

Entrepreneurship as Career Choice of Indonesian Returned Migrant Workers

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Careers are considered as a moving sequence of work experience over time (Arthur *et.al.*, 1989). During their careers, working people experience growth and change. Migrant workers, in particular, also experience transition often changing their occupation besides the social and cultural context in which they live. Sometimes, migrant workers face another transition, if and when they decide to return back to their home countries. When they get back home, the returnees have –whether limited or plenty- career choices and career decisions to make.

Cormick & Wahba (2001) argued that there has been a high tendency among returnees to aspire for entrepreneurship, while Ilahi (1999) found that the return migrant workers have high probability of becoming self-employment. It is widely acknowledged that the returnees contribute significantly to the development of their home countries. Factors such as saving while abroad, duration of working abroad, and individual ability to acquire various skills during their spell in the host countries may favour their decision to become entrepreneurs. However, this general proposition does not take into account other relevant factors at the individual level (Ammasari, 2004). What makes returnees decide to become entrepreneurs and what influences might drive such decisions deserve further research.

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This paper is based on an ongoing empirical PhD project with a focus on career decision making of return migrant workers turned entrepreneurs in Indonesia. The country is well-known as important source of migrant workers in Asia. Six million Indonesian were sent abroad as temporary workers, normally for 2-5 years job contracts, mostly in domestic and manufacturer sectors, and prominently to be placed in Hongkong, Taiwan, Malaysia, Singapore, and the Middle East (Noeswantari *et al.*, 2011). Investigating the entrepreneurial career decision making of Indonesian return migrant workers might address not only the call pointed out above, but also the gap identified in the literature on migrant workers with an emphasis on the processes experienced while working abroad and leaving the study of return migrant workers less researched.

The paper examines the experience of three returnees with different backgrounds and entrepreneurial aspirations. Data for the three cases were collected through series of interviews and compilation of archives. The cases were analyzed through the lens of Bourdieu's relational perspective. The approach was chosen as it emerged from the literature the calls for more integrated perspective offered by grand theory for researches in the field of career (Iellatchichth *et al.*, 2003) and entrepreneurship (Tatli *et al.*, 2014).

The analysis explores the vision of migrant workers and their experience working and living abroad and attempts to make an interdependent critical contribution towards the understanding of their career and entrepreneurial decisions. The results suggest that returnees build on their experience as migrant workers to develop an altruistic world-view of their role as returnees. The analysis also shows the importance of career strategies of individuals in dealing with uncertainty under post-return circumstances. Based on the three cases studied, it appears that entrepreneurship is not merely seen as a way out of cyclical migration. Entrepreneurship may also provide a positive alternative, both economically and socially, to their reintegration prospects.

Implication for public policy are discussed. The paper urged policy makers to improve the working conditions of migrant workers and support their entrepreneurial aspirations through various

means. Cooperation and partnership between government agencies, the unions and migrant workers community can be further improved and become more effective in helping the migrant workers preparing their way to become entrepreneurs.

Key-words: Keywords: return migrant workers, career decision making, entrepreneurship, relational perspective.

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