New step of Vietnamese trainees and workers who contribute to the developments of Japanese industrial sections

Megumi Sakamoto

Vietnam and Japan take a new step for more strong economic cooperation in 2012. In the new EPA between Vietnam and Japan, both countries agreed with the acceptance of the Vietnamese who engage in supplying services as nurses and certificated caseworkers. Japan Times says “Japan has agreed to accept nurses and caregivers from Vietnam under a bilateral economic partnership agreement on condition that they pass a Japanese language test, officials said. Vietnam is the third country Japan has reached a nurse and caregiver agreement with under EPAs after Indonesia and the Philippines. Nurses will receive training during their three-year stay while working at hospitals. Caregivers will be trained for two to four years. If they pass Japan's national exams, they will be allowed to keep working. Due to the difficulties posed by the language barrier, only 11.3 percent of the Indonesian and Filipino nurses passed Japan's national nursing exam in fiscal 2011, which ended last month. Vietnamese nurses and caregivers will receive Japanese lessons for about one year and take a Japanese language test in their home country. They will be allowed to come to Japan if they are able to speak enough Japanese to hold everyday conversations. The first group of Vietnamese nurses and caregivers is expected to visit Japan in the spring of 2014.”

http://www.japantimes.co.jp/text/nn20120420a7.html

Nhật Bản tuyển điều dưỡng, hồ lý Việt Nam
Thứ Ba, 24/04/2012 21:10
(NLD) - Tại hội thảo do Hội Điều dưỡng Việt Nam và Tổ chức Phát triển nguồn lực châu Á của Nhật Bản (AHP) tổ chức ở Hà Nội ngày 24-4, đại diện AHP cho biết Nhật Bản sẽ tiếp nhận điều dưỡng viên, hồ lý Việt Nam sang làm việc trong 3 năm (với điều dưỡng viên) và 4 năm (với hồ lý)
Trong thời gian này, các ứng viên được tham gia kỳ thi lấy chứng chỉ quốc gia của Nhật Bản, nếu thi đậu, có thể được làm việc lâu dài tại các bệnh viện và cơ sở điều dưỡng ở Nhật Bản với mức lương khoảng 2.500 - 3.000 USD/tháng.
Đự kiến, mỗi năm Nhật Bản sẽ tiếp nhận khoảng 500 điều dưỡng và hồ lý Việt Nam sang học tập, làm việc. Hiến mỗi năm Việt Nam đào tạo được khoảng 30.000 điều dưỡng viên, trong đó 5.000 - 6.000 điều dưỡng có trình độ đại học, cao đẳng.
As for the Vietnamese trainee and workers, using Japanese ‘Technical Intern Training’ system, already more than 30,000 Vietnamese trainee and workers visited Japanese for 3 years and supplied skilful workforces in Japanese industrial sections including automobile industries, sewing industry, plastic parts and machine processing industry.

Vietnamese trainees and workers have the reputation for their earnestness and high skills. Now, Japan, especially North East part of Japan including Fukushima face with the serious shortage of human powers, so Vietnamese trainees and workers will play more important part of the Japan’s recovery from the earthquake in 2011.

To attain the mutual and sustainable partnership in this field, both countries overcome some problems. One urgent task for both countries is the problem how can protect the several human rights of the Vietnam workers and trainees? The total number of Vietnam trainee and worker is even up to 8000, after the earthquake. They are already the essential part of the Japanese industry, but also in some cases, unfortunately Japanese companies and owners would not pay the enough regal payments, and Japanese owners force the illegally long time work on Vietnamese. Especially in the sewing factory, the workers are almost 20yeras and 30years ladies, so Japanese male owner even do the sexual harassments and violence.

To protect the human rights of Vietnam trainees and workers is the emergent task for both countries for the advancement of EPA and the sustainable economic partnership. Most important thing is the mutual action and cooperation for the problems basing on the mutual communication about what is happening for the Vietnam workers and trainees in Japan. My talking today will refer the solution of the problems.

Firstly, I would like to show the current situation of the Labor export of Vietnam. Vietnam started the export of workforce in early 1980s. And reportedly around 80,000 peoples are dispatched to countries oversea as workforce and currently total number of workers staying oversea is up to 500,000. Figure 1 shows the situation. Total number of the workers dramatically increased after 1998. In 1997, Vietnam also faced with economic difficulties caused by the Asian monetary crisis. Vietnam government tried to improve the situation and issued Directive No.41. The target of this direction was to contribute to the development of human resources, to create jobs, to generate income of the workers and to improve the skills of workers. Directive No.41 also tried to lay the solid foundation for the long-term partnership with the opposite countries. During these 10years, the number of labor export from Vietnam steady increased. Total number of export in 1998 was 10,000. This become more than 8 times in 2007. Vietnam plans to send 85,000 workers abroad in 2011. Research of Mr. Pham Viet Huong, Head of
Planning and Finance Division of Department of Oversea Labour (DOLAB) and Ministry of Labour, Invalids and Social Affairs, Vietnam (MOLSA) gives us fruitful basis for our examination.

Figure 1 is his document and shows the number of outflow of Vietnamese migrant workers from 2000 to 2011. Averagely Vietnam sends around 85,000 workers every year for oversea after 2007 except 2009 when Lehman Crisis hit the world economy.

**Figure 1. Outflow of Vietnamese Migrant Workers**

Major receiving countries are Taiwan, Malaysia, South Korea and Japan. These major four countries occupies almost 70% of the total number of labor export of Vietnam from 1992 to 2009. First is Taiwan and the number of receiving workers for 18years is up to 210,000 (28%). Malaysia is the second receiving country and receives 170,000(23%). South Korea is third country to accept 115,000(15%). Japan is the same with South Korea and 115,000 Vietnamese come to work during 18years from 1992. This means averagely 6400 Vietnamese workers visit to stay Japan every year. In 2011, Vietnam sends 500,000 workers internationally, and North-East Asia occupies 35% of the export.

**Figure 2.**
To think about Japan’s national scheme of acceptance of foreign workers including Vietnamese, the gradual decline of the population and workforce in Japan have to be discussed. American magazine “Economist” writes as follows in an article titled ‘Japan is Ageing Faster than Any Country in history’ and shows the population structure and pyramid.

“FOR about 50 years after the Second World War the combination of Japan's fast-growing labour force and the rising productivity of its famously industrious workers created a growth miracle.

2. Japan’s Shortage of Workforce and “Technical Intern Training Program.”

Figure 3.

Figure 4.
Within two generations the number of people of working age increased by 37m and Japan went from ruins to the world's second-largest economy. In the next 40 years that process will go into reverse. The working-age population will shrink so quickly that by 2050 it will be smaller than it was in 1950, and four out of ten Japanese will be over 65. Unless Japan's productivity rises faster than its workforce declines, which seems unlikely, its economy will shrink.”

American economist Michael Mandel shows his opinion in his column on the web site titled “The End of Japan as an Industrial Power?” and says as follow: “Basically, Japan’s working-age population is anticipated to drop by 20% over the next 20 years. And that actually understates the problem in the rural areas, which have felt a youth drain to the big cities. That makes it much more attractive to invest in China and the U.S., of all places, which have more desirable demographics for both the workforce and consumption. Ten years from now, much of what is made in Japan today will be made elsewhere.”

This kind of the general tendency of the shortage of workforce in Japan even surpasses the speed of other aging countries. UN’s demographics point out the same fact showing the change in the working aged population growth rate, between the ages of 20 and 65 in Japan, USA, Western Europe and Australia/New Zealand. (Medium Variant Projections, World Population Prospects: The 2008 Revision)

http://unpleasantfacts.com/working-age-population-demographics-the-one-p-0

On the other hand, Figure 3 shows ‘With 65% of the population aged 30 or younger, Vietnam is a country of youth. This population “bonus” will be critical in determining Vietnam’s destiny over the next decades, as they finish school, enter the workforce, become consumers, have families, and so on. Although females still outnumber males in terms of overall population (due to longer life expectancy), the male to female ratio at birth is quite high. The 2010 estimate for Vietnam is 1.115 males to 1 female.

http://veryvietnam.com/country/

Reflecting these situations, Japan introduced new accepting scheme named “Technical Intern Training Program.” Using this Program, already more than 50,000 Vietnamese trainee and workers visited Japan. Japanese government officially says “The Japanese Technical Intern Training Program (TITP) aims to accept young workers from various countries, who then obtain Japanese industrial and vocational skills in Japan, thereby, contributing to the improvement of their occupational lives after their return to home countries, and also to the development of industries and business enterprises in their countries.” But obviously this national scheme was introduced to compensate the shortage of workforce with drastically
cheap wage for the Japanese companies to survive the competition of the international market. I also would like to point out that Vietnamese workers are already the essential workforce for the Japanese industries including automobile makers, TOYOTA, HONDA, NISSAN, SUZUKI, sewing industry, plastic parts makers and even agriculture.

In 2011, Japan accepted 175,000 foreign workers with “Technical Intern Training Program.” The details are as follows;

**Figure9. Total No. of Trainee &Worker in Japan (12.2011)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Total No. of Trainee &amp; Worker</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>China</td>
<td>121,672 (78%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vietnam</td>
<td>13,414 (9%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Philippines</td>
<td>8,473 (5%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indonesia</td>
<td>8,263 (5%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thai</td>
<td>2,704 (2%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>1,565 (1%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Chinese occupies almost 80% of the total number of the trainees and workers. Vietnam is the second major country sending around 5,000 workers every year to Japan. This number varies from the industry. For example, the sewing industry, more than 30,000 workers are on the job. They are almost female between 20 and 40 years. As for the machine processing industry, including press processing, and plastic processing, also around 30,000 peoples work. They are mainly the male worker. Machine workers are daily facing with the serious accidents on their job simply because of the difficulty of their communication in Japanese and the lack of enough technical supports by Japanese employers.
It can be concluded that foreign workers help the fundamental part of Japanese economy and industries and Vietnamese play an important part of the contribution especially in the sewing and machine processing industry in Japan. Considering with the Japan’s shrinking population and workforce, this mutual cooperation between Vietnam and Japan must be stress in both countries. And Japan have the obligation to arrange more properly working condition as an accepting country of Vietnamese workers with the international standard.

3. What is the obstacle of the mutual cooperation between Vietnam and Japan?

Last point is the serious problems relating with the sending and accepting of Vietnam workers. In the Japanese “Industrial Training and Technical Internship Program” ’training’ is hardly actually done, and a lot of troubles are reported from various places in Japan including the serious dehumanizing treaty against the trainees as a simple cheap worker paying the lowest hourly wage about 300 Japanese yen. As for Vietnam the number quickly raised up in these three years and up to 5,000. Their Japanese language skill is not so high, so once some trouble happens, they do not know whom and to which organizations they can ask for help. The outside totally do not know well about their troubles because of they are locked in the companies. The language barrier enhances this situation. This is also true for them to try to assert their claims and rights to the company and the commissioner (they usually called Accepting Union). It is difficult for them to have enough negotiations because of their communicative ability.

A large sum of deposit that exceeds 1.5 million yen is imposed for some applicants, for the language training in their original country (Ho Chi Minh or Hanoi, in case of Vietnam) before coming to Japan, and others are not given any language training. What has happens to the trainees while leaving far from the information and the contact with the outside, now? The serious example of the reality comes up in Feb.2007 This happened in Fukushima Prefecture (North East part of mainland Japan) Tamura City, a small sewing company named "Fashion Midori Ltd." 16 trainees came from Vietnam(Y Yen, Nam Dinh district) to Fukushima in 2004 and 05. The hourly wage was about 300 yen, less than half of the Fukushima Prefecture’s minimum regal wage 618 yen, the overtime work started even from the first month of their arrival (in first year, overtime works are prohibited formally), and it lasted 164 hours a month in the maximum. Their works start at 8 AM and end with two or three o'clock in the morning next day. They could take rest only on Sunday. But, they say even on Sunday they worked occasionally. All members are women in their twenties and thirties. “Onaca, Itai, Atama Itai. Chotto, dake, Yasmasete, Kudasai (Today, I feel stomachace and headache, so please allow me to take a rest for a while)” Even they appealed in Japanese, the owner of the company, just replied, “We are so busy now and you cannot.” They claim to my interview; they had never been to the hospital for these three years.

They all came from the farm village, Y Yen, 120km from Hanoi and continued to work even
in this situation because “We can earn money” and their net profit was only about 60,000 yen every month. This sophisticated illegal system that imposes the long working hours with this incredibly cheap payment might have been completed here but we can point it out again; this is the definite violation of Japanese’ Labor Standards Law

In addition, the company went bankrupt suddenly at the end of December 2006. About five-month salaries unpaid and the total arrear to the trainees exceeded 7,000,000 yen. In spite of the company had imposed to pay them as “Chyo kin (Saving)” (The skill trainee in third year left 910,000 yen a person, to the company and about 12 million yen in total for 16 ladies), the owner says “I cannot return only one yen” Though, the first accepting organization “Ken-Nan Sen-i Kyo-do Kumi-ai (South Part of Fukushima Prefecture, Fiber Cooperation) owe the responsibility formally, but it seems to say “The responsibility is in the owner, we do not have.”

In Jan. 2007, the electricity, the gas, and water service in their lodging were all stopped out. Without knowing whom they can ask for help and the language barrier again, the ladies went up to the nearby mountain to cut to burn.

(↑Water stocks in 30 plastic cases in the trainee’s residence)

Ken-Nan union said to the female trainees “The police will come to arrest you if you insist to stay more and visa will be expired” and made them return home compulsory from the Sendai airport in 14th Feb. It is still crucially important for the related organizations to have close watch to the Ken Nan Union and the agencies in Vietnam to request them to restore the savings and the compensation of the gap between the wage and the minimum rate.

The director of the accepting group also did the same illegal act again in 2009 for female Vietnamese trainee. But this time, Labour Union, Fukushima Ken Roren, Lowyers, and University researcher strongly backed up the Vietnamese workers and 8 Vietnamese females could take legal action and started civil suit to the Fukushima local court in September 2009. First court admit the claim of the ladies and ordered the owner of the company and the accepting group to pay the compensation and unpaid salary. Total amount was up to 35million yen. In Japan now more than 120 lawyers support the trials to protect the human rights of foreign workers. Among them, 5 are for Vietnamese worker. This kind of troubles relating with human rights and might be the new obstacles for the economic partnership between Vietnam and Japan.
Our mutual cooperation already have the firm basis. I would like to pick up the important academic researches. First example is operated by an independent researcher and expert of Asian labour export, Kannika Angsuthanasombat. Kannika summarizes the situation in his paper “Situation and Trends of Vietnamese Labor Export”.

Employers prefer Vietnamese workers as they are hard-working, active, intelligent, open and skilful and are always ready to do extra work. The weaknesses of Vietnamese workers include the fact that most of them are from rural areas and are not yet used to industrialized working practices. In addition, most Vietnamese guest workers’ foreign language skills are poor, particularly in English, resulting in failure to penetrate foreign markets offering them high salaries. Moreover, their certificates or degrees have not yet been recognized internationally so they only can engage in non-professional work when abroad. (Vietnam News, 2007; PANO - Economy, 2007)

**Difficulties faced:**

1. Limited information before departure, little awareness of migrant rights, how to protect and solve problems, little understanding of traditions and culture during work abroad in host country.
2. Communication problems particularly in English.
3. Poor working conditions.
4. In recent years, they are more vulnerable to be trafficked through illegitimate labor export companies.
5. High cost of recruitment fees as workers mostly borrow from relatives or from non-banking sources at a much higher interest rate. They do so, however, as working abroad will enable them to earn much higher salaries than working in Vietnam.
6. The workers have been terminating their contracts and working illegally. Recently, the manpower companies are facing a tough challenge in Taiwan, S. Korea and Japan, as workers are independently moving to higher paying jobs or residing there illegally. Among the reasons for this are high pre-departure expenditures, large amounts of debt, earning a
much higher income, and little opportunity to work abroad again after returning to Vietnam.

Second advanced and the most informative research is “International Labour Migration from Vietnam to Asian Countries 2009 (ILAMI Vietnam 2009 Survey)” operated by Danièle Bélanger, Le Bach Duong, Tran Giang Linh and Khuat Thu Hong.

**Figure 11. ILAMI Vietnam 2009 Survey. Migrants who Reported Discrepancies in Information Received Before Departure and Actual Work Situation.**

The research group comment for this result. ‘[This Figure shows] the information given to them prior to departure (on their work contract or by their recruiters orally) was not accurate….The most common inaccuracies involved their salaries. Firstly, many workers understood from their contracts that they would be able to work overtime; however, once in their workplace, it was not the case. Since they had calculated the ability to repay their costs based on the expectation of working overtime, many felt cheated. Secondly, many reported that they were not paid the amount promised.’

**Figure 12. ILAMI Vietnam 2009 Survey. Migrants who Reported Unfair Treatment by Employer.**
Figure 13. ILAMI Vietnam 2009 Survey. Main Reason for Return Among Early Returnees.

Results show large differences between countries with Japan offering the highest monthly averages, followed by South Korea, Taiwan and Malaysia. Despite higher incomes, workers in Japan had high living expenses during their second and third year, significantly reducing their remittances.

Conclusion

Kannika Angsuthanasombat’s ‘Recommendations’ to improve the situation are quite useful to conclude the discussion. Following comments are quoted from it.

1. Raise public awareness of both positive & negative information, the risks of working abroad, problems, difficulties particularly to rural/village areas, targeting local government and schools in areas of high numbers of migrant workers and their families.
2. Promote documented workers, reduce irregular migration, improve the quality together with quantity of overseas workers, and particularly increase the number of technically skilled workers.
3. The pre-departure training is very important for overseas workers especially on arrival and working at the new place. Therefore, the training should focus more on increasing the efficiency of language skills, vocational training, and providing information relating to protections such as labour laws, organizations and people to contact when they face difficulties or problems, contact information of the Vietnamese Embassy, and general information of the destination country such as culture, lifestyle etc. Good understanding along with good information would be useful for them to protect their migrant rights.
4. Support the workers by decreasing the cost of recruitment fees, increasing income, ensuring good working conditions and good environments. Develop and support services for Vietnamese overseas workers in the receiving countries through the embassies and recruitment agencies are also vital.
5. Protect migrant workers’ rights, especially female workers, as recently there is an increasing number of female migrants, with one third of workers being women. They must learn how to protect their rights and improve their welfare particularly those working as domestic helpers.
6. In addition, in order to deal with returning and reintegration, they should set up policies for the reintegration of returned workers including entrepreneurship promotion, training and education programmes to assist returning migrants efficiency in financial management of
remittances, investment decisions, and good relations with their family while working abroad and when they return.

As Kannika Angsuthanasombha recommends there are several urgent tasks for Vietnam and Japan to protect the Vietnamese workers and trainees. These tasks will also be the solid basements for the mutual economic partnership for the near future. Vietnam government has already made stresses on the protection of the human rights of the workers overseas. On the other hand, in Japan, almost 120 lawyers belonging to the Association of Lawyer for Foreign Trainees (Kensyusei mondai Bengosi Renrakukai) and several workers unions including Trainee’s Rights Network (Kensyusei Kenri Network, and National Confederation of Trade Unions (Zenroren) and academic researchers have exerted to protect foreign workers for these 10 years. 34 trials are on in Japanese court claiming by foreign workers including Vietnamese to recover their unpaid salaries and to get compensations for the illegal treatments by the owners of their companies.

Now is the time for both countries and academic researchers to promote the mutual action and cooperation for the problems basing on the close communication about what is happening for the Vietnam workers and trainees in Japan for the advancement of EPA and the sustainable economic partnership.