



# Migrant Worker Networks and Roles in Community Development through Resource Transfers

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Received: 13 February 2023; Revised: 3 July 2023; Accepted: 7 July 2023

## Abstract

The purpose of this paper is to examine the roles of migrant worker networks in community development through the transfer of resources in the context of Samut Sakhon province. Despite disagreement over whether resource transfers across the country facilitate or thwart development (see Bartram et al., 2014), this study claims that transactions of money and knowledge, practices, and values—particularly in the destination country— can lead to community development, and that migrant networks can be counted among development actors that engage in the process of transferring resources. This study focuses on the process of resource transfers in the destination country. To understand the roles of migrant worker networks in transferring resources in Samut Sakhon province, online surveys were conducted with 94 participants, in–depth interviews conducted with 6 Mon migrant workers, and semi–structured interviews were conducted with 5 community leaders or individuals working for Mon groups. This study’s findings demonstrate that Mon migrant worker networks are engaged in the process of transferring resources through donations to network members and to Mon self–help group projects promoting Buddhism and providing for basic needs (i.e., education, food security during the COVID–19 pandemic, etc.) and through the provision of education. Furthermore, close ties (family and friends) and organizational ties (Mon self–help groups) are engaged in sharing information, knowledge, perceptions, and experiences within networks. Joining and collaborating with Mon self–help groups and participation in community activities are kinds of an engagement in the process of resource transfers seen in this context. Trust is a significant factor that encourages migrant workers to transfer resources within their networks. Actions of engaging in the process of resource transfers built on trust benefit the community and bring about community development in the destination country, since those actions’ outcomes represent a high level of agency and strengthened solidarity, as following Bhattacharyya’s (1995) community development perspective. Donation for religious–related projects, joining and working for Mon self–help groups and participating in community events/activities lead to strengthened solidarity due to shared interests being strengthened, while donation for promoting education, the provision of education and sharing the perceptions, experiences, knowledge, etc. within the migrant worker networks lead to a high level of agency because of migrant workers’ increasing capability indicated by their better job opportunity and income. However, when creating conditions conducive to community development, a balance between solidarity and agency is necessary.

**Keywords:** Migrant Worker Network, Migrant Workers, Resource Transfer, Community Development

## Introduction

Migrant networks are social structures linking individuals, migrants, and their kin and peers. Migrant social networks also include ties to institutions and organizations that provide support to migrants (e.g., religious organizations, educational organizations, political institutions, diaspora organizations, NGOs, and private employment agencies) (Poros, 2011). As a set of both interpersonal and organizational ties, migrant networks function to provide network members with support in the forms of information, advice, and money transferred and exchanged within networks. In the context of Samut Sakhon province, migrants rely on their personal networks to support their livelihoods. The existence of large supportive networks of co–ethnic migrant workers enables the process of resource transfers among close ties and organizational ties. Social networks are also sites of cooperation

for managing resources (Kaewthep, 1995) and pursuing common goals or particular purposes (Charoenwongsak, 2000).

However, scholars say very little about the transfers of financial, symbolic, cultural, and social resources within destination countries and within migrant networks. There is also a lack of attention paid to the role of members of migrant networks in community development in the destination country, possibly biased by the perception that a lack of citizenship is an obstacle to developing the host community.

This paper shows the roles of migrant worker networks in community development through the transfer of resources in the destination country (in the context of Samut Sakhon province). The aim of this study is to examine the ways that community development can occur through an account of resource transfers in the destination country on behalf of members of migrant worker networks. Overall, the results indicate that engagement in the process of resource transfers through donations and sharing the of information, knowledge, perceptions, and experiences, accompanied by collaboration within networks and participation in community events/activities, leads to outcomes representing strengthened solidarity and a high level of agency in the destination country community. As a result, there is a potential for community development through resource transfers. Transferring resources within migrant networks and migrant associations/self-help groups may generate new cooperative actors, and it can be counted on as a strategy for improving society.

## Literature Reviews

### (Migrant) Social Networks

Migrant networks are social structures. Migrant social networks are nodes of individuals and organizations bound together through various kinds of relationships (i.e., economic exchange, friendship, and common interests). They are webs of social ties composed of individuals maintaining relationships with family members, friends, neighbours, workmates, and other acquaintances, also referred to as a personal community (Vacca et al., 2022; Wellman & Gulia, 1999).

Several studies reveal that migrants gain support from their social networks (Lynam, 1985; Leslie, 1992; Aroian, 1992). Regarding the functions of migrant social networks, at different stages of the process of migration, personal networks provide support to migrants (Vacca et al., 2022). Emotional, financial, and practical support (Weber, 2014; Hamer, 2008; Ryan et al., 2008), advice for solving complex problems (Moon et al., 2019; Hansen, 1999), and access to trustworthy information (Lin et al., 1981), accompanied by material support, credit, and accommodation support (Comola & Mendola, 2014) are likely provided by family members or relatives (strong ties), while information and assistance in relation to job opportunities are likely provided by fellow migrants or acquaintances who have been in the destination country longer (weak ties) (see also, Gold, 2005; Granovetter, 1973; 1983; Hamer, 2008). Both strong and weak networks benefit their members.

Social networks also function as a channel for mutual benefit transfers (i.e., innovation, information, and social support). Migrant organizations that consist of a number of service providers with migration experience in the destination country are formed to support migrants in different ways. They work to promote “immigrants’ social, cultural, or political interests” (Huddleston & Tjaden, 2012); to create, show, and preserve a collective identity (Schrover & Vermeulen, 2005); to help migrants deal with issues in their daily lives; and to advocate for migrants’ social welfare (Scaramuzzino, 2012).



Vacca et al. (2022) show that cross-ethnic ties bring about socioeconomic mobility, dependent on the characteristics of individuals (i.e., ethnicity, migration experiences, and language skills), while co-ethnic ties (homogenous networks) support basic needs during the early immigration stages, enforce reciprocity obligations (see also Ma, 2014), and facilitate economic actions through the promotion of trust, reciprocity, and solidarity in migrant communities (Vacca et al., 2022; Portes, 1998).

However, social networks do not provide equal opportunities and resources to their members. Resource transfers can be associated with tensions, conflicts, and resistance when network members break promises or agreements (Poros, 2011). Experiences of being taken advantage of, by members of migrant networks, can also be found within migrant social networks.

### **Social Capital**

The concept of social capital has been widely applied in studies of social networks. Social capital can be perceived as a network of relationships/connections (Bourdieu, 1986). As bodies facilitating action, social capital works as networks, norms, and trust do. Putnam's (1993) social capital is defined as 'features of social organization', referring to features that 'facilitate action and cooperation for mutual benefit', 'such as networks, norms, and trust'. Coleman (1988) sees trustworthiness, obligation, norms, and information as facilitating actions that constitute and become social capital.

Social capital is a key resource for informal social control development (Warner & Berg, 2020). Social capital brings about development through (more) engagement in development activities, as it facilitates action and promotes cooperation (Putnam, 1993). White (2002) addresses that social capital brings about productive activities, since the strength of trust, reciprocity, and social networks result in cooperation and cooperative actions that increase social development. This is seen in active engagement in voluntary associations and local services (Palmer et al., 2011).

Bridger and Alter (2006) argue that features of social capital – social trust and norms of reciprocity – exist during the process of community development creation. In terms of civic participation, trade unions and membership in clubs regarded as examples of Putnam's social capital (Bhattacharyya, 2004), social capital brings about community development since it leads to strengthened solidarity. Bhattacharyya (1995) points out that high levels of solidarity and agency contribute to community development. Social capital as a community development strategy can influence local conditions, capitalizing on histories of civic engagement and the institutionalized features of local life that fortify the capacity to address local problems and increase social well-being (Bridger & Alter, 2006).

However, in some contexts social capital may not function well in building and increasing trust. The conception of social capital as an instrument for community development may be impractical (Bridger & Alter, 2006) in contexts where violence, crime, and social isolation are extensive.

### **Community Development**

According to Bhattacharyya, community development refers to an improvement of agency and a strengthened community solidarity. Bhattacharyya (2004) sees the promotion of solidarity and agency as the main purpose of community development. He points out that solidarity is an essential characteristic of community that should be strengthened, and that development exists to promote agency. Weakened solidarity can cause communities to break down, but community development happens and aims to strengthen solidarity and encourage collective action.

Solidarity is grounded in shared interests or circumstances (p. 11), meanings, attitudes (p. 15), and norms (p. 12) accompanied by Putnam's social capital (p. 15), which is illustrated as civic participation, trade unionism, and membership in clubs. State intervention, the domination of free-market, industrial capitalism, and the centralisation of political, administrative, and fiscal power have made life increasingly commoditised. Growing individualism has resulted in weak solidarity and depleted social capital. Community development, which emphasises the promotion of solidarity and the prevention of weak solidarity, is a solution.

The development of community can also be influenced by the level of agency, i.e., people's capacity and their choices or human autonomy (Bhattacharyya, 2004). Community development in Bhattacharyya's perspective involves both the concept of human development and the concept of choice. It emphasizes the creation and promotion of people's choices and capabilities. Linking to the concept of choice, community development refers to a society where people can select their occupation, religion, and housing, and can reproduce and change their lives in accordance with their own will. Community development not only promotes agency through respecting people's freedoms (see also Sen, 1999), but it also considers people's ability to define themselves rather than being defined (see also de Certeau, 1986) and to address issues/problems that affect their lives through solutions they identify and define (Bhattacharyya, 2004).

#### **Remittances Viewed as Resource Transfers**

An understanding of the process of resource transfer can be developed through the concept of remittances. Remittances are a device for development, and migrants are agents who contribute to development through remittances, investments, charitable contributions, and knowledge and skills transfers (Levitt & Lamba-Nieves, 2011; de Haas, 2006; Ruttan, 2008). Transnational migrant networks and migrant associations also engage in resource transfers. I see migrant networks as important in accelerating development, as these networks enable the transferring of financial and social resources among network members.

Regarding development actors, financial resource transfer mechanisms exist in transnational ties or migrant networks in which actors are bounded. The FAO (2020) asserts that migrants stimulate development in destination contexts and that remittances lead to rural development in the country of origin. Financial remittances from migrant workers help to ease financial constraints and risks to local production. Migrant network clusters, groups, or organizations are also cooperative development actors (Faist, 2010), transferring financial resources to other network members to increase the incomes of those who are left behind, reduce poverty, improve well-being, and invest in the developing economy.

Faist (2010) points out that knowledge transfers and social remittances are perceived as other mechanisms of transfer. The forms of these social remittances include 'ideas, behaviours, norms, cultural meanings and social practices' (Garip & Asad, 2015). Migrant networks, as development actors, can bring about development through their members, who carry and transfer knowledge, norms, social practices, and ideas of development to other members, shape the perceptions, beliefs, and behaviours of potential migrants, and influence social and cultural outcomes.

At an individual level, provided with opportunities for network members to access additional training programs and education (Taylor, 2016), potential migrants gain an increasing level of self-reliance and become potential agents of economic development once they migrate due to their ability to remit financial resources. Assistance from migrant network members also improves migrants' dignity and safety and reduces their stress in receiving countries (Taylor, 2016). Since active migrants transfer life strategies and communication, negotiation, and organizational



management skills to non-migrants in the country of origin (see also Levitt & Lamba-Nieves, 2011), migrants and non-migrant network members in countries of origin benefit from those migrants' experiences.

At the community and country levels, migrant networks can lead to diminished criminal networks, such as networks of human trafficking and forced migration, because access to migrant networks reduces the demand for criminal networks (Taylor, 2016). Access to a variety of migrant network members can also prevent migrants from being taken advantage of by criminal networks.

### Methodology

A combination of quantitative and qualitative data was collected between December 2021 and April 2022. Data collection took place during the COVID-19 pandemic, so I selected research methods that minimized respondent anxiety about exposure to the virus and that did not cause conflict in the relationship with the researcher. Online survey data were collected from a wide range of 94 respondents living in several communities in Samut Sakhon province to gain information about the characteristics of migrant workers who were likely to engage in resource transfers, data about resource transfers in Samut Sakhon province, and to validate qualitative data collected for this study. I used Alchemer (formerly SurveyGizmo) as the platform for the online survey.

In-depth interviews were also conducted with six Mon migrant workers to gain an understanding of the process of resource transfers from the perspective of migrant workers themselves, the roles of organizational ties in resource transfers, and outcomes of resource transfers. Additional five semi-structured interviews were conducted with participants who were not migrant workers but community leaders or individuals working for Mon groups to understand the roles of Mon migrant networks, Mon organizational ties, and family and friend ties in transferring resources. These interviews also shed light on the functions of Mon groups in Samut Sakhon province, perceptions about Mon self-help groups, and the outcomes of resource transfers. Questions were constructed based on the outputs of the survey data and discussions with members and leaders of community-based network groups and community leaders, and observation. Regarding the ethical approval, this research was approved on 23 February 2022 [COA No. 027/2564] by the Research Ethics Review Committee for Research Involving Human Subjects, Chulalongkorn University.

#### Sample Selection and Data Analysis

All respondents for this co-ethnic network study had to be over the age of 18, live and work in Amphoe Meaung (Samut Sakhon's capital district), and be of Mon ethnicity. The 94 online survey respondents were composed of 44 members and 50 non-members of migrant voluntary associations/self-help groups. They were randomly selected. The number of men and women who completed the survey administered in Thai, Myanmar, and the Mon language was also flexible and random.

The six case study participants were migrant workers involved in resource transfers in Samut Sakhon province. They were over the age of 18, of Mon ethnicity, could speak Thai, and had experiences transferring resources (money, social/cultural values, perspectives, ideas, knowledge, information, experiences, objects, etc.) Through the snowballing technique, I was able to access another five interviewees, including two NGO staff members (Rak Thai Foundation and Proud Association), two community leaders (one staff member of the learning centre and one volunteer with several Mon self-help groups), and one Mon Buddhist monk.

I used the quantitative research method to gain data about respondents' backgrounds and characteristics and general data about behaviours of transferring socio-cultural resources (skills, values, beliefs), financial resources and



experiences of participation in community activities and to access a wide range of respondents living in several communities in Samut Sakhon province. Because I used online survey method as the supplemental method for qualitative data, I used a non-complex quantitative data analysis approach: finding frequency of migrant workers' characteristics and behaviours and the relationship between two variables/ factors via SPSS crosstab tabulation analysis. For my qualitative data analysis, I used Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA). Themes and sub-ordinate themes were created, and data were reorganized and grouped into those themes. Cross-case analysis was also applied in this study to investigate similarities and differences across cases (Bazeley, 2013; de Casterlé et al., 2012; Ayres et al., 2003) before I specified and developed patterns into an explanation of generalized behaviours.

### **Findings and Discussion**

The role of migrant worker networks in fostering the community development relates to the process of transferring resources (i. e., financial and social remittances), as financial and social remittances contribute to positive social and economic changes in the community of origin. This section discusses the findings from the interviews and online surveys I conducted. The actions of close ties (family and friends) and organizational ties include transferring financial resources (donations) and social resources (information, knowledge, perceptions, and experiences), collaboration within networks, and participation in community activities. This section also discusses how resource transfers within migrant worker networks can bring about community development in the destination country, in accordance with the study in the context of Samut Sakhon province.

#### **Engagement in Financial Resource Transfers**

There are several forms of financial resource transfers leading to the community development in destination country. Among close ties, financial support (financial resource transfers) was sent to family members and close friends in Samut Sakhon province. This supports the perception that there is the provision of support within networks of migrant workers (see Lynam, 1985; Leslie, 1992; Aroian, 1992), regarded as a function of migrant networks. Among close ties, there were also several forms of donations supporting friends' activities, such as Buddhist religious activities and projects organized or introduced by migrant workers' colleagues in workplace. Among organizational ties, several members of Mon self-help groups provided financial resources to support the work and activities of groups. Mon migrants also spent money on materials that they donated to the group and used their financial resources to arrange community activities as part of their engagement in the process of financial resource transfers, accompanied by volunteering their time to cooperate with group members and with members of other Mon self-help group networks.

At the community level, donations to Buddhist projects (known as 'tumboon') and projects organized by Mon self-help groups taking place in Buddhist temples and through online money transfers were a significant form of financial resource transfers. According to an online survey of 94 Mon migrant workers, 76.6 percent were likely to support all kinds of charitable projects rather than focusing on Buddhist charitable projects (see Table 1). Donations to annual Buddhist community events was also evidence that Mon migrant workers frequently engaged in the process of financial resource transfers as part of their life in Samut Sakhon province due to their Mon ethnic, social, and cultural values and religious beliefs about the merits of donations. Charitable projects that Mon migrant workers supported financially based on an individual's preferences and interests included Buddhism-related projects, projects promoting education in Samut Sakhon province and projects supporting vulnerable people affected by the COVID-19 pandemic, by floodings and by accidents in the workplace in Samut Sakhon province.



An amount of money transferred to support projects organized by Mon self-help groups was significant. In a case of the project of building the Thai– Mon university in Samut Sakhon province for promoting education for Mon migrants, a large amount of donation money enabled Mon self-help group which collaborates with Mon Monk and Mon people holding Thai ID card to proceed purchasing land property for this Thai– Mon university.

**Table 1** Donation for Supporting All Charitable Projects

You Donate Money NOT Only for Buddhism Activities/Events?				
Valid	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Stongly Disagree	3	3.2	3.2	3.2
Disagree	5	5.3	5.3	8.5
Neutral	14	14.9	14.9	23.4
Agree	50	53.2	53.2	76.6
Stongly Agree	22	23.4	23.4	100.0
<b>Total</b>	<b>94</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	

*“Talking about ‘tumboon,’ Mon people have strong faith in doing good religious merits. If they know which temples have religious events/activities, they will join them. They believe that the more they donate money or doing good religious merits, the more they gain good things back... Tumboon is what I have known since I was young.”*

(Male Respondent, M5, 25 Years Old)

*“Donation money gained from Mon people for building a Thai–Mon university here is more than millions recently. That’s enough for proceeding a purchase of land property. It takes several months to reach this amount of money, since January.”*

(Male Community Leader, MM1)

Trust is a significant factor influencing the transfers of financial resources. Trust derived from co-ethnicity or a sense of similarity influenced Mon migrant workers to support Mon charity projects through money transfers to Mon charity project managers. Mon migrant workers were likely to financially support Mon activities and projects that were organized by Mon people or that work for Mon people/missions due to a higher level of trust. Graddy and Wang (2009) point out an influence of an individual’s level of trust on charitable decisions. This study also supports the social capital perspective that trust ‘facilitates action and cooperation for mutual benefit’ (Putnam, 1993), as trustworthiness as a body constitutes and becomes social capital (Coleman, 1988). It also supports the view that the co-ethnic ties (homogenous networks) provide support to network members and facilitate economic actions through the promotion of trust, reciprocity, and solidarity in migrant communities (Vacca et al., 2022; Portes, 1998). Strengthened trust and solidarity within the migrant worker network and the co-ethnic community fostered by the similarity of background, shared beliefs, and sense of ethnic belonging encouraged migrant workers to transfer financial resources.

*“Mostly, I join donation with people who I know. Generally, they gather money for donation for Buddhism temples or for children. I support them...”*

(Male Respondent, M5, 25 Years Old)

*“I help Mon projects more, mostly Buddhism–related projects and education promotion projects.”*

(Male Respondent, M1, 28 Years Old)

### Engagement in Social Resource Transfers

The sharing of information, perceptions, ideas, values, and beliefs and the provision of education can be viewed as social resource transfers. Several studies suggest that migrants gain different kinds of support from their family or relatives (strong ties) including emotional, financial, and practical support (Weber, 2014; Hamer, 2008; Ryan et al., 2008), advice for solving complex problems (Moon et al., 2019; Hansen, 1999), trustworthy information (Lin et al., 1981), material support, credit, and accommodation support (Comola & Mendola, 2014). They are also provided with information and assistance in relation to job opportunities by fellow migrants or acquaintances who have been in the destination country longer (weak ties) (see also, Gold, 2005; Granovetter, 1973; 1983; Hamer, 2008).

In this study, trust, close relationships, and shared ethnic backgrounds lead to the occurrence of social resource transfers. Interviewees revealed that they gained and shared their values and life experiences and asked for support from their family members and friends who were people they trusted and shared a circle of a close relationship. There was sharing of information beneficial for the lives of migrant workers, such as the process of work permit extension and news about illegal agents/brokers among close ties. This shows the migrant networks' functions that migrant networks can protect members from being taken advantage of, and migrant networks can reduce criminal networks, such as networks of human trafficking and forced migration due to the reduced demand for criminal networks (see also Taylor, 2016).

*"Mostly, information on Facebook about brokers, passport extension, or something like this. For some brokers, in some cases, if I don't see more information from them, I will not trust them and will not tell other people about these brokers. Anyway, several migrant workers who trust people easily are cheated by them."*

(Male Respondent, M2, 35 Years Old)

Close relationships with individuals in the workplace or educational institutes also enabled Mon migrants to share opinions, values, and experiences with colleagues and employers rather than having superficial conversations. Some respondents revealed that they were likely to speak their own language with Mon people, got to know Mon people, and shared values and life lessons with Mon people.

*"For me, I like sharing knowledge, social values or cultural values with my friends, and receive them from my mother."*

(Male Respondent, M5, 25 Years Old)

*"Mostly I contact to Mon friends, my colleagues in workplace helping to each other. When they have more duties, I help them. I'm Mon, so I have more closer relationship with Mon people. I also have Thai friends and have a close relationship with them when going to the college and hanging out with them sometime."*

(Male Respondent, M4, 30 Years Old)

Regarding organizational ties, close relationships within Mon self-help groups can enhance the cooperative atmosphere and promote the expression of useful ideas, opinions, and experiences. However, trust that significantly influences social resource transfers not only among close ties, but also among organizational ties. Mon migrant workers interviewed reported that were likely to share perceptions only with their close friends or people who they trusted. They shared situations in which the fear that their ideas/opinions would be rejected made them keep quiet





and elect to take on the role of listener. The establishment of several Thai– Mon learning centers in Samut Sakhon province by Mon self–help groups for providing education to migrant workers was also another form of social resource transfer existing in the community. Knowledge and skills (e.g., language and communication skills) which were transferred to migrant workers improved individuals’ knowledge level and confidence to share knowledge and experiences to other people in the networks.

*“...when members of this Mon group came here and had a chance to join meetings as their first time, second time, third time, they didn’t speak up in meeting groups. When they joined meetings as their fourth time, fifth time experiences, they started to say something, but they only spoke only when they were stimulated by group’s leaders... Anyway, when they wanted to share ideas or opinions, they usually privately told their own ideas or opinions after meeting session...”*

(Male Respondent, M3, 30 Years Old)

*“..In the past I didn’t have a confidence to speak up, but my teacher (a monk) pushed me to speak. He said that his students must be not afraid of speaking up, must be able to speak up. Being afraid of doing everything would not be accepted. ... When I’m not afraid to speak once, I will not be afraid and have more confidence in speaking and expressing ideas.”*

(Male Respondent, M4, 30 Years Old)

#### **Collaboration and Resource Transfers within Networks**

Collaboration is linked to the process of resource transfers, especially social resource transfers. This study shows how the functions of organizational ties, which provide support to migrants (Poros, 2011), involve the process of resource transfers through collaboration. Collaboration in migrant worker networks can promote “immigrants’ social, cultural, or political interests” (Huddleston & Tjaden, 2012); create, show, and preserve a collective identity (Schrover & Vermeulen, 2005); encourage migrants to deal with issues in their daily lives; and advocate for migrants’ social welfare (Scaramuzzino, 2012). The findings also support Putnam’s (1993) perspective of social capital. Social capital facilitates actions and promotes cooperation. White (2002) also points out that social capital brings about productive activities, since the strength of trust, reciprocity, and social networks leads to cooperative actions that increase social development.

Collaboration among migrant networks was observed within Mon self–help group networks and across networks (i.e., between migrant worker networks and service provision agencies). When Mon self–help groups created social and cultural events, academic programs, trainings, and charity activities, they collaborated with each other. Members of Mon self–help groups organized activities received information from other groups, transferred information and news to all members, gathered support from members, and transferred resources to other groups.

*“...Mon groups have many activities such as arranging activities for cultural maintenance, helping people, like helping people who are affected by flooding, etc. I was invited to take part in such activities and help sharing ideas about planning for such activities...At that moment, I collaborated with a monk, for proceeding activities for helping people affected by flooding in Myanmar—I gave information about news and these activities to students at this learning center for gathering financial support. This happened, maybe, in the year of 2018.”*

(Male Respondent, M3, 30 Years Old)



Social resource transfers also occurred between outside networks (agents from NGOs, government agencies, and other associations) and migrant self-help groups. There was the provision of information to Mon self-help groups, such as about health (protection from HIV and TB), labour rights, and sexual harassment and case coordination between self-help groups and community-based groups and NGOs, such as advocacy support from lawyers, nurses and doctors, and local educational service providers. In the process of social resource transfers, community leaders often acted as mediators or information conduits between these external actors and migrant networks.

*“We can give them information how they request for help and how they can access contacts of agents who may help them when migrant workers’ rights are violated. We emphasize our role in providing knowledge or information about health and rights to them... In cases that migrant workers’ illness or household conflicts and isolation or emergency cases, we support them and we can also collaborate with agents from outside to gather support for migrants...”*

(Female NGO Staff Member, FF3)

### **Participation and Actions of Resource Transfers**

The process of resource transfers can be viewed through participation in Mon self-help groups as a volunteer and in educational activities and in community activities, either based on individuals’ interests or recruitment from educational service providers and workplaces. In cases of working for Mon self-help groups, members of Mon self-help groups had opportunities to express insights and ideas, increasing their confidence to share ideas, perceptions, and experiences within these groups. Face-to-face and online group meetings fostered a collaborative atmosphere within the group and more encouraged sharing.

One respondent indicated that they were likely to share experiences, knowledge, and ideas with group members. Joining Mon self-help groups allowed Mon migrant workers to share their experiences, despite the characteristic of Mon migrant workers lacking confidence to share ideas with others.

*“As my first experience of speaking up, I joined this group and shared experiences with other members of this group about making group’s shirts and shirt fabrics and styles. At first time of speaking up, because I had my own experience about making a shirt, I shared it with them. I think, if we have experiences, we will have confidence to speak up.”*

(Male Respondent, M2, 35 Years Old)

Accessing education in Thailand, such as through Thai-Mon learning centres and colleges, and participation in educational activities also gave migrant workers opportunities to share ideas with friends, to work in groups, and to improve communication skills.

*“From my experience, I found that Mon people had confidence to speak up. When I studied, in the classroom I met the type of Mon people who was not shy to speak up, different from Mon people I used to know. They had own ideas and opinions, and they shared their own opinions. Either good or bad, right or wrong perspectives, they spoke up. They had confidence to speak up.”*

(Male Respondent, M5, 25 Years Old)

At the community level, migrant workers were likely to donate money to support Buddhist projects when they participated in social, cultural, and religious activities, such as sermons given by Mon monks. Furthermore, when they joined Mon social and cultural events (such as Mon Revolution Day, Mon National Day, etc.), they were



likely to be encouraged to show their support for maintaining their ethnic social and cultural values by wearing traditional clothing at public events. The strengthened sense of ethnic belonging and feeling that they were part of activities and events could stimulate financial and social resource transfers.

*“Participation like joining Mon National Day event make Mon people see a real event. There are Mon ethnicity’s leaders being invited to join this event and give a speech on the stage. When they join this event, they feel proud of Mon ethnicity and have a stronger sense of belonging. This makes them do not hesitate to support Mon activities and they want to donate more for supporting Mon activities...”*

(Male Respondent, M3, 30 Years Old)

### **Transferring Resources Leading to Community Development**

Resource transfers bring benefits to migrant worker networks and to the community. Financial remittances lead to rural development in the country of origin (areas receiving resources) (FAO, 2020) and social remittances result in migrants’ dignity and safety and reduces their stress in receiving countries (Taylor, 2016). Life strategies and communication, negotiation, and organizational management skills, which are transfers to non-migrants, also bring benefits to people in the country of origin (see also Levitt & Lamba-Nieves, 2011). This study shows that the resource transfer also benefits the destination country, and the outcomes of resource transfers can represent high levels of solidarity and agency, leading to community development, in line with Bhattacharyya’s (1995) concept of community development. High levels of solidarity and agency bring about community development.

However, members of community in this study mean people sharing a sense of belonging and having attachment to space/place rather than citizens having citizenship rights and opportunities (see also Schierup, 2006). De Genova (2009) presents migrants’ ability to claim rights to the city and their presence and the right to movement and non-status and undocumented people in the USA claiming their presence and the right to the city as members of local communities (see also Isin, 2009). This study shows that migrant workers can be counted as members of community taking part in community development through the process of resource transfers—engaging in actions promoting agency and solidarity levels (i.e., donation to projects responding to local needs, providing education, sharing ideas, knowledge, experiences within networks of migrant workers, participating in working with Mon self-help groups, collaboration for volunteer works within networks and joining community events/activities). Balancing the levels of solidarity and agency for the benefit of community development is also necessary in the context of resource transfers facilitated by Mon migrant networks in Samut Sakhon.

### **A High Level of Agency**

In terms of outcomes of the process of resource transfers, which can indicate a high level of agency, financial donations to Mon self-help groups’ educational projects and the provision of education in learning centres (social resource transfers) can increase individuals’ capacity and their choices or human autonomy. This indicates a high level of agency (Bhattacharyya, 2004).

In the context of Samut Sakhon province, migrants were likely to engage in the process of resource transfers, both financially and socially. As mentioned, 76.6% of Mon migrant workers were likely to give financial support to different kinds of projects rather than supporting only Buddhist religious projects. The projects promoting education in Samut Sakhon province were mainly supported financially by Mon migrant workers, as evidence of the existence of several Thai-Mon learning centers in Samut Sakhon province. This could pursue a high level of individuals’ capacity.

Regarding the transfer of social resources, data from the online survey with 94 Mon migrant workers shows that Mon migrant workers were likely to transfer social resources such as knowledge, information, perceptions, and social values to other people, as high as 57.4%.

**Table 2** Preference for Social Resources Transfers

You Prefer Transferring Knowledge/Idea/Values, etc to Receiving Them?				
Valid	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Stongly Disagree	1	1.1	1.1	1.1
Disagree	13	13.8	13.8	14.9
Neutral	26	27.7	27.7	42.6
Agree	36	38.3	38.3	80.9
Stongly Agree	18	19.1	19.1	100.0
<b>Total</b>	<b>94</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	

Due to their engagement in the process of resource transfers, Mon migrant workers in Samut Sakhon province, as resource recipients, could potentially possess a developed level of agency and they could potentially become active agents who could increase level of agency since they shared knowledge, information, perceptions, and social values with other members of migrant worker networks.

Among close ties (family and friends), sharing knowledge, experiences, perceptions, information, skills, and values (in the form of advice) led to better opportunities and life choices. The sharing of knowledge, experiences, and perceptions encouraged by collaborative group atmospheres also brought about higher levels of agency. Participation in Mon self-help groups could improve confidence, communication skills, and collaboration skills, contributing to personal development and knowledge. Broadening social networks derived from working with Mon self-help groups also increased members' capacity to access resources.

*“Mostly, if personal issues, I consult with my close friends and I mostly help my close friends, mother and friends. My mother is the first person who I share my personal issues with and the second is my close friends.”*

(Male Respondent, M1, 28 Years Old)

Furthermore, transferred knowledge and trainings by local educational informal institutes (learning centres) organized and collaborated by Mon self-help groups improved migrant workers' language and communication skills and resulted in access to better jobs, opportunities, and life choices. Study respondents revealed that the positive outcomes of accessing education in Samut Sakhon province were not only that they learned the Thai language, which was necessary for life in the destination community and in the workplace, but they also accessed better jobs or better positions within their workplace. This represented a high level of agency, an outcome resulting from the process of social resource transfer through the education provision in Samut Sakhon province.

*“In Samut Sakhon province... for migrant workers we provide them with courses for Thai language, Mon language and English. When they have more knowledge, they can work more comfortably, and they can understand more Thai language. Some people go study on higher levels—from high school levels to the college level. Their life is improved so that they change their work, for not being as a general worker forever. They start working in higher positions...”*

(Male Respondent, M4, 30 Years Old)



### A Strong Level of Solidarity

Bhattacharyya (1995) sees that high levels of solidarity in the community leads to community development, and degrees of shared interests or circumstances (p. 11), meanings, attitudes (p. 15), and norms (p. 12) accompanied by Putnam's social capital (p. 15) can indicate the level of solidarity. Furthermore, trust in co-ethnic networks leads to a high level of solidarity. As an element of social capital, trust can strengthen migrant worker networks (see also Graddy & Wang, 2009). Graddy and Wang (2009) point out that trust also brings about social solidarity. In this study, co-ethnic networks of Mon migrant workers embraced strong levels of solidarity, since there were a strong level of embedded trust (a component of social networks and social capital) and strengthened shared interests and circumstances, shared norms and social and cultural values or a sense of Mon ethnic belonging. Strengthened solidarity could bring about community development.

Regarding empirical findings, resource transfers brought about many benefits, including outcomes that represent a high level of community solidarity. The provision of education in Samut Sakhon province in learning centres, as social resource transfers, not only increased levels of agency through improvements in knowledge, communication skills, and confidence, but they also strengthened the level of community solidarity through the maintenance of Mon social and cultural values. Respondents described their experiences of Mon migrant workers wearing traditional Mon clothing and showing the shared interest in supporting Buddhist religious projects through donations at community events. They also spoke about the role of learning centres in maintaining Mon ethnic identity by providing Mon language courses and setting up events or activities reflecting Mon traditional identity.

*“About Mon cultural maintenance, this learning centre also has a role in maintaining Mon culture by promoting people to dress up with Mon traditional clothing. When they join events like Mon National Day, we dress up with Mon traditional clothing.”*

(Male Respondent, M4, 30 Years Old)

Shared interests in creating, participating in, and working for Mon co-ethnic projects and the provision of financial resources (donations) in support of Mon self-help groups' projects led to a strong level of solidarity, as suggested by Bhattacharyya (1995) that degrees of shared interests, circumstances, norms and values can indicate the level of solidarity. Participation in community events (i.e., Mon National Day & Buddhist religious events) also strengthened shared identity and interests, supporting the development of community solidarity. When Mon migrant workers had shared interests in joining Mon social and cultural events, donating to Buddhist religious projects or Mon self-help group projects, and providing ideas or perceptions when engaging in group meetings, solidarity within the network of Mon migrant workers and in the co-ethnic community was strengthened.

Regarding the significance of trust resulting in social solidarity, Graddy and Wang (2009) highlight that trust brings about social solidarity. In Mon self-help groups, trust created a more collaborative atmosphere and closer relationships in Mon self-help groups, which facilitated the sharing of productive ideas, experiences, values, knowledge, and information with family and friends. Trust also encouraged migrant workers to provide financial support to development projects, as suggested that trust is embedded in co-ethnic migrant worker networks and facilitates economic actions (Vacca et al., 2022; Portes, 1998). Interactions within the network when committing to such activities created farther strong bonds and trust, which resulted in solidarity within the network and community.

### Balancing Solidarity and Agency

This study argues that although high levels of solidarity and agency, as a result of resource transfers, support community development (see also Bhattacharyya, 2004), a balance between solidarity and agency is necessary





for creating conditions conducive to community development. As reflected in the provision of education for Mon migrant workers in the context of Samut Sakhon province, a lack of balance between solidarity and agency had conflicting effects rather than fostering community development. Tension between an educational focus in Thai-Mon learning centres on maintaining Mon social and cultural values and a focus on multicultural language education and cultural diversity hindered community development.

Balancing agency and solidarity to prevent conflicting results can be achieved by avoiding an over-emphasis on practices that promote agency or solidarity without consideration of needs in context. In Samut Sakhon province, over-emphasis on maintaining Mon social and cultural values by limiting education to Mon language resulted in lower levels of agency, as Mon migrant workers lacked knowledge necessary for life in the destination country, while a high inclination towards multicultural learning schemes in the learning centre led migrant workers to have low respect for an ethnic sense of belonging and resulted in lower levels of solidarity. Actions facilitating resource transfers can support the goal of community development with fewer conflicts, while the creation and maintenance of activities and projects in the community can lead to high levels of agency and solidarity.

### **Conclusion**

There are several ways to bring about community development. Members of migrant worker networks (both close ties and organizational ties) can become active actors improving the community in the destination country through engagement in resource transfers—a mechanism for community development. Empirical findings demonstrate that actions of transferring financial and social resources by Mon migrant workers come in the form of donation to projects responding to local needs, providing education, sharing ideas, knowledge, experiences within networks of migrant workers, participating in working with Mon self-help groups, collaboration for volunteer works within networks and joining community events/activities.

The findings regarding resource transfers, collaboration, and participation correspond with literature on the concept of social networks, social capital, and their functions. Collaboration and participation are facilitated by social capital which refers to trust (see also Putnam, 1993). Trust is a significant factor promoting resource transfers. Actions of transferring resources built on trust potentially lead to community in the destination country because outcomes of resource transfers can represent a high level of agency and strengthened solidarity, according to Bhattacharyya's (1995) community development perspective. While donation for religious-related projects, joining and working for Mon self-help groups and participating in community events/activities lead to a strengthened level of solidarity because of migrant workers' shared interests being strengthened, donation for promoting education, the provision of education and sharing the perceptions, experiences, knowledge, etc. within the migrant worker networks result in a higher level of agency due to migrant workers' increasing capability indicated by their better job opportunity and income.

However, a balance between solidarity and agency is necessary when creating conditions conducive to community development. Future research work may explore different characteristics of members of migrant worker networks, types of networks, and roles of networks in community development.

### **Acknowledgements**

We thank the the Royal Golden Jubilee (RGJ) Ph.D. Programme for providing financial support for this study.



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