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Modern Skills of Left-Behind Households: Responding to Thai International Migration

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Abstract

This research article aimed to investigate the modern skills acquired by left-behind households of Thai migrant workers abroad. Employing a qualitative phenomenological research approach, the study utilized household and community-level units of analysis. Data were collected in a rural community in Phu Khieo District, Chaiyaphum Province, from November 2024 to March 2025. In-depth interviews were conducted with 43 households that currently had at least one member who had migrated to work abroad for one year or more, encompassing both documented and undocumented migrants. Additionally, semi-structured interviews were carried out with 19 community leaders and individuals with experience in international migration. Data analysis was performed using content analysis.

The findings revealed that half of the left-behind households with migrant workers abroad were skip-generation households, primarily engaged in agriculture, trade, and general labor. Approximately two-thirds of the household members had migrated legally, working in the agricultural sector and small factories, with incomes ranging from 1,000USD to 3,000USD per month. Most had migrated for 3 to 5 years. The study also found that left-behind households consistently received remittances from migrant workers, ranging from 470USD to 2,200USD per month. These remittances were subsequently invested in enhancing the modern skills of household members, specifically: 1) the use of the internet and electronic systems for new learning, including the use of digital technology for tracking and managing remittances; 2) access to online social networks to maintain relationships with migrant workers and their networks, which served as a risk prevention measure for international migration; and 3) foreign language acquisition to understand the migrants' situations. These efforts enabled left-behind households in the origin community to comprehend the daily lives of migrant workers and helped safeguard their interests. However, skip-generation households, characterized by older adults living with children, faced limitations in utilizing modern skills within the rural Isan society.

Keywords: Modern skills, Left-behind households, international migration, Thai migrants