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# Education for All in Action in Thailand: A Case Study of Good Practice



## The Bang Khun Tian Model

Case Study

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## Introduction

Research<sup>1</sup> shows that despite the Education for All (EFA) policy, the majority of migrant children in Thailand are still out of school. Yet there are important success stories from which lessons can be learnt. In the Bang Khun Tian district of Bangkok, local government, schools and civil society have been working together to enrol migrant children in Bangkok Metropolitan Administration (BMA) schools and ensure they learn. What has emerged is an innovative model that has successfully engaged migrant communities, schools and local policy makers in the pursuit of realizing Thailand's EFA policy for disadvantaged and marginalized migrant children in the Bang Khun Tian District. The Foundation for Rural Youth's (FRY) Bang Khun Tian model offers a valuable case study from which lessons learnt and models of best practice can be used to inform current EFA policy dialogue to strengthen EFA implementation for migrant children across the country.

## Background

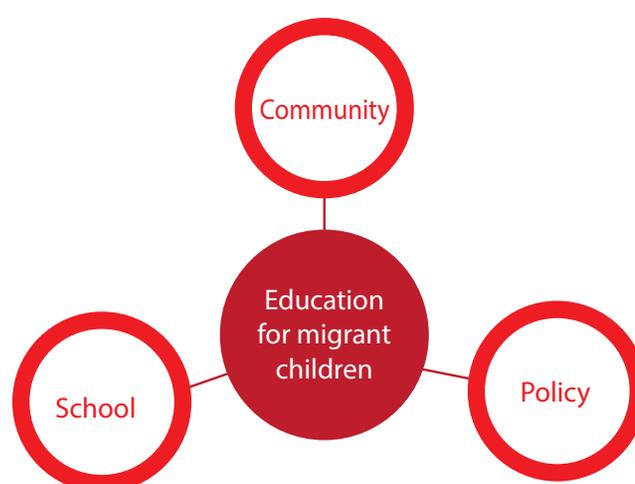
The Royal Thai Government (RTG) adopted EFA in 1990. In 2005, a RTG Cabinet Resolution for Unregistered Persons provided the right to education at all levels for children in Thailand that lack legal status. Thai law stipulates that all children, regardless of their nationality or legal status, have the right to 15 years of free basic education.

While a strong legal framework for EFA exists within Thailand, recent research conducted by Save the Children and World Education<sup>2</sup> indicates a crisis in access to education for children of migrants living in Thailand. Despite the lack of accurate data on the number of migrant children residing in Thailand, the research estimates that over 60%, or more than 200,000 migrant children, are not attending school. Of those migrant children that do attend school, the vast majority (97%) are enrolled either in kindergarten (30%) or primary school (67%), indicating that very few migrant children stay in school until the secondary level. This crisis in education for migrant children in Thailand highlights that not enough is being done to realize the implementation of the EFA.

## The Bang Khun Tian Model

Bang Khun Tian is the southernmost of Bangkok's 50 districts and hosts a large migrant community, who predominately work in factories. Education services in Bang Khun Tian fall under the administration of the Bangkok Metropolitan Administration (BMA) and there are 16 BMA schools in the district that serve the educational needs of the community.

### Three Pillars of the Bang Khun Tian Model



In early 2009, the Foundation for Rural Youth (FRY), a Thai civil society organization (CSO) established in 1985, identified large numbers of migrant children being left unattended in the community while their parents were at work in the surrounding factories. These children were not in a safe environment, were not developing age appropriate social and cognitive skills, and were at risk of exploitation and abuse.

The Bang Khun Tian model adopted by FRY takes a multi-pronged approach to the challenges of supporting migrant children to access and stay in BMA schools. The model is predicated on three pillars of engagement: community, school, and policy.

<sup>1</sup> Save the Children and World Education, *Pathways to a Better Future: A Review of Education for Migrant Children in Thailand, 2014*

<sup>2</sup> Ibid

## Community

The first step to reaching migrant children is identifying where they are. FRY therefore conducts community mapping and out-of-school surveys to gather accurate data on the whereabouts and profile of migrant children. From there, civil society and government organizations are able to plan to include them in schools.



Lunch in a learning center

Once communities and children are identified, FRY provides students and their families with information on their rights to education in Thailand, with a strong focus on community empowerment.

Through community outreach, awareness-raising events, education exhibitions and the production and dissemination of leaflets, FRY is able to successfully target and reach migrant communities.

Migrant children often face financial barriers to accessing education and staying in school. FRY provides financial assistance on a cost-sharing basis that enables migrant children to access FRY's academic preparation program. For a period of six months to two years, depending on the needs of the individual child, migrant children can benefit from subjects such as Thai, math, science, and social studies. As students acquire necessary Thai language proficiency in basic communication skills such as listening, speaking, reading, and writing, they can transition into the Thai government's formal or non-formal education (NFE) programs. The students and their families, depending on the student's age and family situation, decide whether the formal or non-formal education system best meet their needs. While children under 10 years old are encouraged to enter formal education and enrol in a BMA school, older students may also opt to attend the non-formal education program offered by FRY. For working-age students, non-formal education allows the flexibility to work on weekdays and go to school on the weekend. Importantly, both Thai formal schools and the NFE program offer an accredited education certificate upon completion.

## School



Migrant children in the library

At the school level, FRY works with school administrators and teachers to build their understanding of how to successfully integrate migrant children into their classrooms. This is done through meetings, awareness-raising events, and written manuals which explain the enrolment process of migrant children under EFA. This is important as some schools have found it difficult to follow enrolment procedures for students without documents. Additional support for school administrators and teachers includes seminars, workshops, and study visits on teaching techniques and strategies that benefit all learners in the classroom.

After the children are enrolled in BMA schools, FRY plays an active role during the first few months as the children settle into their new classrooms. Primarily, FRY acts as the liaison between the school and home, particularly in cases where parents are unable to communicate with teachers due to language barriers. As the children become accustomed to their classes, teachers, and classmates, FRY transitions to periodically following-up with teachers and students. If the student has stopped attending school for several days, FRY will also follow-up on the status of the student. If schools request additional help with particular students, FRY will provide assistance as needed.

## Policy

To implement change at the policy level, FRY has actively engaged both the BMA and the Education Service Administrative Office (ESAO) on strengthening the practical implementation of the EFA policy for migrant children. Through this advocacy, BMA has provided advice, procedural guidelines, and follow up to schools on EFA implementation in relation to migrant children, including issuing a manual on enrolment procedures, which has significantly strengthened understanding and application of the EFA policy at the school level.

## **A Pathway to a Better Future: The Case of a Model Student who Excels in Penmanship**

Pyo Pyo\* is a 13 year old Burmese girl living in Bang Khun Tian. She had previously attended school in Dawei, Myanmar prior to moving to Thailand when she was seven years old.

Prior to attending the local BMA school, Pyo Pyo attended FRY's preparation program. She studied Thai language, math, computer studies and English for two years before she and her family decided to continue her education in the Thai formal education system. She was very excited to attend Thai school and have the chance to continue learning. FRY's preparation program helped Pyo Pyo to be school ready and develop the necessary Thai language skills to transition into Thai school smoothly.

Pyo Pyo is a role model for her sister and other migrant children. She wishes that other migrant children would work hard and go to Thai school like she did. At school, she has many friends and enjoys singing as part of the Singing Club. Her favorite subject is Thai and her favorite teacher is her Thai language teacher. Pyo Pyo has been awarded second prize for the past two years in the Thai writing competition for her excellent penmanship.

In the future, Pyo Pyo wants to finish grade 6, eventually work in a retail store to support her family, and help her sister with her schoolwork. FRY continues to follow-up with Pyo Pyo and her family regularly on her academic program and future plans.

*\*The name has been changed to protect identity*

## **Impact of the Bang Khun Tian Model on Migrant Student Enrolment**

There has been a 76% increase in the enrolment of migrant children in BMA schools since 2009. In the 2009 academic year, there were only 556 migrant children enrolled in 156 of the 435 schools (36%) under BMA administration. In 2014, this figure increased to 2,338 migrant children attending BMA schools in all 50 BMA districts. Bang Khun Tian district had the second highest enrolment of non-Thai students among the 50 BMA administered districts in 2014.

While the increase in enrolment of migrant children in BMA schools in Bang Khun Tian district cannot be attributed to FRY's program alone, it does highlight how civil society organizations, such as FRY, can use innovative models to support the implementation of EFA in Thailand.

There is also evidence that the Thai language preparation program is helping. In a reading assessment conducted by Save the Children<sup>3</sup>, migrant children in BMA schools in Bang Khun Tian who had been through the Thai preparation course, outperformed migrant students in RTG schools in another region who had not been through the course.

3 Save the Children and World Education, *Pathways to a Better Future: A Review of Education for Migrant Children in Thailand - Reading Assessment, 2014*

## Remaining Challenges

While the model has worked for many migrant children, challenges still remain. The implementation of EFA amongst different schools is still inconsistent in practice. In many cases, school administrators may be unclear about the EFA policy and enrolment processes which result in hesitancy to admit migrant students. In particular, the reluctance from schools has been derived from uncertainty over the procedures and processes that are necessary to register children who lack the 13-digit identification number required to officially register. While guidelines have helped, there is still a need for ongoing support and monitoring to ensure all schools apply the EFA policy consistently.

High drop-out rates for older migrant students pose a significant challenge as well. Due to economic factors, students often drop out of school and seek employment when they reach the age of 13-15 years old. Thus there have been very few students from migrant families who complete primary grades and continue on to secondary school. For these students, non-formal education can be an appropriate option that meets their needs while allowing them to work.

## Lessons Learnt

FRY's Bang Khun Thian Model offers valuable lessons learnt for policy-makers and practitioners seeking to support the significant number of out of school migrant children to access their rights under EFA. Some of the key lessons and recommendations to be highlighted are:

- The EFA has the potential to vastly increase migrant children's access to education and improve their lives. This doesn't happen on its own however, it requires significant awareness-raising, preparation, and follow-up at the community and school levels. For example, schools require written and verbal guidance on enrolment procedures through manuals and order letters, awareness-raising, and training on how to include migrant children effectively. Communities also need information on their rights and options, in order to develop awareness on the benefits of enrolling their children in education.
- The first step to providing education for migrant children is knowing where they are and what they need. It is imperative to pro-actively identify and reach out to migrant communities and their children through community mapping and surveys.

- The role of ESAOs and education supervisors in clarifying and monitoring policy implementation is integral. Schools are not always aware of the correct procedures or do not always implement them consistently, thus requiring close support and supervision. This can be at the individual school level through school visits, and also at the district level through data analysis of how schools are including migrant students.
- Community Learning Centers can play an important role in preparing students to enrol and succeed in RTG formal basic education and NFE systems, as well as following-up with and supporting children once they are enrolled.
- In order to learn and stay in school it is vital that migrant students receive preparation and support in Thai language before and during enrolment in Thai schools. Without this, many migrant students won't be able to learn, and will likely drop out of school.
- As many older migrant students are working and have missed out on several years of education, flexible options are required that allow them to catch up on their schooling and learn skills relevant to their lives. NFE offices should therefore make special efforts to identify over-age migrant students and support them in enrolling in their programs.

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