

# **Impacts of Migration on Socioeconomic Life: A Case Study of *Hlaingkar* Village, *Hpa-An* Township, *Kayin* State**

Shin Thynn Tun<sup>1</sup>, Theingi Soe<sup>2</sup>, Amy Khaing<sup>3</sup>

## **Abstract**

Migration is a crucial part of many people's livelihood strategy, meaning the capabilities, assets and activities required for their means of living. The majority of the local people dwelling in *Hlaingkar* village earn their living by depending on farming. The aim of this paper is to analyze the impacts of migration as an alternate livelihood strategy on socioeconomic life living in *Hlaingkar* village, *Hpa-An* Township, *Kayin* State. This research applied ethnographic research methods, using both qualitative and quantitative methods. Most of the people living in *Hlaingkar* village, *Hpa-An* Township, *Kayin* State are *Kayin* nationals. *Hlaingkar* villagers depend on paddy growing, migration work, shopkeeping and odd jobs. Since 1998, family's social, health and education conditions cannot support by only farming income because of decreases in the rice price, leading to push factors for the villagers to seek to solve their problems through other livelihood strategies, like migration. When they get contacts through their social networks to get job opportunities outside that support a regular income, we can see many pull factors that motivate them to migrate to Thailand as migrant workers. Gradually, due to the contacts of friends and relatives in 2015, both married and single women get more job opportunities than men. Consequently, the child birth rate of the village has become as low as two children per family. Those children, however, get chances to become educated more than before. This research concludes that on the one side migration changes have positive impacts on the local people to develop education, but on the other side it affects family structure, labor shortage in farming.

Keywords: Migration, livelihood, family structure, education

## **Introduction**

Migration is crucial to the livelihood strategies of people all over the world. This article will examine two patterns of migration found in Myanmar internal migration, and international migration, each of which have different pull and push factors of migration based upon economic opportunities. Agriculture is the main sector to Myanmar's economy. Most developing countries' livelihood is based on agriculture. Chambers defines the term livelihood as referring to the capabilities, assets and activities required for a means of living (Chamber & Conway, 1991). Agriculture is commonly combined with other livelihoods such as fishing, trade, craft production and migration. Rice is the staple food of Myanmar and paddy cultivation is the main livelihood of its rural people. Most of the people living in *Hlaingkar* village, *Hpa-An* Township, *Kayin* State are *Kayin* nationals and the *Hlaingkar* village has various forms of livelihood which are paddy growing, odd jobs, shopkeeping and migrant work. Local people cannot fully support their family's need so that they go to another country, especially Thailand. This paper first looks at the impact of migration on socioeconomic life, then focuses on analyzing what are the pull and push factors of international migration in the study area.

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### Research questions

- What are the pull and push factors, and how should we understand them?
- What are the impacts of migration on socioeconomic life?

### Aim and Objectives

The aim of this paper is to analyze the impact of migration on socioeconomic life living in *Hlaingkabar* village, *Hpa-An* Township, *Kayin* State. The Objectives of this study are

- to explore the reasons why and how the local people move to work in abroad
- to analyze the impact of migration on socioeconomic life

### Research Methodology

This research used an ethnographic research method, using both qualitative and quantitative methods. The study area, *Hlaingkabar* village was chosen since most of the natives are *Kayin* nationals because the majority are *Kayin* national and most young people there have been moving to work abroad. For qualitative method, the study population is village elders, bachelors' leader, chaperon and youths for Informal Group Interview (IGI); village elders, all social classes age above 20 with residence of 10 years for In Depth Interview (IDI) and Participant Observation. Data collection technique used in this study included face-to-face interview using structured questionnaires was performed in study village. Interviews were made with heads of households and dwelling native aged above 15 years on livelihood and ways of life for quantitative method. Interviews were conducted at the convenient time and places of the respondents to ensure their comfort and privacy. Data collection for the paper was conducted through the village tract's elders and authorized persons concerned of a designated study area by asking their permission to do so. Data recording and photo taking were performed according to their consent.

### Literature Review

The existence of and degree of access to livelihood assets is important in influencing the livelihood options that people may or may not have (Chamber & Conway, 1991). Family is an important social institution among Sugali. The head of a family is the decision maker with regard to the livelihood pursuits of family members. The kin members play an important role in the livelihood pursuits of individuals (Eswarappa, 2007). Lee's data shows (1966) that migration is determined by the presence of attracting pull factors from the new host community and repelling push factors at their original community. In rural Uganda, Kim (2011) explored the patterns of livelihood diversification that influenced unequal access among different group and then the contribution of social networks to better chances of success in different kinds of livelihoods upon which they depend. He argued that if a social network is strong in the community, it supports the community in getting more income. Singh (2010) said that on the one hand economic conditions relate to push and pull factors; while on the other hand migration develops from push factor and pull factor. Migrant workers were young with low levels of education and married male Hindu made up 89% of them. The brick-kiln workers migrated along with their families. 75 per cent of the migrant workers remitted money to their native place. Migrant workers kept their links alive with the place of native town. The pull factors that motivate people to migrate are better job opportunities, industrial development and comparatively higher wages in Punjab. These factors attract the brick kiln workers whereas lack of job opportunities in their native place are the push factors that drive them away. Economic conditions cause push and pull factors but then push and pull factors also cause economic conditions.

Entering in to the above-mentioned scholars' discussions, this paper will explore the livelihood assets and push and pull factors of international migration and how that influences its impact on the family.

## FINDINGS

### Historical Background of *Hlaingkabar* Village

The majority of *Kayin* nationals are living in *Kayin* State and the *Ayeyarwady* Delta. According to oral history, *Hlaingkabar* village is near the *Hlaingkabar* Creek, so their village is named *Hlaingkabar* village. *Hlaingkabar* village was established over 60 years ago. After 1960, *Kayin* people suffered floods and moved to a place which is located beside the *Hlaingkabar* Creek so that they depended on farming there. The village was then named after the name of the creek there *Hlaingkabar* creek and the village became known as *Hlaingkabar* village.

*Hlaingkabar* village is nearly five miles far from *Hpa-An* Township and it is situated at the bottom of *Zwe Kabin* Mountain in *Kayin* State. It is surrounded on the east by *Kauktheik* village, on the west by *Khalaukno* village, on the south by *Kauktayokeya* village and on the north by *Kaukdan* village. It is located on *Myawaddy-Hpa-An* highway road. It is closer to Thailand compared with other regions of Mandalay. The *Hlaingkabar* village can be reached by motorbike via *Hpa-An* Township in fifteen minutes, except during the flooding period happening three times per year. Most of the household build boats rowing by hand to go to the *Hpa-An* town during the flood period. Although the majority of *Kayin* nationals are Buddhist, a few follow the traditional practice of worshipping *Dohnyin Du Wei*.

Although the local people in *Hlaingkabar* village had traditionally done farming as their profession before 1998, young people have migrated to work in Thailand—a place they refer to as “uphill” (*Taung-paw* in local language) since around 1998. A forty-year-old local *Kayin* said:

*"My friend went to Thailand and then he encouraged me to work in Thailand because Thailand has rich in job opportunities and more income than Hlaingkabar village that he informed so I decided to work in Thailand. He also contacted his relatives to work in Thailand."*

Since then, few villagers worked in Thailand as migrant workers. For farm-land owners, it is not difficult to go to Thailand because they have enough money for transportation charges but farm-less people are manual labors and they face difficulties to save enough money for transportation. So, they borrowed money from rich persons with the interests and then their debts pay back after got salary by migrant worker.

### Household and population

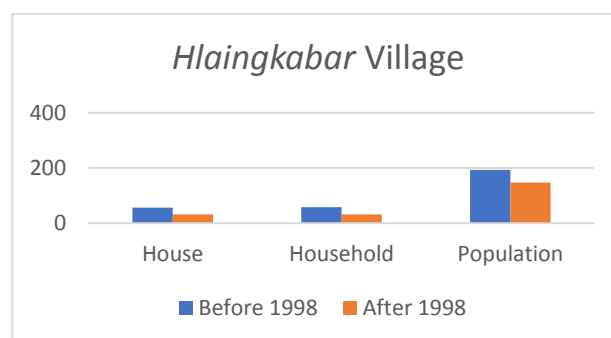


Figure (1) Comparison population of *Hlaingkabar* Village

Figure (1) shows that before 1998 *Hlaingkabar* village had 56 houses, 58 Households and a total population of 193, but it changed to the 32 houses, 32 Households and a total population of 147 after 1998 because of the migration to Thailand. These migrations were temporary, as they come back one time per year to meet with their families according to key informants that were interviewed.

## Push factors forced to work in Thailand

### Farming livelihood

*Hlaingkabar* village has various forms of livelihood, namely; paddy growing, migration work, shopkeeping and odd jobs. *Hlaingkabar* village has 88 acres of total paddy-plantation. Paddy is grown three times a year with harvests called Monsoon, Mid-water and *Pata* Paddy. Generally, the seedlings of Monsoon Paddy are sown in June and the harvest is made in October. Mid-water Paddy seedlings are sown and initially grown in August and the harvest is usually in December. *Pata* Paddy seedlings are sown and grown in September and the harvest generally takes place in February. The types of paddy that are usually grown include *Sinthukha*, *Manawpyet* and *Pata* while *Manawpyet* is the most frequently grown type. The type of paddy named *Sinthukha* has to be grown by ten *pyis* (a *pyi* equal to 0.07 of a bushel) per acre and yields approximately 100 bushels of paddy. *Manawpyet* paddy has to be sown by one and a half bushels per acre and usually yields approximately 60 bushels of paddy. *Pata* paddy has to be grown by one bushel per acre and yields about 100 bushels of rice. Although a small proportion of fertilizer needs to be added due to the fertilization of the soil for growing paddy, pesticides have to be applied to the paddy in the case of the presence of pests.

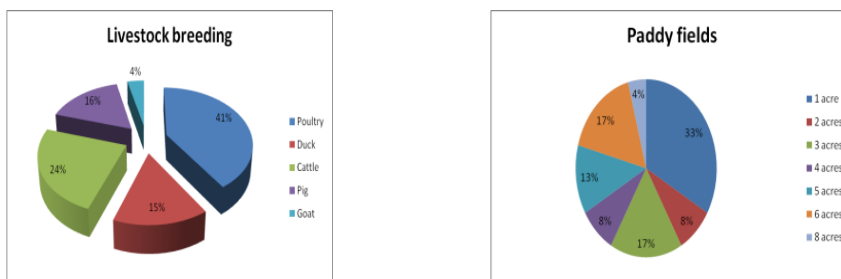


Figure (2) Paddy field owners possess and livestock breeding of *Hlaingkabar* Village (Before 1998)

Figure (2) shows that in doing farming as the primary professional work within *Hlaingkabar* village, the land owners possess at least one acre of land and at most eight acres of agricultural land. Most of them possess only one acre of land and those who are in possession of eight acres of land are the smallest number. The local people dwelling in *Hlaingkabar* village breed chicken, turkeys, ducks, goats and pigs only for self-contained domestic consumption. Since fish usually becomes plentiful in *Hlaingkabar* creek from the beginning of August, the local people normally go fishing there in a self-contained way for the purposes of making self-contained domestic consumption and making and storing fish-paste from the catch of fish. Fish-paste is also usually stored for all-year-round consumption.

Before 1998, the rice market was not stable and the farmers were better off if the price of rice was on the rise but worse off if the rice price was low. The annual harvest is usually stored for domestic consumption, selling away only the surplus rice. It is known that the agricultural water is sufficient since the paddy growing is made by using in-turn distribution of the water from *Hlaingkabar* Creek for growing rice within *Hlaingkabar* village. In order to

grow paddy in and around *Hlaingkabbar* village the water from *Hlaingkabbar* creek is irrigated to the agricultural areas. In irrigating in turns, the farmers also take the leading role and make negotiate efforts for one another.

In summer, however, summer paddy cannot be grown since there is not enough water to do agricultural activities. In *Hlaingkabbar* village, flooding generally occurs once every three years in the Myanmar months of *Waso* and *Wakhaung*, and during those flood periods, paddy cannot be grown.

Those who make a living by farming have sufficient amount of rice to cover the living expenses of the whole family only if they possess at least three acres of agricultural land. Those who possess fewer than three acres of agricultural land generally have merely enough rice for eating for the whole year but the low amount of harvest, the presence of pests and the low price of rice eventually put them in debt. When pests are present on the paddy, the farmers have to grow it again and hire daily-waged laborers again, thus putting them in debt. The landless people also earn a living by working either as daily-waged laborers or as migrant workers in Thailand.

The above data shows push factors for the villagers living in *Hlaingkabbar* village to find money for their family in abroad.

## **Pull factors**

### **Gender**

Starting from 2007, a small number of male and female people from *Hlaingkabbar* village went to work in Thailand as migrant workers. This was motivated by the prospect of earning more income from working abroad than farming in native areas, gaining regular salary every month and needing less effort in working abroad than doing agricultural activities. Nowadays there are at least one to three people per household going and working there; there are also a few others who have moved to work abroad along with all their family members.

They have gone and worked there in the fields of agriculture, livestock breeding, industrial enterprise, and housemaids. Generally, it was found that more women have migrated and worked there than men. The rationale behind this is that there are more job opportunities for women to work as housemaids and that the job of a housemaid is usually more highly paid. Generally, women prefer working as housemaids since other types of jobs are more tiring and much lower paid. The job of a housemaid allows the person concerned to do only domestic chores with a much better salary.

In migrating and working in Thailand, female workers earned more incomes than male workers since the latter who work at fish industry, iron industry and rice mills in most cases earn 6,000 *bahts* per month while the former, who mostly work as housemaids, earn around 10,000 *bahts* per month. Thailand employs housemaids as they are seen as essential for their family, making female migrant worker are rich opportunities and more salary than male migrant workers. And then most of the housemaids are suitable for only female migrants because in activities such as child rearing, chores and cooking activities, women are seen as more reliable than men.

Starting from the time when the local people migrated and worked in Thailand, both husbands and wives came to work together.

During the times when farming was practiced as the only professional work in *Hlaingkabar* village, only husbands were in charge of the business while wives just provided the necessary supports and help.

### Age

The people aged from 15 to around 50 years, whether single or married and whether male or female have migrated and worked abroad. Because this age level can work as migrant labor and then employers like this age level, so this aged level got job opportunities and good salary.

In most cases, girls migrate and work in Thailand from the age of 17 years and return to settle down in their native villages only at their age of 40 to 50 years because women migrant worker still around 40 years old and then they saving money in this year due to their attachment to the children. The grandparents can't take care grandsons and granddaughters because of old age and adulthood of the children.

### Impact of Migration on socio-economic life

Before 1998, local people use to achieve their livelihood objectives within the village providing them the important availability of cash that enables people to adopt different livelihood strategies. Among the local people dwelling in *Hlaingkabar* village, those who have their own farms earn incomes by doing farming while those without farm ownership get incomes by working as daily-waged farmhands or by doing random errands. However, since farm land owners gave the total incomes to daily waged earners only after the harvest and they do not have regular monthly incomes, they usually face financial crises when they experience urgent family matters.

After 1998, the first priority of the *Kayin* migrant workers in Thailand became to transfer cash home for the food and drinks of their respective families who remained in the native villages, as well as to provide support for the families' spending on education, health and social affairs. Monthly money was transferred to family members by agents who are from *Hpa-An* Township. Those married couples who do not have their parents to take care of the children entrusted their children in the hands of relatives and sent the required amount of money home. Their second priority is to construct brick buildings with the total saved amount of surplus money after the cash transfer. However, some families saved money and sent them to their families back home who would then leave the home village to invest in a general store or open a Thai food restaurant in a town. For farm-less people, they save money in Thailand to purchase farm land with a future plan start farming after going back to their home village. Before 1998, Farm-less people share their labor in odd jobs so they have debt. After 1998, they saved money and bought the farm-land so that their family members could work their own farm-land after they returned back to their home village. A married woman who is 50-years-old said:

*“Before go to Taung-paw, my family are hard economic because not regular income, now I have one acre paddy field and monthly remittances by my daughter and son so I pleasure these conditions”.*

It was found that the economic status of the local people dwelling in *Hlaingkabar* village is in good condition since many people from almost every house has migrated and worked in Thailand.

## Changes in Family Structure

Before 1998, the family pattern of the local people dwelling in *Hlaingkabar* village was of nuclear family type with a father, a mother and children living together in the same house. According to the demographic data documented at the administrator office of the village (2018), the total number of 53 were found to be nuclear families while six were extended families. Generally, the sons and daughters who have already been married live in separate houses according to the culture of the village. The kinship system is of parental relations type. All the sons and daughters have to make equal divisions of the inheritances that their parents had possessed but left behind.

However, after 1998, twelve families were nuclear while twenty families were extended families because, while most spouses worked in Thailand, the children had to live with their grandparents and relatives starting from the age of around two years. The children usually have to grow up only under the admonishments of grandparents and relatives rather than those of their own parents. In the following quote, a 65 years old man and care of two grandchildren, who was a farmer, recounted how he had to take care of his grandchildren so that the children's parents would be able to go and work peacefully in Thailand.

*“My daughter is currently in Taung-paw for work. Her husband went there first. Later, she told me that she also wanted to go and work there and asked me if I could take care of her children instead of them. I replied to her that I would do so. If you just kept working on the farm, you won't become better off. They get regular salaries there. Therefore, they can save money. They have to work and save money while they're still young and active. The children don't live together with their parents. It's the only problem that they don't live with them. All the other things can be fulfilled for them. Their parents are currently away solely for the future of the children.”*

Consequently, daily life of children lives with grandparents or relatives so their mind is close with grandparents or relatives than parents. When they want something from their parents, they request it from their grandparents or relatives because the parent only comes back home at least one time in year. In addition, children are also unfamiliar with their parent and learn their daily practices from grandparents or relatives.

Moreover, the family members decreased after 1998 according to the interviews. Before 1998, the child birth rate was above four children per family. After 1998, however, only about 2 children were born (Figure 3) and raised per family since the people have to go and work in Bangkok This brought about a decrease in the population. The people worried they would not get money if they had many children and would not have enough for education, health and social. Regarding this, a-sixty-years-old married man expressed about after 1998, birth rate was decreased in village.

*“Before 1998, most families have nine children but after 1998 most of the family has only two or three children because the couple migrated to work in Thailand. So, they worry not to earn income at least one year if they got pregnant while they work in Thailand. The grandparents can't take care of more than two children”.*

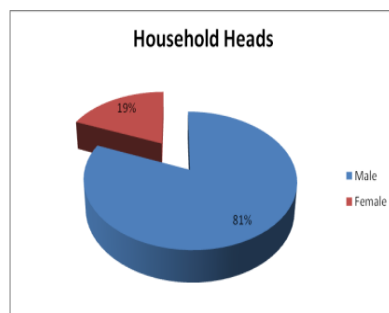


**Figure (3) Grandchildren living with the grandparents**

From the above, it is clear to see that the children are not close to their parents as they are to the grandparents and relatives who have lived with them. Within a particular village, too, the children of respective parents who have gone and worked in Thailand were found to be as loving and close towards one another as relatives rather than mere friends. Since the majority of the people in the village are only elderly persons, the young people live cheerfully and help one another by participating in the mobilized game of school-age children, socializing with one another and visiting one another's houses.

### **Changes in Gender role and labor**

Before 1998, in *Hlaingkabar* village most of the household heads were male because they were the ones working for the family income. According to the traditional culture of the village, they view that males are better at leading others than females and they are therefore usually regarded as heads of households. The special cases in which females are heads of households were only in cases when husband who had already passed away and or in the case of a divorce. After 1998, women earned money in Thailand more than men. Figure (4) shows the number of the household heads after 1998 shows that in *Hlaingkabar* village, male heads of households are 81 percent of all the households while female heads of households have risen to 19 percent.



**Figure (4) Household Heads in *Hlaingkabar* Village after 1998**

There are also cases in which some married women who earn better salary go alone to work abroad, leaving their husbands in the village in order that the latter would do the farming



and take good care of the children. However, concerning the fact that there have been some difficulties in the matters of doing domestic chores and the affairs of the children, although the economic condition of a household is better off because married women have been going and working in Thailand, a 45 years old head of a household who is also a farm owner recounted as follows:

*“My wife is currently in Taung-paw for work along with my daughter. My son who is currently at home with me now attends Grade 4 and it’s quite difficult to manage him since his mother is away. While I am away in the farm, he just doesn’t do any studies but keep playing all the time. He doesn’t eat regularly, either. My wife has once told me that she won’t go and work abroad after we’ve saved enough money. As you know, we don’t get much income from the farms. Therefore, my wife has to send back money. However, the combined salary of my daughter and my wife has made some savings. If you just remain in the village without leaving it, you’ll hardly earn enough money even to have regular meals.”*

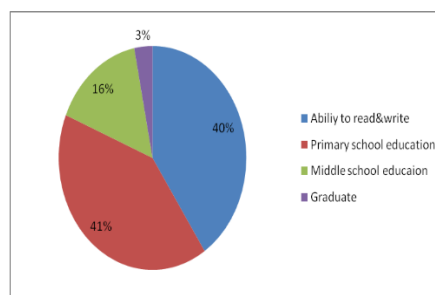
The family members of farmland owners shared labors in their own farming before 1998, but the youths and housewives changed their livelihood to work in Thailand after 1998. Thus, their labor also changes in terms of their jobs according to table (1).

**Table (1) Division of Labor after 1998**

No	Age	Male	Female
1	5-10	Attend school, farming	Attend school, chores, farming
2	11-16	Migrant worker, farming	Migrant worker, farming
3	17-22	Migrant worker, farming	Migrant worker, farming
4	23-28	Migrant worker, farming	Migrant worker, farming
5	29-34	Migrant worker, farming	Migrant worker, farming, shopkeeper
6	35-40	Migrant worker, farming	Migrant worker, farming, shopkeeper
7	41 -46	Migrant worker, farming, odd job	Farming, shopkeeper
8	47-52	Migrant worker, farming, odd job	Farming, shopkeeper

## Education

Since only up to the primary school level is accessible within *Hlaingkabar* village, the majority of local people generally complete primary school education. The number of young people who graduate from a particular university is becoming scarce because only a few students go on to pursue the middle school level education. At the age of around 15 years, most of the young people are eager to go and work abroad. However, it was also found that there are some parents who have gone and worked in Thailand leaving their children at the care of the grandparents but who have intended to have the children educated until they obtain degrees.



**Figure (5) Household Heads Literacy Levels of *Hlaingkabar* Village**

Figure (5) shows that the education levels of heads of households dwelling in *Hlaingkabar* village showed that the majority of those individuals have completed primary education level while the second largest group is that of those who can just read and write. It was also found that the smallest group is that of graduate heads of households. The study on the education levels of heads of households dwelling in *Hlaingkabar* village showed that the majority of those individuals have completed primary education level while the second largest group is that of those who can just read and write. It was also found that the smallest group is that of graduate heads of households.

In *Hlaingkabar* village, even youths change their mind to work in abroad. Regarding this, a 15 years old boy expressed his feelings that he has dreamed only about going and working in Thailand and that he is not interested in education at all.

*“I don’t want to continue doing my studies. I’ve already told Mom and others at home that I don’t want to continue my studies after completing the middle school education level. I just want to go and work in Thailand. As you know, if a person continues his or her studies, he or she needs to do so for a very long time. After getting a degree and a job, it’s not sure whether you’ll get good salary or not. Some of my friends have already gone and worked in Thailand and they’ve already had their own incomes. I’m going to Thailand for work next year, as well. When I have a job, I won’t need to ask for pocket money from my family members any more. I’ll save money there. After that, I’d like to open a Thai food restaurant back in Hpa-An.”*

This interview shows that because of his friend, he changes his mind not to attend the school and plans to work in Thailand. This is also the reason why even youths would like to work in Thailand.

Some local people accept that the educated persons can have more job opportunities and work more comfortably with their high knowledge and skills and so encourage their children to work hard in their experiences. Regarding this, a 43-year-old mother who has two children working in Thailand currently said:

*“In our times, our parents just did farming, so they didn’t have regular monthly income. They gained only the amount of rice that was hardly enough for family members’ eating. Therefore, after we had completed the primary education level at the village, they couldn’t afford sending us to the middle school in town. Now, our children are lucky. Both my husband and I have gone and worked in Thailand, so we get monthly income and we have surplus money. We are able to transfer money home to support monthly schooling expenses for our children as well as eating and the general expenses for the grandparents who have cared for them. We have to encourage our children to try their best to become highly educated persons. If they become educated, they’ll have more job opportunities. As a result, they can choose to pick one that can be tackled without any physical efforts.”*

From the above information, it is known that the parents want their children to become educated person and they migrated to work in Thailand to earn money for their family. This is to push them find money on the abroad.

### **Labor Shortage in Farming**

The villagers who work at the Thailand usually visit their native village for only about one month during the Myanmar months of *Tabaung* and *Tagu*. After 1998, the issues of scarcity of laborers were experienced in the farming business of the villages. So, farm owners have to be worried about getting laborers in time during the paddy-transplanting and harvest seasons. The daily wage for paddy-transplanting and paddy-reaping is 3500 kyats before 1998 but those workers have to be hired with a rate of up to 5000 kyats during the time of scarcity of laborers after 1998.

### **DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION**

In the case of Hlaingkabar village, the local people face difficulties in farming due to low price in paddy, and not stable in paddy price, insufficient money for health, education, and other social affairs. These factors pushed them to migrate to Thailand as temporary migrants. The reason they chose Thailand was that it is very close to Kayin State compared with other countries and they have contact with friends and relatives in there as pull factors for them to work at Thailand. This process is similar with the argument of Lee's (1966) that migration is related to pull factors and push factors. Additionally, as Kim (2011) exemplified with the case of Uganda, social networks can support different kinds of livelihood. Similarly, in this study local people depend on their parents to take care of their children while they work to earn money in Thailand. Without the support of relatives, the spouses could not migrate to struggle in Thailand. Therefore, social networks are very important to sustain their socioeconomic life. Finally, Singh (2010) said that on the one hand economic conditions relate to push and pull factors; on the other hand migration develops from push factor and pull factor. In Punjab, he elicited that migrant workers are male and their education is only low level but they can save money because of better job opportunities and industrial development. Compared with Hlaingkabar village, females have chances and more opportunities to find money due to the demand of female workers in Thailand where they moved and female migrants also sent money to the home village to support the children and to invest for the future. From this, it is concluded that livelihood is the key of its community to promote socioeconomic life and people find place where they can earn money because of pull factors and push factors. Moreover, it is understood that migration has positive and negative impacts on the community where they live.

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