

Timorese migrant workers in the Australian Seasonal Worker Program

By Ann Wigglesworth, Victoria University
and Abel Boavida dos Santos, National University of Timor-Leste

February 2018

1. Why Migrate?

The movement of people from their place of origin is often influenced by diverse factors such as poverty, war or conflict. Migration is driven by expected improvements in the life of a migrant's family which might include higher wages, employment, health and education. Migration for work has become an increasing phenomenon as a strategy for development, both sponsored by governments to create remittance streams and as an option taken up by families to improve their economic status.

The United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP) reports that worker migration generally is beneficial for most of those involved, resulting in higher GDP growth in countries of destination and increased wages for migrants. Remittances sent by migrants have positive effects not only for their families, but also for communities and their country in general. In particular, countries of origin benefit when migrants return with new skills that are useful to the national economy (ESCAP 2015 p10-11). A global analysis of the relationship between migration and development shows that migration patterns are structured by social divides. Migrant networks link migration streams to specific areas that are often not the poorest in the areas of origin, and often slightly better educated or skilled than average (de Haan 2006). Nevertheless, migrant workers typically work in low skilled work, work that nationals do not aspire to do.

2. Timorese experiences of migration

Economic inequalities between urban and rural Timor-Leste have been persistent, with 92% of the high wealth quintile comprised of urban dwellers, while the vulnerable poor are predominantly in the rural areas (McWilliam 2014). This wealth contrast is a driver of rural-urban migration.

In Timor-Leste the mobility of young people to access education and work opportunities starts with school students moving to their district town or Dili to attend secondary school. Most of them do not return to the rural areas to live but remain in the urban areas seeking further education or work opportunities. Internal migration from the rural areas to urban centres also resulted in a population increase in Dili from people fleeing the conflict in 1999, and after 2000, the economic opportunities from aid and development resources which were concentrated in the capital. In 2009, around 22% of the total working age population living in Dili were migrants, and close to 39% of the working-age population moved to Dili for economic or educational reasons (ILO 2016:11). Around 18,000 youth leave school every year with low skill levels but the number of new jobs available, even in Dili, are just a few hundred (La'o Hamutuk 2016).

Following a political crisis in 2006 which saw youth gangs take to the streets in violent communal conflict, there started to be some concern about the disaffection and social marginalisation of youth as a result of lack of employment opportunities. Timor-Leste sought to enhance work opportunities through labour migration, initially through the South Korea Temporary Workers Program. This government to government program made Timor-Leste the fifteenth Asian country to join the Korean Employment Permit System (EPS). This program has enabled two thousand young Timorese to work in South Korea for three to five years over the six years from 2009 to 2015 (Wigglesworth and Fonseca 2015). It is run by the Department of Overseas Workers at the Secretariat of State for Vocational Training and Employment Policy (SEPFOPE), which also manages the Australian Seasonal Worker Program (SWP).

The SWP is the second labour migration program in Timor-Leste, and started in 2012. The SWP is an Australian government initiative, to fill unskilled seasonal vacancies in Australia, led by the Department of Jobs and Small Business and supported by Department of Home Affairs, Fair Work Ombudsman (FWO) and Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT). Operating since 2009 in the Pacific, SWP now is available to ten countries: Fiji, Kiribati, Papua New Guinea, Nauru, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Tonga, Tuvalu, Vanuatu and Timor-Leste.

The numbers of Timorese migrants that have worked in the two official overseas work programs in Korea and Australia are relatively small, with a total of less than 3,000 migrants having been placed up to 2016. The unmet demand for such work opportunities is evident from the large Work Ready Pool of almost a thousand potential Timorese workers waiting for a SWP placement in 2017 (with equal numbers of men and women), in response to the plan to scale up the program. In FY2017 26% of Timorese SWP workers were women, a higher proportion than any other participating Pacific country.

Timorese migrants also travel to UK for work, taking advantage of the right to a Portuguese passport for Timorese nationals born before 2002. This confers access to work in EU countries and thousands have travelled a well-trodden path to join family or friends working in the UK (Wigglesworth and Boxer 2016). There are now an estimated 16-19,000 Timorese resident in UK, on Portuguese passports and without official support, predominantly working in meat factories, warehouses and cleaning jobs. They are assisted by family members or friends who are already there and are disproportionately from Lautem and Baucau districts. The scale of this migration demonstrates a strong unmet demand for paid work in Timor-Leste and through the official migration programs.

3. Outline of research

The research that this paper was based on was commissioned by Cardno EM Ltd, manager of the Labour Mobility Assistance Program (LMAP). LMAP is funded by DFAT with the specific purpose of supporting SWP partner countries to increase the number and quality of workers participating in the programme, and to support targeted activities that will increase the benefits (financial and other) for workers and their communities resulting from their participation. In Timor-Leste LMAP provides in-country support to the in-country labour supplier, SEPFOPE.

This research was carried out in Timor-Leste with returned workers from Australia. The first phase of research interviewed 50 returned workers shortly after their return. The second phase interviewed these same workers after five or six months at home, and before they return for another season of work. It investigates the workers' experiences in Australia as well as how SWP has contributed to the livelihood and wellbeing of the worker's family in the present and into the future.

The research team for the Re-integration and Tracer study was led by Dr Ann Wigglesworth with Mr Abel Boavida dos Santos as the Research Supervisor. A team of enumerators of three women and two men was recruited and trained. Using a questionnaire developed by LMAP which was translated into Tetun, enumerator training ensured proper understanding of each question, the purpose of research and how to approach research respondents, ethical issues and confidentiality.

4. The Seasonal Workers Program

The SWP is a complex program with multiple stakeholders in Australia and has operated in Timor-Leste since 2012. After a slow start, the program recruitment has built up with 781 SWP workers recruited and sent in 2017, making a total of more than 1,400 workers since the start of the program.

Table 1: Numbers of Timorese SWP workers per year (SEFPOPE data)

Year	Male	Female	Hospitality	Horticulture	Total
2012	7	5	12	0	12
2013	25	10	21	14	35
2014	100	31	46	85	131
2015	115	46	41	120	161
2016	227	71	34	264	298
2017	556	225	42	739	781
Total	1,030	388	196	1,222	1,418
%	73%	27%	14%	86%	100%

In Australia the registration of SWP employers is managed by the Department of Jobs and Small Business. Its purpose is described on its website as follows:

‘The Seasonal Worker Programme offers employers in the agriculture sector and employers in selected locations in the accommodation and tourism sectors access a reliable, returning workforce when there is not enough local Australian labour to meet seasonal demand’.

For the participating countries the benefits of the SWP are expected to be as follows:

‘The Seasonal Worker Programme contributes to the economic development of nine participating Pacific Island countries and Timor-Leste, by providing access to work opportunities in the Australian agriculture sector, accommodation sector in selected locations and tourism sector (northern Australia)’¹.

In September 2017, the Australian government announced new measures which ‘would increase both the flexibility and support within the Seasonal Worker Programme and reflect a broader commitment to expand labour mobility in the Pacific’.² The new measures will help to increase Australian industry engagement, pilot ways to lower upfront costs for employers, improve visa arrangements and reduce red tape. They will also help employers provide additional pastoral care assistance, strengthen skills training and assist seasonal workers who wish to access their superannuation.

The Labour Mobility Assistance Program (LMAP) is funded by DFAT with the specific purpose of supporting SWP partner countries to increase the number and quality of workers participating in the programme, and to support targeted activities that will increase the benefits (financial and other) for workers and their communities resulting from their participation. In Timor-Leste, LMAP provides in-country support, assists the in-country labour supplier, the Secretariat of State for Vocational Training

¹ <https://www.employment.gov.au/seasonal-worker-programme>

² <https://ministers.employment.gov.au/cash/new-measures-support-participation-seasonal-worker-programme>

and Employment Policy (SEPFOP), to strengthen its own systems, particularly in relation to pre-departure briefings and reintegration briefings.

Seasonal workers brought into Australia by employers are subject to the same workplace relations and work health and safety safeguards as Australian workers. There are many other temporary workers on Australian farms who do not have the same protections, and many of these employers have used sub-standard practices, which the media are quick to make known. This poor record has somewhat tarnished the reputation of seasonal work. In this research no such concerns were raised and the research shows that Timorese workers on SWP are overwhelmingly appreciative of the opportunity to work and positive about the way they have been treated by their employers.

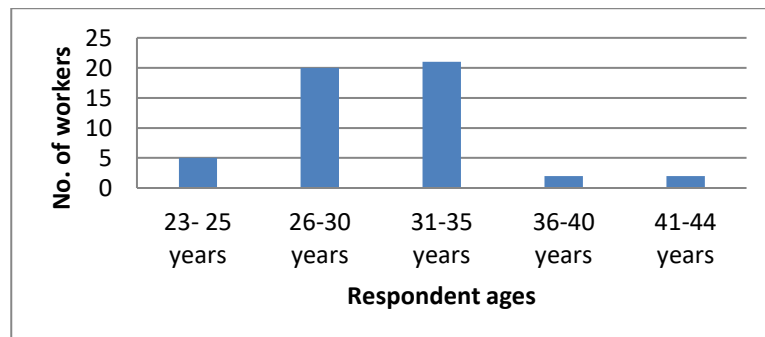
Contributing to this positive record is the fact that SEPFOP has employed a Labour Attaché based in the Timorese embassy in Canberra, who maintains contact with SWP workers and employers and deals with labour issues arising. This strategy by the Timor-Leste government is also employed in Korea. This level of support and protection has not been available to the Pacific island workers in the SWP.

5. Research Findings

5.1. Profile of sample of workers

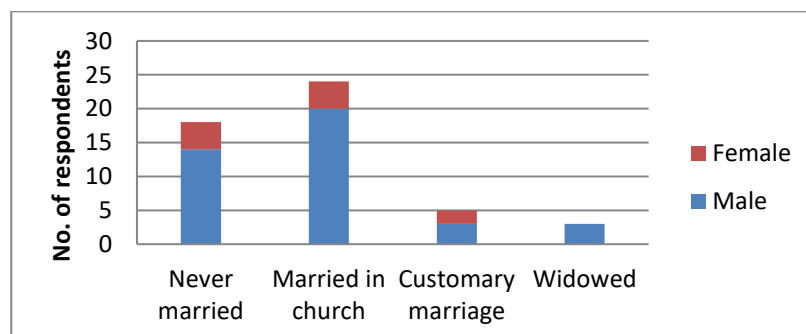
Of the 50 workers interviewed, 10 were women and 40 were men, the majority between 26-35 years old with an average age of 30. Forty-nine were Catholic and one Protestant.

Figure 1: Age profile of workers



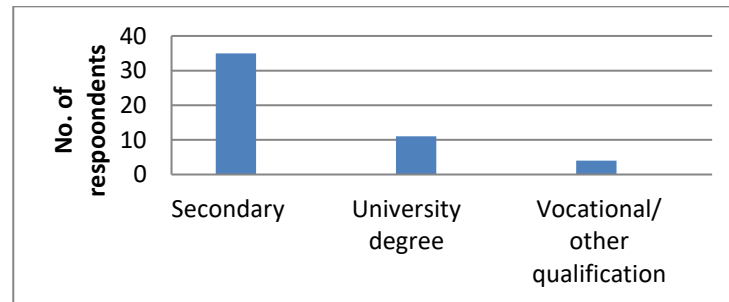
Most of the respondents were married, 48% by officially registered church marriage, and 10% by customary marriage recognised by the local community and the Timorese Constitution. 36% had never married, including four of the ten women in the sample.

Figure 1: Marital status of respondents



When asked which district they are from, every district of the country was represented. However, 45 of the returned workers are now resident in Dili. This reflects the tendency of young people to migrate to Dili for education, work or training opportunities which are greater in Dili. The majority of workers interviewed have just secondary school education (70%), and 22%, mostly in the older age ranges, have a university degree.

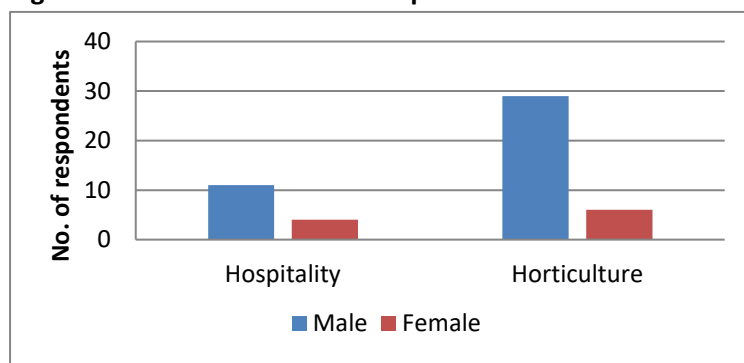
Figure 3: Education / qualifications of workers



5.2 Types of work

There are two types of work in the SWP, horticulture which is the largest category and hospitality in the Northern Australia areas designated by the Australian Government. While most men work in horticulture (72%) the women interviewed were more evenly split between the two categories (60% horticulture and 40% hospitality).

Figure 4: SWP work sector of respondents

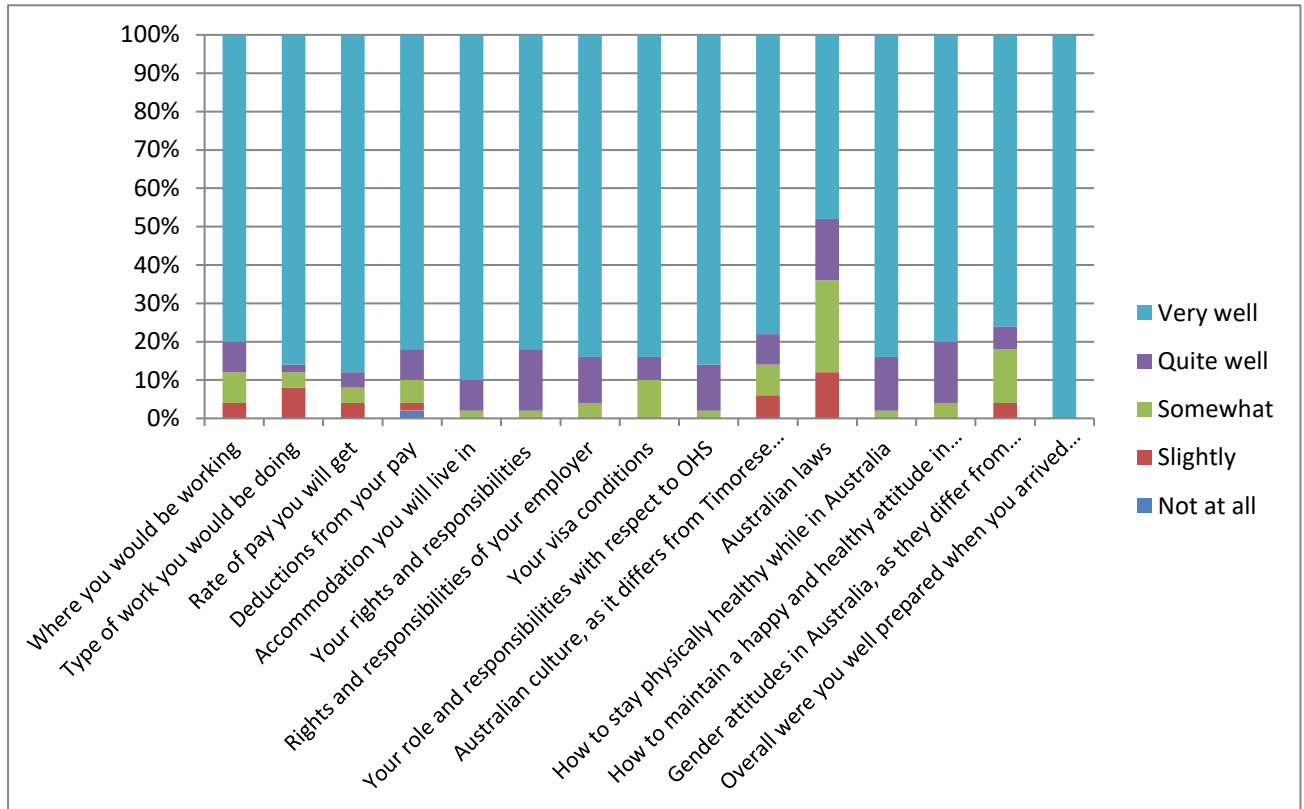


Friends were a major source of obtaining information about the SWP (44%) followed by the media (32%). A number found out about SWP from SEPFOP itself.

5.3. Pre-departure briefing and life in the field

A pre-departure briefing provided by SEPFOP (on the basis of training and materials provided by LMAP) is important for workers to have a thorough understanding of the work and living conditions that they will have, and the rights and responsibilities of themselves and their employers. The knowledge about the SWP process that they gained in this briefing was very good, although it should be remembered that the majority of workers had prior experience working in the SWP.

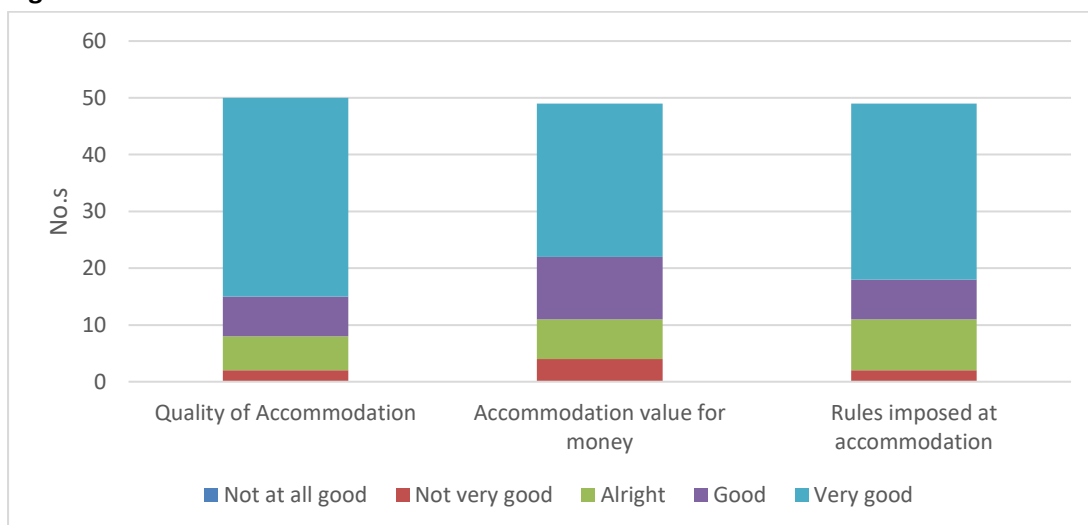
Figure 5: Understanding of SWP work issues on arrival in Australia



More than 80% understood what their working and living conditions, rights and responsibilities would be. Weaker understanding was evident for the questions about Australian Law about which less than half the respondents had a good understanding, and Australian culture and gender issues. Both these are questions about the environment they would be working in rather than directly related to their work conditions.

Most workers found the quality of the accommodation acceptable, with 42 workers (84%) rating the quality good or very good and 38 workers (76%) rating the value for money good or very good and also accepting the rules imposed at the accommodation.

Figure 6: Assessment of worker accommodation



The majority (52%) shared a room with one other person, but there was a range of sharing conditions, with 36% of workers sharing a bathroom with 10 or more people. Some workers complained that waiting to access to the bathroom or kitchen facilities would make them late for work.

Most workers (42 responses) also received a briefing from their employer in Australia, either the business owner, or the labour hire or labour contracting firm through which they were engaged. Of those that did, the majority (39, or 85%) said the briefing provided the information they needed for their time and work in Australia.

Access to internet was available to only 30% of workers. Some workers were in such remote locations that they could not make calls home by either phone or internet except on weekend shopping trips to town. For many migrant workers, communications with the family back home is extremely important and the internet provides a cheap means of communicating through Skype, Facebook or other social media sites compared to the telephone.

Transport to and from work was provided for 60% of workers and another 16% said they lived near to their work and did not require transport. In many worksites, transport was made available for workers to go shopping (36%) and for recreation (24%) but charged to the worker as a deduction. Only 52% of workers said they had opportunities for recreation, many of the others saying that there was no time for recreation. Access to banks, medical services and opportunities for religious practice were largely acceptable. The main suggestions by workers for improvement in the briefings provided at the workplace were about how to use local transport systems and how to find the shops and bank near to their workplace.

5.4 Their work experience

Within the two broad sectors of work there is considerable variety of tasks. Some workers named just a single task they were doing every day while others named a variety of tasks. In the table below the type of activity has been simplified – a worker might say they picked melons or picked lettuces, but all fruit and vegetable picking has been categorised together, and similarly with packing of fruit and vegetables.

Table 2: What work were you mostly doing?

Sector	What work were you mostly doing?	Number of workers
Horticulture	Picking fruit or vegetables	16
	Clearing old crops, planting new crops & weeding	8
	Packing fruit or vegetables	5
	Tractor/truck driver	4
	Irrigation	1
	Pruning	1
	Total workers	35
Hospitality	Housekeeping	5
	Hotel work	5
	Kitchen hand	2
	Restaurant	2
	Gardening	1
	Total workers	15

Crop work made up 68% of horticultural work, the largest number in picking and others in land clearing, preparation, planting, weeding or a combination of these. Some of the drivers transporting the produce from the fields also did other crop work. In hospitality, housekeeping involved making up bedrooms and laundry work, while 'hotel work' implies more varied tasks within the hotel.

Most workers worked six days a week (68%) with some 12% of workers working only five days and 20% of workers working 7 days a week. The hours worked was more variable. Most hospitality workers averaged eight hours a day, while 85% horticulture workers worked either eight or nine hour days. Many of the horticulture workers were paid on a piece rate basis and could work longer hours to get more money. Of those interviewed, 36% received piece rates for some or all of their work, while the majority 64% of workers were paid on hourly rates.

Most workers considered that the skills they learnt by working in Australia were valuable. The technical skills that they believed could be useful when they returned home are presented in the table below:

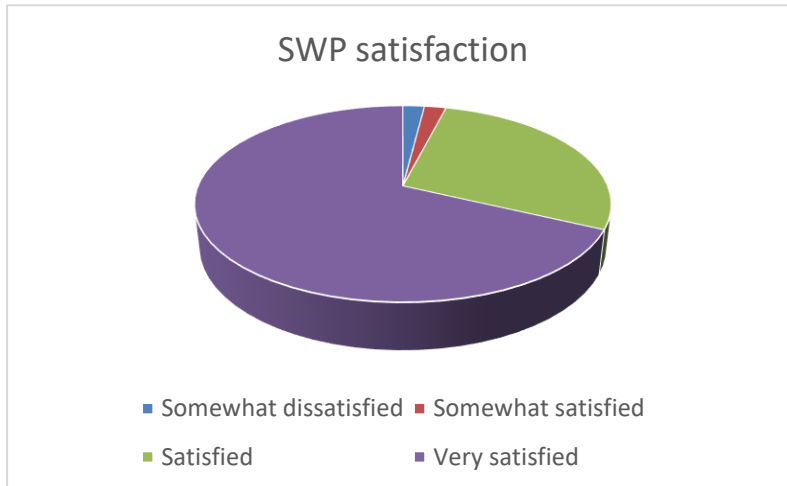
Table 3: What technical skills have you acquired in Australia at the workplace or outside work that you will be able to use back in your home country?

	No. respondents
Horticulture workers	
Fruit picking skills	24
Fruit packing skills	23
Pruning	13
Planting	16
Managing pests and disease	4
Operating a forklift	9
Operating a tractor	12
Operating other machinery	7
Total horticultural workers	35
Hospitality workers	
Cleaning and remaking guest bedrooms	13
Cleaning and preparing public hospitality areas	12
Cleaning and working in kitchens	12
Other	2
Total hospitality workers	15

The vast majority of workers felt that they had benefited significantly from the SWP experience. When asked to comment, at least 10 specifically mentioned the good money they earned and the regular payment, often compared to the poor wages and irregular payment back home. Learning English language was valued by many workers. Most workers believed that they had gained useful skills which they could put to use when they return home.

When asked how satisfied they were with their recent SWP experience, 96% of workers said they were satisfied with 68% of these being 'very satisfied'.

Figure 7: Satisfaction with SWP experience



There were a few workers who were unhappy about the hours they worked. This ranged from those who said the hours of work were insufficient, due to limited fruit available to pick, to complaining about having to work into the night. Another problem arose when workers were sent at the wrong time and incurred accommodation and living costs several weeks before the fruit was ready for picking and they could start earning. The majority became accustomed to the working hours and the need for hard and timely work, and appreciated the benefits that the work brought to their lives.

5.5 Impacts and remittances

Workers were asked to describe the positive and negative impacts of their work in Australia. There are the most common responses:

Common positive impacts described by workers:

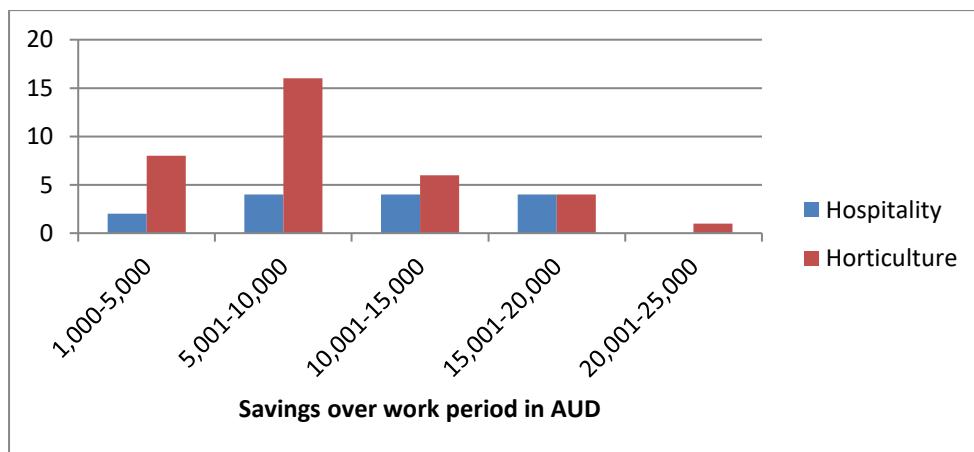
- Workers feel happy to get a good salary which can finance the needs of their family.
- They can save to build a house or start a new business to benefit the family in future.
- They can pay school fees for their children and other family members such as sending siblings to university.
- They are able to send money for the health needs of their family particularly their children but also parents and disabled family members.
- Children are proud because their parent is in Australia and their needs are met.
- Some adolescent children become more independent.
- Husbands gain the trust of wives because their job can support a family and their future.
- Women feel they can better support the education and health needs of the family.
- Some workers can support another family member or a housekeeper to help with the family at home.
- Workers can send money to support their parents.
- They can pay for therapy or equipment for family members who are disabled.
- They can buy a motorbike to facilitate getting the children to school and the family business.
- In general, workers change their attitude while working in Australia. They learn to appreciate keeping to time and hard work.

Common negative impacts described by workers:

- When the family know a worker is getting a lot of money, the family force them to spend a lot of money on customary ceremonies.
- Children lack the attention and affection from their father or mother who is far absent from the family.
- Some workers feel they have limited control over how their spouse will spend the money (male and female).
- The family, particularly the spouse and sometimes parents, are left with more work.
- Some husbands worry that their wife doesn't have protection when he is far away.
- Sometimes mistrust occurs because they are far away from each other, particularly by husbands or boyfriends of women workers.
- Some workers find it hard to focus well on their work due to the remoteness from their family

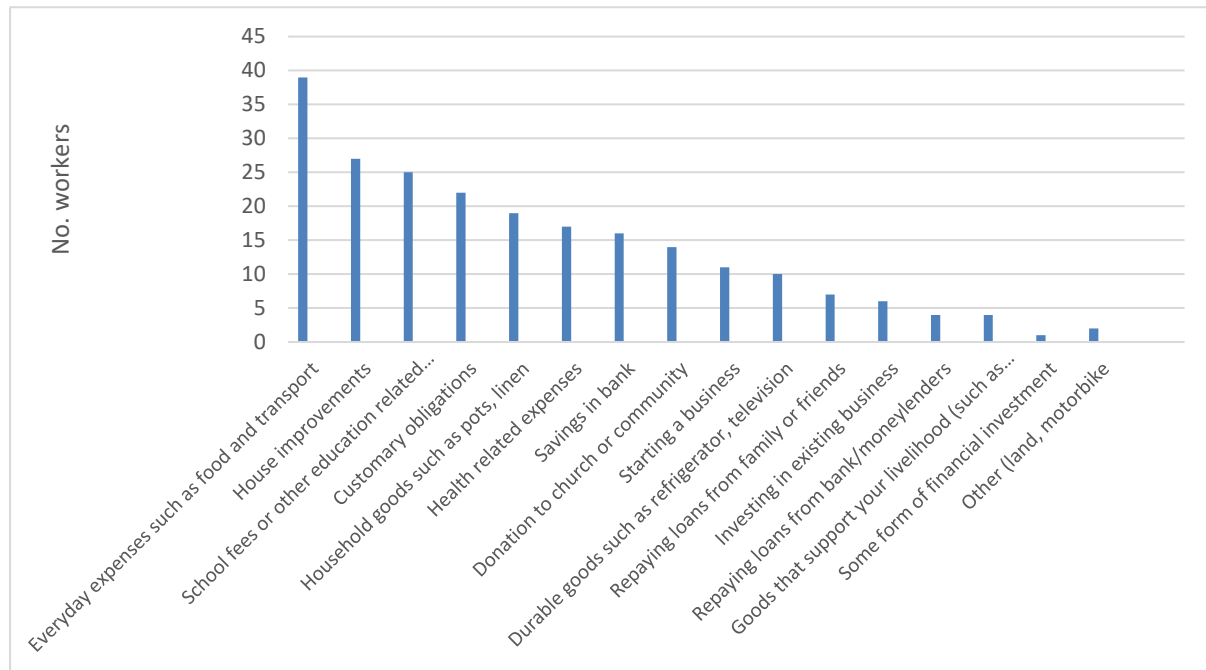
The benefits to the family were substantial. Horticulture workers saved on average AUD 6,000-10,000, while hospitality workers were more likely to save more. However those that saved the least were in hospitality and a horticulture worker achieved the highest saving. Many workers have the opportunity to work overtime to increase their income if they wish.

Figure 8: Level of savings by number of workers (AUD)



The average remittance over the work period by those that sent remittances is AUD 3,200. The most common use of remittances is for daily living expenses (78%) followed by house renovations (54%), educational expenses (50%) and customary obligations (44%). Customary obligations were mentioned by the enumerators as an obligation that limited the workers' opportunities to spend money according to their preferences due to expectations by their families. Customary obligations might include financing a wedding or funeral ceremony, education for extended family members, house construction for parents, purchase of transport (truck or bus) for siblings. Such obligations can limit the worker's ability to realise their own plans such as establish a business.

Figure 9: Use of remittance funds by no. workers



In addition, workers were asked what goods they bought in Australia to take back home. An average of AUD 1,242 per worker was spent in Australia on goods to carry home. Mobile phones are the most popular item to take back with many workers buying a number of phones, presumably for different family members. Computers are the next most popular item, and clothes, shoes and educational materials also preferred items to take home. Purchases of household goods made or planned on return home were most commonly mobiles phones, computers, TV’s, refrigerators, motorbikes and other vehicles.

5.6 Returning home

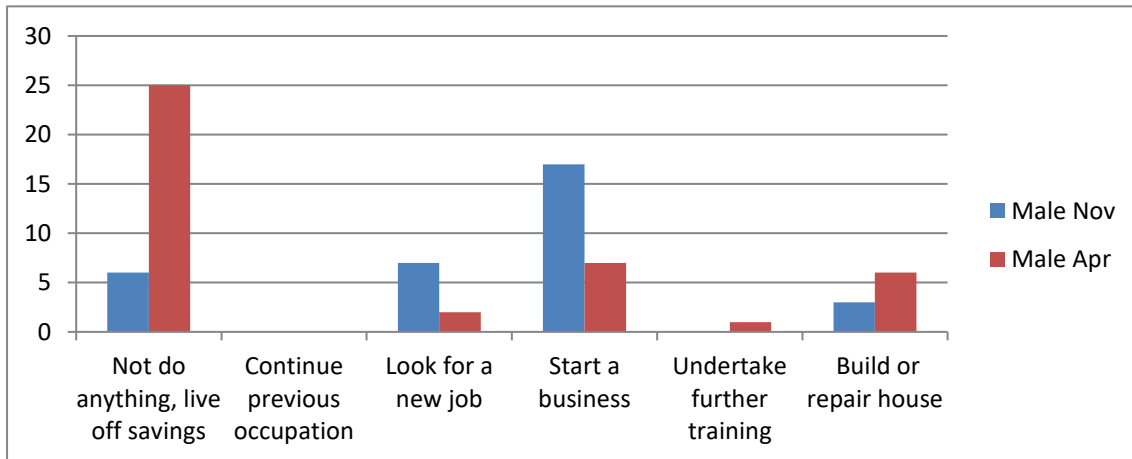
For the second phase of the Tracer survey, data collectors who had been involved in the initial Reintegration and Tracer survey in November 2016 were re-recruited. Of the 50 workers initially interviewed, 39 workers could be traced and interviewed for the second interview phase. These workers interviewed included 6 women and 33 men, of whom five women and eleven men worked in hospitality and one woman and 22 men worked in horticulture.

On return to Timor-Leste, half of the returned male workers wanted to start a business, and 21% wanted to look for a new job. Some 15% of men intended to not do anything except live off their savings and another 10% planned to spend the time building or renovating a house. At the end of the six months at home, 75% of male workers lived off their savings, with 18% involved in house building or renovation activities. Of the 20% who wanted to look for a new job only 13% actually did so and all but two failed to find one. (Where two activities were mentioned, both are included here).

Many reasons were given for the difference between the planned and actual activities. Some 20% said that they changed their plans because they had to spend their money on supporting relatives and paying school fees. One had to spend all the money on a funeral and another had to spend most for ‘adat’ (customary obligations) on a wedding. Amongst the men, less than half of the workers who had plans to start a business achieved this. The reasons for this included: not being able to find a suitable

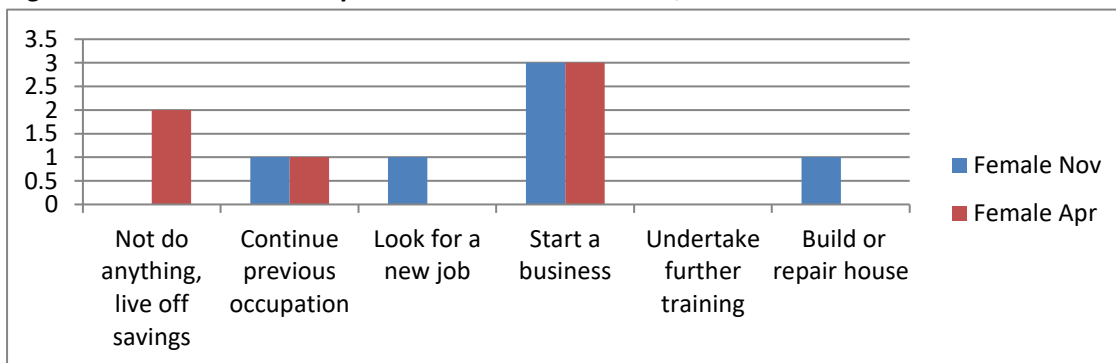
premises; not having enough start-up capital; changing the type of business established; building or renovating a house as a priority; spending capital on other items.

Figure 10: Male workers' planned activities on return, and actual activities 6 months later



A number of workers looked for work, but most said there were no opportunities, while others decided not to look for work because they didn't want to give up the job to go back to Australia to work on SWP. One worker responded to an advertisement to work in the new Heineken factory and was successful, and another found a new job working in an international organisation. Both said that their SWP skills that were useful in the job included work skills such as team work, leadership, punctuality and English skills.

Figure 11: Female workers' planned activities on return, and actual activities 6 months later.



Half of the women also wanted to start a business and one worker previously had a job in a restaurant and returned to that job. No women planned to not be involved in economic activities and live off their savings. All the women who wanted to start a business achieved this.

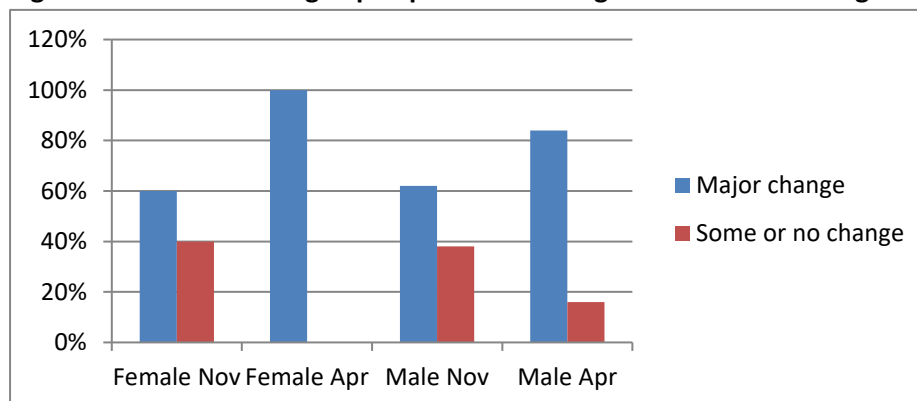
Of the ten (seven male and three female) workers who started a business, all established the businesses using their own financial resources, but they also involved other family members, mostly 2-4 other members. The businesses established were a Guest House; a restaurant; three set up shops (two general stores and a clothing store); two engaged in food processing for sale (tofu and tempe, and bread), one bought a truck for a transport business and another imported motorbikes for sale, and one became a money lender.

The majority either had no training or advice or they learnt skills from a family member (including a sister, father and husband). One mentioned they developed the required skills in Australia. Only one had formal training from the Institute of Business Support (IADE) to develop a business plan. There are a range of existing agricultural support and market access programs in Timor-Leste such as Avansa Agrikultura and TOMAK that could offer support to returning workers on their return home. LMAP has started to make links with these organisations in their debriefing program, but linkages need to be strengthened between SEPFPOPE and the various business support services to better assist the returned workers.

5. Cultural-gender impacts

Workers were asked whether their views on gender had changed since returning from Australia. In the November survey, 62% of men and 60% of women said they had significantly changed their perspective about their own role in their family. By April, all the women and 82% of the men said their views had changed, indicating that the change in attitude has consolidated with time at home. In addition, they were asked to explain about how their views have changed.

Figure 12: Workers changed perspectives about gender since returning home.



The degree to which most male workers claimed to have changed their behaviour is remarkable. A number of male workers said that before going to Australia they had forbidden their wife, younger sister or daughter to continue her education because they believed women should be in the kitchen, but in Australia they learnt that women can play many diverse roles in society. Some explained after they returned from Australia they assisted female family members to enrol and pay for classes.

Several also explained they now help their wife with domestic tasks, which they would not have done previously. In Australia, men learned to do household tasks including cooking, cleaning and washing, and now they realise that they can help their wives with these tasks at home as well.

Other workers explained that they previously slapped or beat their young siblings if they were not obedient, or would become angry with their wives and did not respect them or their views. Many men said they respect women more now or talked of being calmer and having less conflict in the household now compared to before. In Timor-Leste, violence is commonly used as a tool to solve problems in the family and community, but these workers have learnt in Australia that violence is not an acceptable instrument to respond to situations or ideas that they disagree with.

Women workers, on the other hand, experienced being treated as an equal. They took this experience home and shared it with their families, sometimes finding voice in place of formerly subservient

behaviour. They described how previously they had to obey their husband, but in Australia they learned that women and men are equal which gave them confidence to make decisions for themselves. They are proud to make a greater contribution and take responsibility for the household.

6. Workers perspectives and preferences in SWP

6.1 Recruitment and work

As the workers are organised in teams, if one worker does not carry their weight or meet the work requirements the rest of the team might be negatively affected. As a result the recruitment of urban unemployed youth for horticultural work was criticised as many of these young men are not interested in agricultural work, and were said to have expectations of an easy life in Australia because they have no experience of working hard. Workers also believed that the skills that workers gain through SWP should contribute towards positive development in Timor-Leste, but urban unemployed youth are unlikely to use their horticultural skills on return to Timor. On the other hand, if rural people were recruited they would have relevant work experience and also benefit from learning skills that they can use on return home.

Some SWP workers are in full time work but they take leave for six months to do SWP and return to their job in Dili. This was said to be unfair, because these people do not need work and deprive others of the opportunity. Each work team has a team leader, often selected by SEPFOP staff. Sometimes the team leader had inadequate English skills to properly do their job of acting as the main channel of communication with the employer or supervisor, and this created problems for the team. It was felt that there was sometimes favouritism or personal connections involved in the selection of the team leader rather than choosing the person with the best skills.

When workers return to Australia for a second (or subsequent) time, the workers are often invited to return to the same employer. In this research, all hospitality workers returned to the same workplace, but not all horticulture workers. Horticultural work was found to be hard, and in Victoria workers suffered from very cold working conditions. As a result, a number of women and men chose to change their workplace from horticulture to hospitality as their preferred work option. It should also be noted that a higher proportion of women are in hospitality than horticulture, partly due to the fact that some Australian farmers are reported to have a preference to recruit men, which is not the case for hospitality work.

6.2 On return home

When workers were asked if they had any difficulty adjusting to life when they returned to Timor, the major concern was that it is difficult to come back to Timor where there was no work, and the only possibility was to wait until they could go to Australia on SWP again. Some men expressed a sense of demoralisation or being 'in limbo' because there were few options to contribute to the family in Timor. This is another reason for maximising the opportunities of returning workers to use their new skills in the Timorese economy. However many Australian employers are opposed to limiting the number of times that SWP workers can return. They want to build a reliable workforce where trained and effective workers return year after year.

SWP's role in meeting livelihood needs of the family varies over time. Initially much money is spent on improving home infrastructure and buying material goods and paying education fees for family members. After these expenses have been met, workers start to consider longer term investments in

their future, often looking to set up a business. Most workers however see SWP work as a means to an end, to earn enough money to meet their family's needs and to establish a better life in future in Timor-Leste. For this to occur they need to look for ways to leverage their SWP skills and capital to establish a business or to find work in the Timorese economy. It is a sacrifice to be away from their families, and while their children are young this is not a problem, but many want to be at home while their children are growing up and at school. For the wellbeing of the family and contribution to development in Timor-Leste, an ideal period of SWP placements might be recommended as four to six years.

In November, half the returned workers wanted to start a business but the April survey showed that half of those failed to do so. Skills in hospitality, life/work skills and English language skills were used in starting a business. No worker had found horticultural skills to be useful. This is in spite of the fact that in November, almost half of the workers said that their horticultural skills would be useful. The hospitality sector appears to produce skills which are more likely to be put to good use on return to Timor, with several returned workers starting businesses including a restaurant and hotel.

Tourism development in Timor-Leste is widely seen as an important sector in national economic development. Ecotourism and community-based tourism have potential in certain district towns and localities of natural beauty. SWP could coordinate with the Ministry of Tourism as well as private sector tourism and hospitality operators to help strengthen the human resource base for tourism in the locations where tourism is being planned.

There is huge potential for horticultural development in Timor, but horticulture is an area where there is a poor matching of worker recruitment with work destination. For this to be addressed, the Government of Timor-Leste should be more strategic in its use of the SWP to build new productive skills. By better integrating SWP into government development plans, workers could be supported to use their skills and experience to realise economic activities. Workers reported learning relevant skills for productive activities, but a major obstacle to developing horticulture activities by returning workers is that many of them do not own or have access to land because they are urban residents.

While the soft skills that are learnt by seasonal workers (punctuality, team work etc) are important and applicable across any crop or sector, there is scope to enhance the direct applicability of horticultural skills through better matching of workers. The survey team noted that workers should be recruited in the rural areas and better work allocation should enable those from the mountain districts to be placed in temperate areas in Australia, while those from the hot coastal plains should be placed in the tropical north. Their horticultural skills will then better match the productive potential of their home district. In support of this, LMAP is currently working with SEPFOPE to implement a pilot recruitment of workers from rural districts.

7. Conclusions

The SWP is anticipated to be a win-win situation for Australian farmers and migrant workers. Indeed the SWP is highly sought after and most workers have a high level of satisfaction. However the program is focussed on recruitment of workers to meet the needs of the Australian employers and provide remunerations benefits for the migrant workers, but does not prioritise longer term development outcomes for the families or the sending country, even though this is a stated objective of both DFAT and the Timorese government in promoting labour migration. If more attention were paid to the skills development benefits of the program the development impact could be greater. Not only should there

be support for workers to establish businesses on return, but also a change in the expectation that the same workers will continue returning to a workplace beyond five or six years.

Workers are appreciative of the opportunity to be able to support their families. Overall, they contributed a large part of their time and money in Timor-Leste towards house improvements and daily living expenses. There was a strong interest in establishing economic sustenance at home through a job or business, but there was a gap between the workers' intentions and what they actually achieved. The experience and skills that were acquired through SWP in Australia motivated workers to establish business activities, and a significant amount of money was saved in the bank reflecting their intentions to start a business. Many were unable to realise their plans for two main reasons. Firstly they do not have knowledge for establishing a business enterprise, nor adequate information about how to gain support for a business once back in Timor. Secondly, the selection process does not consider how skills developed in Australia can contribute to the local economy according to their geographic location and match workers accordingly.

For SWP to realise its potential to support the development of horticultural activities in Timor-Leste, more attention is needed to recruit rural workers from the districts where some of the horticultural production techniques learned in Australia can be replicated when they return home. A reintegration policy for returning workers is needed, with much greater integration in the national development planning mechanisms, as well as links with non-government agencies that support and promote entrepreneurialism. Government departments such as the Ministry of Agriculture, the Ministry of Tourism, the Ministry of Economic Development and the Ministry for Youth, Employment and Training, could provide technical support to help returning workers integrate into the local economy.

There are various agricultural and business support programs in Timor-Leste which would have the potential to offer support to returning workers on their return home if linkages were made. SEPFOP needs support to make suitable arrangements for support of returning workers with such organisations. In developing the capacity of SEPFOP in this area, these processes should facilitate both the SWP and the Korean EPS returnees to find work, as the same constraints to economic integration exist in both programs. The value that the returned workers could make to the economy, if they were well selected and supported, could be much greater than is currently the case.

A highly significant and remarkable finding was the degree to which workers claimed to have changed their behaviour with respect to gender attitudes since working in Australia. The majority of men said that they had changed their attitudes toward women in their families and are now more supportive of women getting an education and of helping with domestic duties than they were before. Women workers have strengthened their resolve to take greater control over their lives. These workers provide important insights into how the application of gender equality principles in the LMAP program has caused many of the male workers to recognise for the first time women's equal ability in the workplace, in many cases causing a softening of their former patriarchal attitudes. On returning home these men have the potential to make an important, if unplanned contribution towards more equitable community development.

Given the highly complex institutional arrangements across various agencies in two countries, it is recommended that independent research continue to be carried out as the program is developed and changed. SWP participants' observations and experiences that have been collected in this tracer survey

provide valuable insights into the local level implementation of SWP which is essential for ongoing strengthening of the program and its development impacts.

References

- de Haan, A. (2006) 'Migration in the Development Studies Literature - Has It Come Out of Its Marginality?' *UNU-WIDER Research Paper No. 2006/19*.
- ESCAP (2015), 'Asia-Pacific Migration Report 2015 – Migrants' contribution to development' United Nations' Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific.
- Gusmao, JB (2016) Press release by General Director of SEFPOPE Jacinto Barros Gusmão on 1/8/2016
- ILO (2016). Structural Transformation and Jobs in Timor-Leste. International Labour Organisation, Dili.
- Lao Hamutuk (2016), 'Rights and Sustainability in Timor-Leste's Development', November 2016
www.laohamutuk.org
- McWilliam (2014) 'Migration and Rural-Urban Inequalities in Timor-Leste' State, Society and Governance in Melanesia - In Brief 1/2014 ANU.
- Wigglesworth A & Fonseca Z (2016) 'Experiences of young Timorese as migrant workers in Korea', Development Policy Centre, ANU: <http://devpolicy.org/2016-Australasian-aid-conference/Papers/Wigglesworth-Fonseca-Experiences-of-young-Timorese-workers-in-Korea.pdf>
- Wigglesworth A & Boxer I (2017) 'Transitional livelihoods: Timorese migrant workers in the UK' presented at Australasian Aid Conference 15-16 February 2017, ANU Canberra.
http://devpolicy.org/2017-Australasian-Aid-Conference/Papers/Wigglesworth-Boxer_Transitional-livelihoods-Timorese-migrant-workers-UK.pdf
- Wigglesworth A & dos Santos AB (2017) '*Timorese workers in Australia: Seasonal work experiences, skills and future options*' Labour Mobility Assistance Program, Cardno, Melbourne (unpublished).