



# PROCEEDINGS OF SEMINAR ON PUBLIC RESPONSES TO FOREIGN WORKERS IN SABAH

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**Research Unit for Ethnography & Development  
Universiti Malaysia Sabah**

**Proceedings of Seminar on:  
PUBLIC RESPONSES TO FOREIGN  
WORKERS IN SABAH**



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Edited by:  
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## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

<b>ADUN</b>	<b>Ahli Dewan Undangan Negeri (Member of the State Legislative Assembly)</b>
<b>BIMP-EAGA</b>	<b>Brunei Indonesia Malaysia Philippines-East Asia Growth Area</b>
<b>CIDB</b>	<b>Construction Industry Development Board</b>
<b>DPBS</b>	<b>Dewan Perniagaan Bumiputra Sabah (Sabah Bumiputera Chamber of Commerce)</b>
<b>EMPA</b>	<b>East Malaysian Planters' Association</b>
<b>FELCRA</b>	<b>Federal Land Consolidation and Rehabilitation Authority</b>
<b>FELDA</b>	<b>Federal Land Development Authority</b>
<b>FFB</b>	<b>Fresh Fruit Bunch</b>
<b>FOMEMA</b>	<b>Foreign Workers' Medical Examination and Monitoring Agency</b>
<b>FSM</b>	<b>Federation of Sabah Manufacturers</b>
<b>GNP</b>	<b>Gross National Product</b>
<b>ICT</b>	<b>Information and Communication Technology</b>
<b>ILP</b>	<b>Institut Latihan Perindustrian (Industrial Training Institute)</b>
<b>JKKK</b>	<b>Jawatankuasa Kemajuan dan Keselamatan Kampung</b>
<b>JKR</b>	<b>Jabatan Kerja Raya</b>
<b>KDN</b>	<b>Kementerian Dalam Negeri</b>
<b>MAPA</b>	<b>Malaysian Agricultural Producers' Association</b>
<b>MLVK</b>	<b>Majlis Latihan Vokasional Kebangsaan (National Vocational Training Council)</b>
<b>MP</b>	<b>Ahli Parlimen (Member of Parliament)</b>
<b>MPOA</b>	<b>Malaysian Palm Oil Association</b>
<b>MPOB</b>	<b>Malaysian Palm Oil Board</b>
<b>MSC</b>	<b>Malaysian Super Corridor</b>
<b>MTUC</b>	<b>Malaysian Trade Union Congress</b>
<b>NPC</b>	<b>National Productivity Corporation</b>
<b>NUPW</b>	<b>National Union of Plantation Workers</b>
<b>PAM</b>	<b>Persatuan Arkitek Malaysia</b>
<b>PDRM</b>	<b>Polis Diraja Malaysia (Royal Malaysian Police)</b>
<b>PLKS</b>	<b>Pas Lawatan Kerja Sementara</b>
<b>SHAREDADA</b>	<b>Sabah House and Real Estate Developers' Association</b>
<b>SLDB</b>	<b>Sabah Land Development Board</b>
<b>SSTC</b>	<b>Sabah Skill and Technology Centre</b>
<b>VSS</b>	<b>Voluntary Separation Scheme</b>

## **PREFACE**

On the 11<sup>th</sup> of May 2004, Unit Penyelidikan Etnografi dan Pembangunan (UPEP) held a seminar on “Public Responses to Foreign Workers in Sabah” to provide a platform for informed discussion on the subject by various interested parties. UPEP invited representatives from the manufacturing, construction, agricultural and commercial sectors and recruiting agencies to present their views on the subject along with members of the academic community.

The seminar is part of UPEP’s on-going research project entitled “State and Public Responses to the Presence and Employment of Foreign Workers in Sabah” which is funded by a grant from Universiti Malaysia Sabah (UMS) under its Fundamental Research Grant Programme. The project which began in early 2003 involves a team of six researchers from the School of Social Sciences, led by head of UPEP, Prof. Dr. Azizah Kassim. Fieldwork for the project was carried out in several phases which began with site visits to immigrant settlements and their places of work as well as several government departments in Sandakan, Semporna, Tawau, Kudat, Kota Marudu, Lahad Datu, Kunak and Kota Kinabalu in an attempt to get a comprehensive picture of the issues and problems related to foreign workers and to gauge the responses of the state authorities towards them. This was followed by intensive fieldwork in Kota Kinabalu, the main focus of our research, where responses of the public was studied through focussed group discussions with community leaders and by questionnaire surveys.

With the completion of the fieldwork at the end of 2003 members of the research team are now in the process of analysing the research data and writing up their findings. The first part of the findings on state responses to the presence and employment of foreign workers was presented at an earlier workshop held in February 2004. In this seminar, the team members presented the second part of their findings which touches on public responses. They were joined by representatives of organisations which have direct dealings with foreign workers namely the Malaysian Palm Oil Association (MPOA); Federation of Sabah Manufacturers (FSM); East Malaysia Planters’ Association (EMPA); Sabah Housing and Real Estate Developers’ Association (SHARED); Sawit Kinabalu Berhad; Emcojuta recruiting agency;



and Sabah Bumiputera Chamber of Commerce. The off-campus writers who are experienced in their respective fields presented excellent in-depth insights to their specific problems in dealing with foreign workers. Our research team members feel that such information should be shared with others; hence our decision to publish the seminar papers.

We extend our profound thanks to Universiti Malaysia Sabah, particularly to our Vice Chancellor, Tan Sri Professor Datuk Seri Panglima Dr. Abu Hassan Othman and the Deputy Vice Chancellor for Research and Development, Professor Datuk Dr. Kamaruzaman Ampon, for providing us the research grant and for funding our seminars and publication. We also wish to thank all the paper writers for their contributions and hope they will continue to assist and co-operate with us in subsequent research projects, seminars and publications.

Azizah Kassim  
Editor

# **MIGRANT WORKERS AND THE PLANTATION SECTOR**

*Daud Amatzin\**

## **1.1 Introduction**

The subject of labour shortage in the oil palm sector in Malaysia is a perennial concern to planters; as relative to the biological nature of the palm tree itself. This predicament has been haunting the sector ever since the first large-scale undertaking of plantation tree crops that took place in this country some 130 years ago.

There is no argument to the fact that most primary agricultural production is labour intensive the world over. We have also seen tremendous progress and improvements being achieved through technological development and mechanisation in many aspects of farm operations. However, there are limitations, which are inherently most challenging to some crop such as oil palm in the tropics. The oil palm sector in Malaysia has undergone many changes in many aspects in order to remain sustainable. Nonetheless, one aspect that has consistently plagued the sector is the one concerning human elements.

To illustrate the point to-date, little progress was achieved to replace manual harvesting of the fresh fruit bunch (FFB) from the palm trees with a mechanical harvester, despite much effort being made by the Malaysian Palm Oil Board (MPOB). Compounded by the government pursuit to become an industrialised nation by year 2020, this accelerates the level of competition for recruitment of local workers. The tight domestic availability of suitable manpower has prompted the government to allow the employment of foreign workers from approved source countries in certain sectors including the plantation.

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*\*Mr. Daud Amatzin is Head of Government Affairs, Malaysian Palm Oil Association (MPOA), Kuala Lumpur.*