on the basis of monthly fees. The government has been implementing a plan to increase the number of electricity meter in the village. For transportation, there is no direct bus line linking the village to downtown Mawlamyine. Horse and trishaw are the only means of transportation to reach to the nearest bus terminal in order to catch a bus to central Mawlamyine.

*Table 3.1 Basic Infrastructure of Nya Na Kone Village, Mawlamyine, Mon States*

1	Drill Well	10
2	Hand Draw Well	47
3	Water Pump	15
4	Post Primary School	1
5	Primary School	1
6	Pre-primary School	1
7	Monastery	2
8	Public Dispensary	1
9	Library	1
10	Bazaar	1

Originally, the village is a mixed community of Mon and Burmese ethnics. It is strange to see that all members of the community are Buddhist and there is no one who believes in other religions. The traditional customs maintained by the villagers does not allow non-Buddhists to stay in the village because they do not desire to see other religious building existing in the community. This is one of the reasons why there is no church or Mosque or Chinese Temple in the village. This custom is not legally binding but it makes the strangers hardly settled among the original community members.

One of the prominent characteristics of the village is its range of festivals and special social events throughout the year. In the past, most villagers could manage to earn a sufficient income to meet both ends and to enjoy a number of festivities. The major income of the villagers used to come from fishing in the Thanlwin River and the Andaman Sea, as well as agriculture on the islands adjacent to the village and remittances from relatives working in Thailand.

Income sources for the villagers are mainly in fisheries and agriculture, the underground lottery and remittances from abroad. Only a few villagers work in the public sectors and private business. Some are trading Thai commodities along the border area and doing other related businesses based in the Myawaddy-Mae Sot area.

Fishing was the easiest way to make money and the villagers have a motto: "We cannot go hungry as long as our boats touch the water of Thanlwin". Earning a living from fishing was an "easy going" lifestyle for the villagers. The income of fishing household varies from 4,000 Kyat to 10,000 Kyat per day in 2007. However, it is not possible to fish every day as the fishing season is only in the period of the spring tide. On average, a fisherman's working day is 15 days to 20 days per months. Due to increasing fish exports to China, fish prices are much higher than in the past as a result of high inflation rate of the whole economy. However, in the recent decade, the fish population in the river has decreased due to over fishing to meet especially the Chinese demand. Fish export companies lent money to local fish mongers to collect fish on their behalf. The nature of fishing was seasonal and most fishermen had to spend money for fixing and buying fishing nets and other equipments before the fishing season came. They had to borrow money from the fish collectors with high rates of interest. However, it was not possible to predict how much they would actually earn during the limited fishing season in order to repay their accumulated debt to the money lenders. Decreasing fish stocks in the river does not allow sufficient levels of income to be earned despite rising fish prices to repay debts owed to the money lenders. Over fishing has led to a depletion of fish stocks below sustainable limits and is one of the environmental causes which have forced many villagers to become migrant laborers in Thailand. Nowadays, earning a living through fishing is a career only for a very small number of villagers who are not willing or cannot afford to go to Thailand.

Less than 15 percent of the total number of households has their own land for agriculture. The land area around the village and the islands adjacent to the village are used for agriculture. The economy of land owners is more stable than those who work in fisheries. Agricultural work provides employment not only for land owners but also

for the landless. Agricultural land owned by the villagers is limited and only some have regular income from farming. The farmers can grow only one crop in the raining season because no irrigation system is providing for the farmers and the contribution of agriculture to the local economy is limited. Moreover, the peasants are also not free from the effects of economic mismanagement by the government. Even though the government stopped its direct procurement with fixed prices from the farmers in 2003, the strict control of the government on rice trade has impacts at the grass root level. The government has tried very often to control the rice price to prevent food insecurity because it will trigger the public riots. Limits on rice exports have undermined the production of the farmers for decades. The most common problem faced by the farmers in the village is their struggle to meet rising labor wages and the capital cost with the available resources. The benefit from the output is limited while the cost of input is going up.

Under this situation, most of the landless who work in other farms on daily or seasonally wages are not capable to survive with the small income and even land owners just manage to make ends meet. In 2007, the daily wage for a farm worker in the harvesting season 1,500 Kyat = 1.2 \$ is not an attractive wage for a worker. Now the majority of laborers who used to work on local farming have moved to Thailand in the hope of better earnings leaving people from other regions to carry out this seasonal job.

The most successful breadwinners among the villagers are those who are doing business related to legal and illegal trade with Thailand. Some have hired temporary residents in border towns like Myawaddy and Kawthaung for doing business. A few countable numbers of educated villagers joined the government service and private companies because the job opportunities are rare in this town even though it is the third largest city in Myanmar.

It is obvious that the declining economy of the whole region also has an impact on the micro economic condition of the village. After the economic activities involved in the black market had been eradicated, the underground lottery has become

one of the main businesses of Mawlamyine. The underground lottery which allows gamblers to bet two times on every week day on the closing number of Thai stock exchange is very popular among the public. The majority of the town population is involved in gambling business as betters or as ticket sellers who accept the bet.

The economic decline of the town is responsible for increasing gambling in the town because people are attracted by easy money and do not have sufficient opportunities to do business. It is common to see the betting in Mawlamyine including the case study area even though the government authorities takes action to stop this practice. The increase in underground gambling has eroded the social fabric of the village for more than two decades and the vicious circle created by debt and gambling are increasingly common. The solution for those who wish to escape the miserable life of shouldering heavy debt burdens is to cross the border and to work as a migrant in Thailand, the closest neighboring country.

Moreover, the local public and private economic sectors cannot absorb the increasing population of the younger generation by creating sufficient employment. Young people of the community faced with a severe lack of opportunity for any employment see migration as their only chance to create a better life.

Migration is not a new phenomenon for the villagers because their ancestors also crossed the border through sea and land to trade with Thailand for decades. Since the 1980s, villagers started to enter Thailand to seek a better livelihood. At that time, the Mawlamyine - Myawaddy Road was not safe and the majority chose Ranong as an entry point to Thailand. Since the 1990s, the number of people who sought work in Thailand has increased due to the emergence of manufacturing factories in Mea Sot and other border provinces. The mass migration gained momentum after Thailand introduced a series of registration schemes for workers from three neighboring countries in the region. Thus, the numbers of migrants working in Thailand as documented and undocumented workers has increased significantly. Recently, the stronger social networks among those who have settled as long term migrants in Thailand has attracted an even larger number of villagers from this community to join

the Thai labor force. Currently, the village income is heavily dependent on the remittances sent by family members working in Thailand. Remittances sent by migrants have changed the household consumption pattern. In the area chosen for this study, sending family members to work in Thailand and receiving remittances has become more than an economic phenomenon. It has become a social trend bringing with it a higher social status in the village.

In the village, 467 households have family members working as migrants in Thailand (excluding the households which have migrants working in other countries) out of the total number of houses 766 houses. Therefore, the households with migrants represent 62 percent. As a result, the village is heavily dependent on the remittances sent by the migrants.

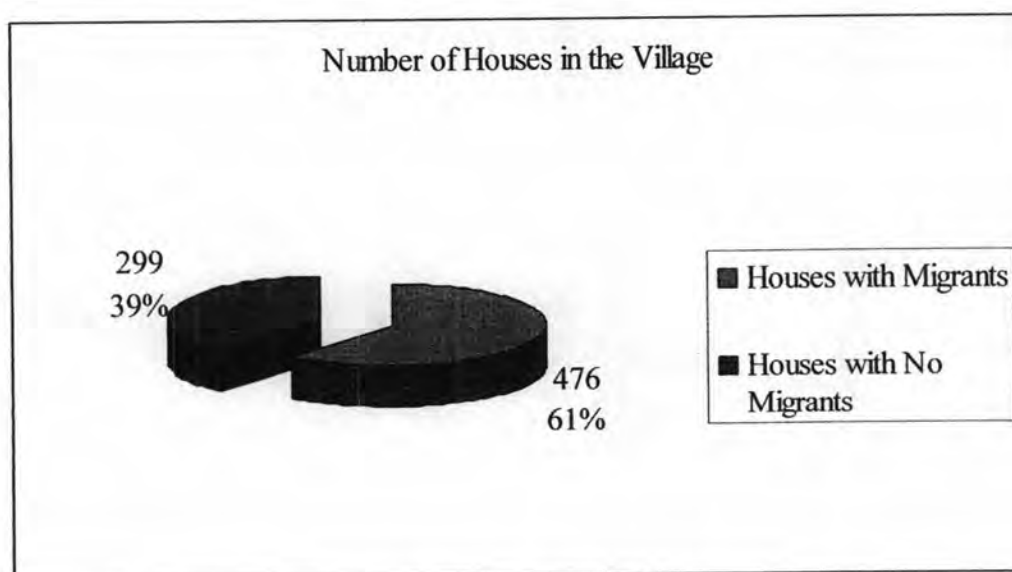


Figure 3.1 Numbers of Migrant Households in the Village

### 3.2 Case Studies

After coming out of the village, member of this community joined the bottommost level in Thai labor forces. Their works are usually referred to as 3D jobs (Dirty, Difficult and Dangerous). Similar to migration phenomenon of other parts of the region, Myanmar migrants are also facing a range of problems in places of destination. Trafficking, labor exploitation, poor access to health and education, low

quality of living and working condition, arrest, deportation, and physical abuse are common problems for them working in Thailand. This illegal status has put them at risk of arrest and deportation in their daily life at the hands of the Thai immigration and police authorities. Moreover, the corruption of Thai police and their involvement in many abuse cases towards migrant workers raises the vulnerability level of migrant workers (Arnold and Hawison, 2005).

Moreover, most of the occupations they hold are not regular work, for example, construction workers, fishing boats and fish processing. In some places, they have to face with violence which is threatening to their security; for example, the robbery takes place in every month around the factories of Mu 6, Bangkhuntien Road, Bangkok<sup>4</sup>. Sometimes they have to work in dangerous condition and are not fully protected. They have to stay in unhealthy life due to limited access to health care and facility. Malaria and TB are common diseases among Myanmar migrant workers, in addition to HIV/AIDS and drug abuse-related health problems. Debt, control and coercion of Myanmar workers are also reported as serious work-related issues. Language barrier and lack of communication between employers and Myanmar workers are also a common problem which leads to their worsening conditions as vulnerable, exploited migrants. Even under this condition, majority of the villagers who are working Thailand are sending remittances home. Their remittances propensity and behavior, the process of sending money they are accessible and contribution of remittances at home were explored by learning 12 matching cases of remittance senders and migrants.

**Case No-1 (Household of male migrant, 34 year of age, working in Bangkok fish processing factory)**

It is a family four people. Before they came to Thailand, father, the household head worked in agriculture, fishing and construction. His wife used to run a grocery shop. The economic conditions of the family became worse and worse despite their

---

<sup>4</sup> Interview with migrant workers from a fish processing factory which located in 101/6 Mu 6 Soi Muangsakul Bangkhuntien Rd, Bangkhuntien Bangkok 10150, Thailand on 12 April, 2007



hard work and the amount of debt they had taken from the local fish collector was gradually increasing with the added interests. As a solution to the serious debt problem, the husband decided to leave for Thailand in 2004. The wife who had left behind had to wrestle with the debt burden after her husband had left home. Her earning from a grocery store was insufficient for the consuming cost of her own and the two children. At that time she started to addict to underground lottery while she strived for making better to meet the running cost of the household and the debt repayment. However, her solution was in the wrong way and it made her indebted more and more. Finally, she decided to leave her two children with her mother-in-law and left the village without letting other people know about her trip.

After the parents left for Bangkok, the two children are left behind with grandmother from father side. The aunt of the left behind children is helping her mother of over seventy years old to take care of the children. Normally, the person who takes care of the left behind children of migrant family is the remittance recipient. The respondent and his wife send regularly only for the children monthly allowance and they save the rest in their hands. Indeed the amount of monthly remittances is barely enough for the two children and the mother because the commodity price is always increasing without stop. Sometimes, when the allowance was not enough and had to borrow from the children grand parents from mother's side.

Now both sides are giving pressure to send sufficient money for the children. For the remittance sender, they are trying to be as thrifty as possible in Bangkok in order to save for future capital investment. Apart from the regular remittances, they used to send irregular one to both sides of parents when they have emergency needs and gave pressure to a ring to send money but larger amount is flowing into wife's side. But they are never willing to share the burden of other siblings who needs financial aid.

In every month they call the primary collector to come to their dormitory on the day closest to pay day of their factory. They do not have mobile phone to call to

recipient on the day of transfer. So the telephone service provided by the money collector is very useful for them to contact with home. The cost of transfer is already included in currency exchange rate fixed by the collector. However, they have to pay for the telephone call to Myanmar. While they send remittances in cash regularly, remittances in kind was never sent through the collectors. They send goods home with their friends and co-workers on their return or short visit to native land. In each time, they send clothing for children and parents.

In addition to the monthly allowance 100,000 Kyat for left behind children and care giver, they have spent 930,000 Kyat on debt repayment they owed to the fish collectors and other money lenders. For housing improvement, they installed electricity meter at home. It cost them 0.35 million Kyat. They also keep saving amounted to 0.6 million Kyat in hands of a better-off relative. She is giving monthly interest to the couple because she can use this funding in her own business. Now they have two sources of income; from their monthly salary in Bangkok and the interest from their financial investment. They are planning to use larger parts of remittances on investment in near future because they do not need to raise the amount of consumption extensively. Up to now, the bigger volume of remittances has been flowing into unproductive expenses in this family.

**Case No-2 (Household of male migrant, 42 year of age, working in Bangkok fish processing factory)**

The respondent is a divorcee and he has no responsibility to build up a family as case No -1. His mother is over 60 years old and can no longer work. But she is healthy enough to take care of the grand son left behind by the migrant. For the respondent, this is the last time of his migration and he used to be trafficked in his first time in mid 1990s and had to work for a Thai rubber plantation for nine months without pay. In his home town, he used to work as fisherman, construction worker and smuggler who carried Thai commodities between Mawlamyine and Thai border area. He was brought to Bangkok by his cousins who have been working in Thailand.

These relatives who became financially strong after migrating to Thailand supported him out of social responsibility and kindness to his mother.

At present, he is sending remittances to his mother and his son. He could not send money to his mother regularly during the first ten months after arrival. Nowadays, he sends 100,000 Kyat regularly to his mother even though his average salary is around 150,000 in Kyat. He set aside the rest of the salary in his cousin's hand as saving for his future investment. The remittance sending is his important responsibility because it is the only income source for his mother and he himself wants to make her mother happy and carefree for finance.

In the early years of his stay, he spent very modest amount on his consumption out of his salary. For the very first ten month He have to struggle to save money for repaying debt and sending money back home at the same time. Passing after two years in Thailand, his spending habit has changed noticeably. Besides eating good food, he comes to enjoy drinking and betting on slot machine gambling. He said he should make himself happy because his work in the factory makes him very exhausted. However, he is lucky enough to have some younger cousins who can control his finance and has some influence on him. If they are not around him, all his income was supposed to be streaming into all his expenses in Bangkok.

He has nothing concern with the process of sending remittances. All he needs to do is to send his wage he has taken from the factory to his cousins. On every pay day, he pays all his net wages to them. They allot for him how much for sending home, how much for his expense and how much for savings. They usually transfer his portion along with their remittances. They also contact the money collectors via telephone for hiring service for all their money. They pay for his transaction cost, too. So, he does not need to arrange for any step of the process. He just comes and waits in their room to talk to his mother from Mawlamyine on telephone at the time of money transfer. For receiving money his mother does not need to pay any service fees, too.

At the destination, remittances are utilized mainly on daily consumption and expenses on education by the mother. As an elder person, she is religious and usually contributes a little amount of monthly donation to the monastery. Being a sociable lady, modest amount of financial participation in various kinds of social affairs is unavoidable for her. She makes fun out of betting on lottery and uses 200 Kyat per day amounted to one fourth of her daily personal consumption cost. It could be seen that unproductive consumption has been absorbing the largest part of remittances in their remittance allocation pattern.

Although the remittance recipient is the old mother of six sons, only the respondent from Bangkok is supporting her financially. Before his son's migration, she had to run a food shop for a small income. It is not easy for her to run the shop alone when she gets older and older. Now the remittances save her life and she can live with no worry in her late sixties. For her grandson, the remittances are funding for tuition fees and daily expense to go to school. In their house, eight grand children of three families are living together. He is the only one who can continue until high school. Now the migrant father is saving money for his future.

**Case No-3 (Household of male migrant, 24 year of age, working in Bangkok fish processing and canning factory)**

The family had suffered the economic turmoil due to high living costs when the family size become bigger and bigger. Six children had been grown up one after another and their education expenses put heavy burden on the shoulders of the parents. They had to sell their home in the central city and make a new settlement after buying a cheaper house in their ancestor's village. In order to solve the debt problem, the first resolution they made is to send the first and third sons to Malaysia as illegal migrants. Unfortunately, they had to face many difficulties Malaysia and could not help the family's financial problem through remittances. So the mother had decided to go to some relatives who are working in Thailand. She withdrew another two sons from the school and brought them together with her.

After working three years in Bangkok, the mother already returned to Myanmar after saving money for three years in Thailand. Sons still working in Bangkok keep sending remittances. They rent a room around the factory campus for accommodation. The cost for living is relatively lower than other migrant workers because three brothers are sharing the same room. Their dormitory in Bangkok is like a common place for their friends and they have drink party occasionally. However, they are not spoiled children and not addicted to drinking too much. They are good sons and hardly waste money. They save and remit money as much as they can for present and future family investment. In their teenage, they had a bitter experience of family economic break down. Now they are working hard because they want a sustainable livelihood when they come back to Myanmar. In their cases, the desire to be able to lead a decent life is pushing them to work hard and send remittance back home.

They use the remittances service of their friend collector, a working migrant who is available any time around them. His normal service charge is not relatively cheaper than any other providers. But he usually gives some discount in currency exchange rate for his close friends, the senders. They have frequent contact with their mother not only on the day of sending money via the collector's mobile phone but also in other occasions.

While sons are working hard in Thailand, father gives support to the mother by using remittances in an effective manner. Before his wife returned back home, he used to be the key decision maker in allocating the remittances. Their remittances are distributed both on productive and unproductive investment including household consumption, debt repayment, investments in agriculture, education expenses, purchasing durable goods and contribution to the social affairs. They had also invested in migration cost, too.

Buying durable goods and investment in agriculture were the major expenses for their household. After debt problem had been settled, they started to invest in buying live stocks and land. Now the family is planning to start a new business by

buying a bus for running between Mawlamyine and Myawaddy. Size of investment on education is more likely to be raised in future when their migrant son come back to resume university education. However, it should be noted that the bigger part of remittances has been absorbed to unproductive utilization rather than investment to income generation activities. For a united family, the outcome of migration is positive resulted in better economy and more potential human resources in future.

**Case No- 4 (Household of female migrant, 18 years of age, working in Bangkok fish processing factory)**

Case No-4 has five children and three are working in Thailand. The youngest two children are still studying in the middle and primary level school. They owned some acres of agricultural land as inheritance from the parents. In recent years, deteriorated economy of the family forced the elder three children to stop education and leave home for Thailand.

At the moment, the eldest son is working in Phuket province and the younger two are working in Bangkok. Both of them in Bangkok are staying together with their aunt from father's side. She is responsible for looking after all of them during their stay together with her. Managing their finance and preparing their meals and accommodation are her main concerns. Owing to her gratitude, they can save more money under her supervision. She helped them in many ways to raise their capacity of remittance sending. And the aunt controls their saving well and prevents them from spending much their money on unnecessary durable consuming goods.

In each time of remittance sending, the two children share the total amount equally. They send money back home in every two months. The remittance service they use is chosen by their aunt. The service providers they deal at present are reliable and they showed high satisfaction on their service. They have contacts with more than three service providers and their aunt normally selects the one who can offer the most reasonable currency exchange rate. They accepted the fact that telephone service provided by the money collector is cheaper than calls from their own mobile. So, they request the providers to bring a good mobile phone for talking to their parents in

Myanmar on time of transaction because they do not use their own mobile on the day of money transfer.

Diversified income sources are advantages to this family. While the children are working in Thailand, both of the parents at home are making money on their own way. Father is working not only as a farmer but also as a fisherman. Mother has never stopped running her food shop even though regular remittances come from Thailand. Recent increased income of the family from agricultural and fishing is adequate for the family of four members at home. Remittances are not meant for their daily consumption expenses while other incomes are fulfilling the basic requirements of the family. As a result, decision makers, the parents, could distribute remittances to investments in agriculture, finance and to savings while they use their own income for daily expenses on food, education and health care. In brief, this is the only one family who can speed up capital injection more on productive uses. However, it is uncertain that their remittances keep flowing to the productive expense in coming future because they said they will buy a new housing soon. The mother had requested her children to work hard and to save money for buying house in coming summer 2008. In their case, they had used migration as a tool for risk diversification and economic co-insurance. The remittances are a source of income back up the family in case of economic crisis.

**Case No-5 (Household of female migrant, 28 years of age, working in Bangkok fish processing and canning factory)**

Among all case studies, this household had been receiving the largest amount of remittances through out the stay of their children in Thailand. They are Mon ethnic and have strong network in Samut Sakhon and Bangkok area since very early years of 1990s. Similar to other cases, no one of four children from the poverty driven family had reached high school. Before migration, they were not financially capable to invest in their paddy field in the growing season and had to take loan annually from money lender with high interests. The outcome from their hard work through out the farming season had gone to the money lenders at harvest. The first person who decided to take

risk to migrate to Thailand is the eldest son in his age of 18. The relatives working in Mahachai had support him financially and socially. When he became settled well in Thailand, the family invested the migration cost for another child. One child after another had followed him after leaving school. In this ways, only parents are left behind at home since then.

The migrant respondent for this case is the second daughter who works in fish processing factory in Bangkok. Now three siblings are working in the same factory and the rest one had moved to Phuket. They do not practice regular remittance sending. Instead, they prefer to save and transfer larger amount in every two or three months rather than sending regular small amount in every month. They think it is more effective in utilization if they send in large scale. Of the three children in Bangkok, the eldest son who had been working continuously in Thailand for almost ten years got married three years ago with a co-worker from the same factory. Normally a marriage man's remittance propensity could not be expected to be the same with unmarried children. They might take self interest as first priority in their consideration and are more likely to reduce remittances to family left behind. But in his case, he keeps sending money to their parents and parent in-law alternatively even after marriage. However, the larger amount has been flowing to his wife's parents. But he never hesitates to send his parents on their request for some particular needs of the family such as donation or building new house. Their couple has never come back to native after marriage and they have never seen each side of parent in-law living in different provinces of Myanmar. For sending remittances to both sides of parents, they expect to enjoy inheritance in return.

Whenever they send money back home, the second daughter is responsible to collect money from the eldest son, the third daughter and the youngest son. The married son had changed his habit and no longer contribute equal amount as other children. They send with hundi and mostly they choose the service providers based on the speed of sending remittances. In the past, they used to experience delays on the way. They do not want to keep the parents waiting with worry for late money.



For this household, the remittances turned their life from money borrower to money lender. After having struggle for a certain period of time, they became free from worry of debt. Apart from debt settlement, daily consumption, housing improvement, donation, expenses on social contributions combined as unproductive use of remittances in their household. The largest percentage of total remittances had been used for building a new house which cost 8 million Kyat.

As productive use, they put more investments in their grocery shops and bought more acres of land and live stocks. As financial investment, they pay mortgage on lands and other valuable property such as gold. They realized migration cost as an effective tool of investment. So far, the unproductive expenses are as large as double of productive investment. The mother, decision makers of the remittance use said "I have no children around me to help in agricultural works in paddy growing and harvesting seasons and I must hire daily and seasonal workers to replace their labor force. While my children receive their wages in Thai Baht, I have to employ local labors who replace them in Myanmar Kyat. The gap of value between Myanmar Kyat and Thai Baht is big and it is better to send them to Thailand than to keep them at home."

Despite all the children earn a relatively higher income than Myanmar, they have desire to go back home in near future. The eldest son mentioned that he would go back to Myanmar one day when he own sufficient acres of land and live stocks to create a sustainable livelihood around parents or parent in-law. All the children from this household feel that they need money for future investment to lead a happy life in their home town because they are uneducated and saving and making investment is the only way of surviving.

**Case No-6 (Household of female migrant, 28 years of age, working in Bangkok fish processing and canning factory)**

Case No. 6 is relatively better-off among other respondents. They own more than 20 acres of land and reap high income from agriculture. Nonetheless, they also

passed a very difficult time in the past before their daughter migrated. The remittance had lessened the intensity of their financial crisis in many cases. The health problem of the household head father was the root of their economic breakdown. After spending enormous medical expense, they had to pawn half of their agricultural land. Owing to the burden of high interest rate, they started to face debt problem when the respondent decided to leave home. In fact the journey to Thailand was driven by her own sense of affections and responsibility towards her mother. She said she feel very sad when her mother tried to solve the financial problem by selling her gold button which she had always put on her dress for the whole life and the gold comb she used to wear on her hair<sup>5</sup>. The respondent said her mother dress without the gold button is unforgettable picture caught in her mind through out her stay in Thailand and later this become a dynamic force driving her motive to remit. She worked hard and tried to save money to solve the family's debt problem in early years of her stay. She extended her income source by selling household commodities in the factory dormitory and give loans to those who were in urgent needs. This is one of the reasons she could send bigger amount of remittances than other friends and co-workers. A good social environment she built up in the migrant community support her in many ways to do business. She has no expectation from her family in return and her propensity to remit is mostly based on the kinship to family.

She used to send money and goods with brokers in early days of her stay in Samut Sakhun. After moving to Bangkok area, they started to use the hundi service. Many service providers she contacts are from their home town and they have good reputation as reliable partners of migrants. However, she is never stick to only one service provider. She always inquires the exchange rate from two or three service providers before remitting and chooses the one who can offer the most reasonable rate. However, for remittances in goods, she sends with friends and relatives on their returns.

---

<sup>5</sup> Wearing golden accessories in dress and hair was an old fashion of Myanmar women. Although it was taken as a symbol of status in the past, it is no longer a popular fashion today.

Among other respondents, the volume of her remittances in goods is the largest. She fulfills not only the basic needs but also a variety of wants demanded by the family. Many kinds of goods; from food and household utensils to clothing and furniture are sent yearly. Now the family no longer wants to receive durable goods from her because they found that many things are not useful at home. They try to stop her not to send household commodities any more. Instead, they request only cash from her.

While large part of income from agriculture has been spent on the daily household expenses and education investment, the remittance has been relied as a source for emergency needs such as debt repayment, health care, family donations and other affairs. The biggest share of remittances had flowed into household improvement and buying durable goods. Similar to Case No.5, the allocation to the unproductive use of remittances is almost two times larger than that of productive investment. For this household, the remittances have given a cushion supporting the family in case of economic crisis. However, high dependency on the migrant can be seen as a by-product of the remittances. Other family members especially female siblings of the respondent are not so enthusiastic to work and not active in money making. They have only one migrant in Thailand while other 11 members of household are dependent on the remittances and yearly earning from farming. Now the family urged the migrant to return back home for short visit because she had been working in Thailand almost nine years continuously. But they want her only to visit but not to come back permanently. They do not even desire her plan to get married because marriage might change her propensity to remit.

**Case No-7 (Household of male migrant, 47 years of age, working as shop keeper in Mae Sot)**

The recipient of the remittances in the Case No. 7 is an old widow who lives by her own. She has a serious hearing problem, so raised-voice conversation was needed during the interview. Out of her six children, only the youngest daughter lives in the same village. The rest of children have been working in Phuket and Mae Sot.

Two months before the interview, the youngest son of the widow came back from Phuket province but with HIV/AIDS and died later in the home village. He left a certain amount of money for her and she used this money to build a house for her permanent residence. Now she is selling 'Ta Yaw', Myanmar traditional herbal shampoo for her daily survival. She has three sons working in Mae Sot and only one can send money to her regularly. However the monthly amount of remittances she receives is very small and cannot meet even half of her consumption cost.

The sender of the remittances had moved the whole family to Mae Sot two years ago due to debt problem. He was deeply indebted before migration and decided to follow his children when he found himself no longer survival in the home village. He has four children who had been working in knitting factories in Mae Sot since their teenage. They got married one after another before the age of twenty. He is now running a food shop for Myanmar migrants around the factories where his children work at. He and his wife earn money on preparing Myanmar dishes for those who pay on a monthly basis. Most of the knitting factories provide only cooked rice for the factory workers. Therefore, their food shop attracts many customers who have to buy food. Their eldest daughter opens a tea shop in the factory area and the whole family gain better income than ever before. They are satisfied with their present living standard even though the whole family has to live in a small crowded house located in an unsanitary surrounding. They said they are happier in Thailand because they can make both ends meet. The respondent is sending a little amount of money to his mother left behind while his wife is sending money to her own parents. He does not take full responsibility to take care of his mother for two reasons. On the one hand, he has his own family to bring up and his first priority is to save money to restart his life again in home village. On the other hand, he hopes other siblings are also responsible to look after their old mother. Furthermore, it is very common that wife is more influential in managing income in a Myanmar family. So he can send money only if his wife gives her approval.

Even though they can make a better income in Mae Sot, their daily life is full of risk and fear. There is only one member of family, the eldest daughter's husband, is

granted registered migrant while the rest are unregistered. They have to cross the Moei River very often to free from the arrest<sup>6</sup>.

It can be said that he is a good son because he keeps sending money to his mother even though the amount is not sufficient enough for living. He sends via the carriers who come monthly from his home village to Mae Sot in order to collect money from customers. Sometimes, these carriers use his house as a place to gather money from customers during their days in Mae Sot. His house is convenient for them in terms of both accommodation and food. Therefore, as a kind deal, they carry his money free of charge to give to his mother. He usually makes sure whether his mother has received the money by another middle man. There are many people from his community coming in and out of Mae Sot and it is easy to pass words to his mother via those people.

The widow shows much reliance upon this son and his remittances are of great assistance for her daily life even though the amount is under 12 \$ per month. Her life will be more difficult if she no longer receive this small amount of remittances. Now the widow requests this son to look after her until she dies. She said she will give him the house she recently built in return as she is also worried for this homeless son. Hence, remittances can be considered installments in order to buy the house from the widow in the future.

**Case No-8 (Household of male migrant, 24 years of age, working in Mae Sot knitting factory)**

After her husband decided to ordain, a lady in her fifties has become the head of family in Case No.8. Out of her six children, a son and a daughter work in Thailand. The son works in a knitting factory in Mae Sot and the daughter as domestic worker at a restaurant in Phuket Province. This left behind family has no full-time job

---

<sup>6</sup> Two days after my interview with Case No-7, the two boys from their surrounding factory died in the current of Moei River while they are crossing in heavy rain under fear of arrest.

or regular business to earn consistent income. Remaining children make their living through doing odds jobs.

Both two children working in Thailand dropped out from high school recently and the son still desires to continue to study. Both of them cannot send remittances regularly. The daughter sent only one time about 100,000 Kyat during the past whole year and the son is trying to send during the working season of the knitting factory. They have income for nearly six months in one year. The son is an undocumented worker and he has to hide quite often from the arrest. Both of them were once arrested by Thai police. For the son, arrest and deportation are the most serious threat in Mae Sot. Nonetheless, he knows how to survive. When he was deported the last time, he could manage to re-enter Thai side easily as soon as the police set him free. However, the threatening arrest and deportation turn his useful hours of making money to good-for-nothing. Generally, he got less income during the arrest and deportation seasons because he was absent at work. He wants to move to Phuket when his sister becomes secured there. He thought that life will be easier in Phuket and he has a plan to take risk to go there soon. He hopes his younger sister will help him one day. In fact, he heard that the sister had to hide recently in a rubber plantation not to be arrested by the police. He realized that she is unable to send remittances in every month because she is illegal and cannot work full time without fear.

He always tries to be thrifty in daily consumption but still he cannot send much to his mother. To send the remittances in cash, using carriers is the easiest way for him. They show up around the factories on the pay day of the workers. The charge depends on the amount sent. His mother keeps pressure on him by sending mail with the carriers because the remittances she receives are no longer adequate for her daily expense. For this household, using remittances on productive investment might be possible only in dream. She is in need of money for her survival and cannot hope for support from other children staying in the same house. Apart from the two children who work in Thailand, the rest are married and have to struggle for their own family. The mother is also trying to protect herself from the risk of hunger by working as a part time domestic worker. She does not let the two migrants children know about her

work because they might be upset to know their mother is working as domestic worker. She thought that this kind of job will deprive her children's dignity. For the time being, she is happy to get extra income apart from the remittances. However, she is not in a good health anymore after tiring chores in the long term. She is trying to save money as much as she can for her medial expenses. Remittance is an important relief for her life and she is giving continuous pressure on her children to work hard and send money. In order to cover her consuming and medical expenses during the time she did not receive remittances, she has taken a mortgage on the family house she is living nowadays.

**Case No-9 (Household of male migrant, 20 years of age, working in Mae Sot knitting factory)**

The household head of Case No.9 is also a widow. She has been running a green grocery to bring up the whole family after her husband died. She has four children, two boys and two girls. The first migrant of this family is the second daughter who dropped out before she finished middle school. She has worked in a Mae Sot knitting factory for more than seven years and has regularly sent remittances to mainly support two younger brothers' education. Her income used to be a secondary source of income for the family while the mother's income could not afford educational expenses for the two sons. With love to the family and sense of responsibility, she has to work for many years in the factory to keep streaming the remittances back home. Even after her elder brother graduated and the youngest brother decided to quit school, another responsibility had waited for her. She brought these two brothers to Mae Sot and settled them in a knitting factory. Although she earlier had a plan to get married, she waited until they have regular income. And then she married her co-worker after she could hand over her duty to the two boys.

The respondent participated in this research is the youngest son of this household. He and his elder brother work through out the whole year in a knitting factory. Unlike him, his brother is not a registered worker. They send money throughout the working season of knitting factory. While the elder brother prefers to

live in an economical way, the younger one likes to spend money on unnecessary stuff. Their elder sister who works in another factory takes care of them as much as she can. The youngest respondent in the right side of twenty is still a little childish and often fights against other hostile co-workers. However, the elder one tries to control all his brother's movements including his ways of expense and drinking and smoking habit.

They do not need to use carrier service because their mother herself is a carrier in a way. She pays monthly visit to the factories where the children work and other factories in the surrounding area. She gathered money from customers and during the same trip when she usually purchases Thai commodities from Mae Sot Market to sell in Mawlamyine. Therefore, she can make money from both trading and service charges on the migrant workers' remittances.

Whenever she comes to see her sons, she brings clothing and food for them. In this way, she prevents her sons to spend excessively. For Case No-9, all family members are now working and they are better off than ever before. However, their size of remittances for unproductive use is three times bigger than productive one. Mainly they have been spending remittances on daily consumption, debt repayment, contribution to social affairs, buying durable goods. They built a new house with remittances before the daughter got married.

The remittances are spent for the sons' education and this can be considered as the most advantageous investment. However, they thought that they have not seen the tangible outcome of their education investment so far. For graduated son, the employment opportunity is very scarce in home town. He has to work in a knitting factory even though he is not so happy. He does not like his working and living condition in Mea Sot which are very different from the student life. On the other hand, he and his younger brother no longer wanted to stay in their home place because almost all their friends had left to Thailand and Malaysia. The respondent said he was no longer happy in home village because there was no friend who used to play and go to school together. In order to catch a better opportunity, they plan to move to another



country like Singapore as legal migrant after saving enough money for visa and transportation cost.

**Case No-10 (Household of female migrant, 29 years of age, working in Mae Sot knitting factory)**

This household is economically secured with many acres of land and other business. Two sons in Malaysia and one son in Thailand send remittances very often. The respondent who sends remittances from Thailand is not their own family member. After both of the parents had died in their childhood, the respondent and her younger brother were left home without anyone to look after. The elder sister of their mother took responsibility to raise them since then. They stayed with this family until they left for Mae Sot. After leaving school, the two children decided to go to Thailand for their own living. The house left as inheritance from their parents has been locked empty ever since. The respondent's life as migrant in Mae Sot is never settled throughout her entire stay. She changed many work places and lost her registered status many times. Now she works as unregistered worker because she lost her documented worker status on her move from the previous factory to the present one. Most factories owners in Mae Sot do not allow migrant workers to keep the original registration card, claiming that this would prevent abrupt mobility before migrants could settle up the registration fees the factory pay in advance. When the respondent decided to leave the former factory, she did not have enough money to repay the registration fee. So she decided to leave the original registration card and managed to get her own security by paying police fee 100 Baht per month. The respondent frequently moved from one factory to another due to the only reason behind, unfair wages. Nevertheless, she is still facing labor exploitation in the current factory too. The wage is based on the number of pieces they can make during the month. The wage rate they should receive for making one piece is determined by the employers on dozen scale. In many cases, the wage offered by the employer is lower than 80 Baht per day if dividing the monthly wage into the daily pay. Hence, they usually take collective action against the employers because the wage is just not enough even for their consumption. If the employers give the green light to raise the wage, their

boycott is successful. But if the employers disagree with their request, workers have to resign and seek a new job. However, in many cases, employers have been obliged to raise the wage to prevent mass resignation. This cycle of problem takes place quite frequently in the respondent's factory.

The respondent does not send remittances regularly. In struggling to stand on her own feet, she sometimes cannot save or send money back home but sends household commodities instead for her aunt's family. In average, the value of goods she sent is never more than 1500 Kyat per month. During her stay of almost nine years of good and bad days in Thailand, she could once buy a small gold necklace from her savings. When she returned back home, her cousin who used to take care of her in childhood made this necklace bigger by putting some of her own gold in return for the remittances in goods she had sent through out her stay away from home. However, after coming back to Mae Sot, she sold it to spend on her living costs during non-working seasons of the factory. In this way, all her income is spent on her own stuff and the strong motive to remit has never come to her. The aunt said her niece never worries about the own sustainability of life and she has heavy mind for her future. Even though they do not receive goods from Mae Sot very often, they try to take care of the parentless child by sending Burmese food with the carriers.

**Case No-11 (Household of female migrant, 28 years of age, working in Mae Sot knitting factory)**

The respondent family, Case No.11 has five children. Except for the youngest son who is studying at a middle school in home town, the rest of children are working in Thailand. Among these four children, one was already married and he never sends money back home. No news is received from another unmarried son. For this household, the regular remittances senders are two daughters working in a knitting factory in Mae Sot. The father is a seasonal plantation worker and does petty jobs. The mother earns money as fish vendor and she is the decision maker of the family for allocation of the remittances. The largest amount of remittances they have received so far comes from the eldest daughter who has been working for almost nine

years in Mae Sot. She regularly sends remittances in cash and in kind to the family on a monthly basis throughout her entire stay.

She does not concern for her own interest in sending money back home and does it for the sake of her parents, siblings and extended family. She wants to maintain a social norm as a dutiful daughter who repays well the gratitude of the parents and elders. She started working as child labor since 12 years old and has been working to support the family for over seventeen years. Nevertheless, she feels happy and proud to be a good daughter of the family. During the first months after arrival in Mae Sot in 1996, she tried to save money and spent the minimum on her living costs. At that time, she daily spent only three Baht for food.

While regular remittances in cash have been sent through carrier, remittances in goods are out of her consideration. She always chooses the reliable carrier to send money because she used to have bad experience with delay of the carriers. Her mother comes to see her once or twice a year and brings her clothes and food on her visit. However, her mother said "I don't want to go to Mae Sot quite often to see them. If I go, I have to spend not only to prepare food and clothes but also for the transportation. If I send stuff with the carriers, I don't have to care about the traveling cost and they will bring me the money back to me." Even though she wants to see her daughter from time to time, extreme poverty and traveling cost are such the obstacles.

Her remittances have solved many family economic problems. It has been used not only for their own family but also for the extended ones. Health care expenses and funeral costs for both sides of grandparents derived from her remittances. Debt repayment, housing improvement and celebrating special social affairs are also spent from the remittances. The recipients cannot make significant investment as productive utilization so far and the family is still in severe poverty. The mother gives continuous stress on the migrant daughter by sending letters with carriers and passing words with neighbors who go to Mae Sot regularly.

**Case No-12 (Household of female migrant, 28 years of age, working as street vendor in Mae Sot)**

There were three sisters in this household. The eldest sister had to take care of the younger two after the parents passed away. The first migrant of this household is the youngest sister. She went to Mae Sot and worked at their cousin's food shop and later got married there. One year later, the second sister who participated as the remittance sender in this research also got married in her home village. After getting married she had to struggle for her livelihood together with her husband. When they could no longer endure the debt problem in her home village, the couple made up their mind to follow her younger sister who was still working in Mae Sot. They sold their house and paid off the debt. They spent the rest of the money for transportation costs to Mae Sot. After working for some months in their cousin's food shop, the couple decided to divorce as the husband could not stand any longer with the struggle they had to face daily. Later, one year after divorce, she married for the second time with her current husband and moved to her new workplace. A few months after marriage he made a decision to go to Malaysia in the hope of better job opportunities. At present, she is selling fish and other food items around the knitting factory in Mae Sot for her own sustainability. She stays together with the teenage daughter of her eldest sister. She has started sending remittances to her elder sister who is struggling for food security of all children in miserable poverty.

Although she could not send money back to her sister before her settlement in the destination land, she sent the remittances for the first time after two years of stay in Mae Sot. She sent it with carriers who come to Mae Sot regularly. The amount is very small for a big household of her sister and it covers only 13% of the household consumption as an unproductive use of remittances. However, her idea of allowing the daughter of her elder sister to stay at her residence in Mae Tao is to reduce jobless family members at home. She believes it can trim down the size of the family burden shouldered by her sister. Recently, her sister requested her to bring another child who was currently working in a fishing boat to Mae Sot. The fishing boat owner would not allow him to go if he could not pay off the debt his mother had taken from him. So his

mother sent a request to his aunt to pay for it. At last, the aunt had promised to send money for bringing him back. In future, there will be three persons in their house located in slum beside Moei River. She is not sure that the land owner of their slum compound will allow three illegal persons to stay in the same house. For them, migration is a life saving strategy.