

Labour Force Shortages in Rural New Zealand: Temporary Migration and the Recognised Seasonal Employer (RSE) Work Policy

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Abstract

Contemporary economic and social change in the agricultural sector in New Zealand in conjunction with a time of full employment has ensured that labour shortages are an increasing reality for many primary producers. Increasingly too, changes in land use within this sector, especially where viticulture and horticulture have replaced sheep and beef production in some areas, have increased the demand for temporary seasonal workers. This paper explores how New Zealand immigration policy is responding to these changes in the agricultural, horticultural and viticultural sectors, paying particular attention to the use of temporary migration as a means to address labour shortages in these sectors through the Recognised Seasonal Employer (RSE) policy. The paper draws on interviews with public sector stakeholders conducted in late 2007 and early 2008 where the objective was to explore the reasons for establishing the RSE policy, the process of policy development and anticipated outcomes. This paper outlines the intentions behind this scheme, observes current research in the area and highlights the need for further research on the use of temporary migration to meet labour needs in New Zealand.

New Zealand has experienced significant economic change in the last three decades which in turn has led to changes in labour requirements and demands. During this period the New Zealand government has focused on sectors requiring a high level of skill, for example, the health sector, information technology and business services, and how migration might assist in addressing labour shortages in these

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sectors. Skilled labour and migration have also attracted considerable attention from both the media and researchers alike. Labour market shifts and emergent needs have prompted various policy shifts that culminated in the development of an immigration strategy from 1987 onwards that attempts to attract skilled and business migrants to New Zealand as permanent residents (Bedford & Ho 2006; Benson-Rea & Rawlinson 2003). Not surprisingly, much of the debate in migration research until recently in New Zealand, has focused on the various implications of this major policy shift, consequent migrant flows and integration outcomes for new settlers (Iredale 2000, Lovelock & Trlin 2007; Nash *et al.* 2006; Watts & Trlin 2000). Thus, there is an established body of research which has focused on skilled migrants and permanent migration policy in New Zealand over the last two decades and there is ongoing research in this area (Bedford *et al.* 2002; Bedford *et al.* 2005; Trlin & Spoonley 2005).

Yet, despite some evidence of a shift toward a knowledge-based economy and the subsequent labour demands that this generates, New Zealand's export economy remains primarily dependent on agricultural production and arguably will continue to be so into the next century. This predominant means of production carries with it significant labour demands and requires both skilled and semi-skilled workers. With respect to the latter, the local labour market has struggled to provide the seasonal, casual and in some cases permanent semi-skilled labour required by the agricultural sector.¹ Bedford and Ho (2006) observe that temporary migrants and policy to address temporary migration have become increasingly important over the last decade in New Zealand. Here however, the focus has tended to be on acknowledging that temporary migration can serve as a tool to facilitate permanent migration of skilled workers in what has become an increasingly competitive global market (Cobb & Clarke 1997; Iredale 2000).

However, temporary migration is also a means of addressing semi-skilled labour shortages, where permanent settlement is neither the intention nor the outcome. The important role that temporary migration plays in assisting producers in horticulture, viticulture and agriculture reach their production objectives should not be underestimated. Temporary migration is emerging as an important component in migration policy and practice in New Zealand, however not all temporary migrants are the same, nor will they share the same trajectory of experience. Temporary migration

practices have important economic, social and cultural implications for both New Zealand society and for those countries supplying the labour, and consequently demands long term research attention.

The Agricultural and Horticultural Sectors

Agricultural production in New Zealand contributes over 60 percent of export earnings (Statistics New Zealand 2008). The agricultural workforce comprises nine percent of the total New Zealand labour force and the labour takes place on approximately 66 000 farms, dispersed throughout the North and South islands (Statistics New Zealand 2008). The agricultural workforce of approximately 103,000 workers is culturally diverse, aging, geographically dispersed, and has a diverse set of skills (Statistics New Zealand 2008). Over the last thirty years the agricultural sector has experienced increasing intensification: specifically there has been a decrease in the number of farms, an increase in stock levels and increased mechanisation across the sector. There have also been significant changes in land use in some regions, with some producers moving out of grazing and grain cropping and into viticulture and horticultural production (Le Heron & Pawson 1996; Lovelock 2008; McLeod & Moller 2006; MAF (1)).

These changes in land use and shifts in the profitability of some production practices have ensured changes in labour requirements within the sector. Specifically, sheep and beef producers increasingly rely on part time, casual and seasonal labour and there has been a trend of moving away from employing permanent full time workers (Lovelock 2008; M&W (1)). This shift in employment practice for these producers is due in large part to issues surrounding falling returns for their products, in particular wool and the subsequent inability to afford labour (Lovelock 2008). Further, those engaged in viticultural and horticultural production have a greater need and reliance on temporary seasonal labour (HORT (1); Le Heron & Pawson 1996; Lovelock 2008; M&W (1)). There have also been shifts and changes in ownership practices in the sector (Le Heron & Pawson 1996; M&W (1)). The emergence of corporate farms, which usually involve large land holdings, has ensured that some properties employ a significant number of both permanent and temporary workers (Lovelock 2008; Le Heron & Pawson 1996; MAF (1); M&W (1)). In some regions these corporate farms are predominantly engaged in dairying and finding an adequate and reliable

workforce to work on these properties has been difficult for employers (Lovelock 2008; MAF (1); M&W (1)).

Managing constantly shifting labour requirements has been an issue particularly in those regions where land use change has occurred relatively rapidly and where employers have also been experiencing the effects of long-term rural depopulation and loss of services (Lovelock & Leopold 2009)². Attracting temporary, fixed term contract workers for work on a seasonal basis and/or attracting permanent workers into areas where public amenities such as schools, childcare facilities, health care and retail outlets (supplying basic goods), have been lost has been a significant challenge for many employers in rural New Zealand over the last two decades (Lovelock 2008).³

The labour shortage in the rural sector is not new. Arguably, it has been a problem intermittently for this sector since the time of colonial settlement (Martin 1990). More recently, industry forums and their representatives started drawing attention to labour shortages and the pressing need to address these shortages in horticulture, viticulture and agriculture (HORT (1). Throughout the 1990s and early 2000s many industry related publications addressed the economic consequences of not being able to attract workers in time for harvest. Some also raised concerns about the 'work ethic' amongst the local pool of labour, complaining that many of the young who remained in local areas did not want to work or were unreliable. Importantly, in this period, many in the horticultural and viticultural industries attempted to redress the labour shortages themselves (HORT (1)). It has been estimated that attempts to secure labour during these shortages led to as many as 80 percent of growers engaging in the employment of illegal seasonal labour from abroad (HORT(1)). While this practice raised issues with respect to border control it also raised issues with respect to the working conditions provided for these illegal workers.

Demand for Semi-skilled Labour

How the state responds to the 'skill' shortages in the rural sector, has been and looks as though it will continue to be, quite different to responses to skill shortages in sectors requiring high levels of skill. Most notably, it has involved the introduction of various schemes aimed at attracting temporary migrants; those that will stay only for the working season and then return

to their permanent place of residence. More recently these schemes aim to secure 'return' temporary migrants to work in the same industry – even on the same property.

Thus, while we see increasing flows of highly skilled migrant labour occurring across national borders, and, increasing international competition between various settler nations to attract these skilled workers, we also see new and reoccurring flows of low or semi-skilled labour across national borders. However, the flow of low or semi-skilled workers is also commonly a flow of temporary workers, where permanent settlement is not an intended outcome. Typically too, the market for temporary low or semi-skilled workers has become very competitive with various nations targeting labour sources from within their geographic regions and agricultural nations increasingly seeking seasonal temporary labour from their less developed neighbours (Massey *et al.* 1998; Hugo 2004; Martin 2008).⁴

The development of formal temporary migration schemes is an attempt to regulate this migrant flow. In New Zealand as elsewhere, such schemes attempt to address the problem of primary producers acting outside of the law, to provide border protection and to offer some protection for temporary migrant workers whilst they are in New Zealand. Not surprisingly policy development in this area has drawn on established migratory flows and relationships within the region. Increasingly too, attempts have been made to address the social and cultural implications for sending communities – or more broadly still to address 'development' issues in the region (Katseli 2008; Levick & Bedford 1988; McPherson 1981; Ramasamy *et al.* 2008).

One of the key differences between semi-skilled migrants and skilled migrants is the intention of the state to 'temporarily settle' the low or semi-skilled and ultimately encourage the 'permanent settlement' of the skilled. Firstly, it is important to note that not all temporary workers seek permanent settlement, even if it is possible, and arguably this is as true for semi-skilled workers as it is for skilled. However, it is equally important to note that while this observation suggests a commonality between semi-skilled and skilled migrant workers, it is important not to exaggerate commonality between these workers. Critically, the difference between these migrant workers is that there is no intention on the part of the state to encourage the settlement of low or semi-skilled workers; there is intention

to settle the skilled – even if temporary migration is the necessary tool used to facilitate this outcome.

How an individual responds to state intentions is variable, but for the semi-skilled arguably an individual's response is more constrained; not only by state policy, but also the economic circumstances of those they leave behind and the economic realities of what they as workers can command in remuneration from their host society and how much it costs them to remit home. For the unskilled or semi-skilled worker, intentions and 'choices' are constrained and typically shaped by very different economic, social and cultural realities than those that shape the experience of skilled workers.⁵

Thus, while globally it appears we have entered an era of increased mobility, where not all migrants seek permanency, it remains to be demonstrated convincingly that there has been a 'blurring of the boundaries' between different types of movements, as Bedford and Ho (2006:52) argue.⁶ It may be the case that skilled potential migrants will work temporarily, or study (up-skill), in a destination before deciding to seek permanent residence and it is the case that there is no obstacle to these workers achieving this under current immigration policy. However for the low or semi-skilled this option is at best constrained for some and not an option from the outset for those working under the Recognised Seasonal Employer Work Policy. The blurring of boundaries perhaps should be qualified as it appears to be peculiar to skilled migrants who come to 'wait and see' whether they will stay; while there is little blurring for the semi-skilled who come 'knowing they are going home'. We need to be cautious about suggesting or implying commonality between the skilled and semi-skilled temporary migrant because it can obscure vast differences and inequalities that exist between skilled temporary migrants and low or semi-skilled temporary migrants, as well as their source societies and the host society.

Temporary Migration

Researchers in New Zealand have tended to treat temporary and permanent migration quite separately, and consequently, as Bedford and Ho (2006) observe, little consideration has been given to the relation between the two. This clearly has implications for our understanding of the nature of contemporary skilled migration. It also precludes a critical consideration of how we respond to migrants who have been categorised in this way. More

generally too, while little research has addressed the relation between both classes of migration, even less attention has been paid by researchers to temporary migration per se. This is perhaps because researchers have tended to focus on the state's traditional emphasis and practice of settling people permanently in New Zealand.

The relative absence of a research focus on temporary migrant labour is notable, particularly given temporary seasonal migrant labour has been meeting our labour needs in agriculture since the introduction of intensive pastoralisation in New Zealand (Martin 1990). Over time the labour sources have changed and our labour needs have shifted slightly, but the process and practice of employing temporary migrant workers dates back to colonial settlement and continues to play an important role in sustaining and meeting contemporary labour needs in agriculture and increasingly horticulture and viticulture in New Zealand.

There is a small body of research in New Zealand which focuses on temporary migrant workers. This research provides valuable insight into the various schemes which have addressed labour shortages in urban and rural New Zealand through facilitating and regulating the flow of temporary migrant workers. In particular the research has focused on formal and informal schemes aimed at attracting temporary labour from the Pacific from the early 1960s until the late 1980s (Gibson 1983; Levick & Bedford 1988; McPherson 1981). In this period a number of formal and informal schemes operated and targeted specific countries in the Pacific. In 1976 these various country specific schemes were replaced by the South Pacific Work Permit Scheme and at this time a separate scheme was negotiated with Fiji to meet rural labour needs in New Zealand (Levick & Bedford 1988). The South Pacific Work Permit Scheme and the Pacific Islands Industrial Development Scheme (PIIDS) represent a move on the part of the state to formalise and curtail temporary worker movement from the Pacific in a time of rising unemployment and provide an early illustration of the relation between temporary migration and development initiatives in the region (Gibson 1983). In this instance, the South Pacific Work Permit Scheme addressed the perceived need to regulate the informal movement of guest workers from (then Western) Samoa and was in part an attempt to enforce immigration regulations and the PIIDS explicitly addressed development concerns. Specifically, aid was given to facilitate industrial development in the Pacific, in particular to provide incentives for

New Zealand manufacturers to establish manufacturing employment opportunities in the islands and to provide training opportunities for workers in the Pacific (Gibson 1983; Levick & Bedford 1988; McPherson 1981).

The termination of the temporary work scheme with Fiji in 1987 and the curtailment of the informal guest-worker movements from Samoa in this period highlight how temporary migration schemes (formal and informal) can be vulnerable to economic downturn and rising unemployment in the host society. In this instance the economic downturn also shaped shifts in perceptions about the role that temporary migrant employment could or should play in development initiatives within regions and also served as a mechanism by which the host society could sanction political unrest in one source country, Fiji. Space precludes a full discussion of the aforementioned schemes and the processes that shaped their development and their subsequent demise. However it should be noted that these schemes are the historic precursors to the Recognised Seasonal Employer (RSE) policy in New Zealand which currently facilitates and regulates temporary migrant worker flows from the Pacific. Many of the issues and concerns raised by researchers in the 1980s about these earlier schemes have been and will continue to be subjects of debate with respect to the RSE policy. This is, in part because the RSE policy is addressing the same issues that previous schemes set out to address, but also because the RSE policy differs from its precursors in that it explicitly attempts to be beneficial to all parties (Ramasamy *et al.* 2008).

Recently, researchers have focused on the RSE scheme, documenting the origins of the policy and the implementation of the scheme, as well as providing an initial evaluation of the scheme (Ramasamy *et al.* 2008). Other researchers have explored the implications of this temporary migrant scheme for Pacific workers, their households and communities (McKenzie *et al.* 2008; Gibson *et al.* 2006, 2008; Ramasamy *et al.* 2008). This research will be discussed more fully later in the paper.

These studies are part of a comparatively small body of research based literature on temporary migration in New Zealand, and this stands in stark contrast to the vast international literature that considers temporary worker migration for a wide range of sectors and in a large number of locales. While it is beyond the scope of this paper to review this body of international literature in any detail or to consider other schemes operating

in comparable settler and agricultural nations, it is important to note a number of reoccurring issues and concerns that emerge from this research record.

The International Context of Temporary Labour Migration

For nations that recruit temporary migrant labour there are issues that arise over protecting borders, addressing and managing illegal migration, and regulating the nature of the migration so that it remains temporary (Basok 2000). There are also issues surrounding citizenship and rights for temporary workers and access to welfare protection (Engelen 2003). To date the research record has demonstrated in a number of locales that temporary migrants are vulnerable to deprivation and exploitation, including poor housing, poor health provisions, social exclusion, poor health outcomes, and inequitable pay rates (less than that paid to local workers); the latter can potentially precipitate the erosion of work conditions for other workers (Basok 2000; Holmes 2006; Martin 2005; 2006).

Research has demonstrated that temporary migrant workers are often engaged in industries that are hazardous, e.g. agricultural injury and disease is a public health concern in industrialised nations and many of these nations rely heavily on the labour of temporary migrant workers in the agricultural sector (Bean & Issacs 1996; Ciesielki *et al.* 1991; Cooper *et al.* 2006; Culp & Umbarger 2004). There are also health outcomes for families when workers return, for example with AIDS (Ford *et al.* 2001; Goicoechea-Balbona & Grief 1992), or with significant injuries, with mental health issues, or with substance abuse habits developed abroad and continued at home (Hiott *et al.* 2008; Kim-Goodwin *et al.* 2004; Garcia & Gondolf 2004; Rust 1990; Sakala 1987).

With respect to policy in temporary migrant destination countries there tends to be an over reliance on self reporting mechanisms where typically workers are not likely to report difficulties for fear of losing the opportunity to work abroad and remit home, thus compounding vulnerability (Connor *et al.* 2007; Culp *et al.* 2004; Engelen 2003).

Qualitative research in the United States focusing on Latino workers reveals that they often experience considerable racism which manifests itself with respect to access to health care, obtaining reasonable work place conditions and in relation to their experiences in the local

communities within which they reside (temporarily) (Holmes 2006). Other health and cultural outcomes include migrants experiencing the ready availability of commodities which are affordable and may be consumed in excess, with alcohol being a prime example (Garcia & Gandolf 2004; Watson 1997; Worby & Oganista 2007). The temporary migration can also lead to changes in the sexual lives of temporary migrants whilst away working. This can have implications for their relationships back home and their health and the health of others when they return home (Gonzalez Lopez 2005). Managing remittances and adjusting to changes when they return home is also an issue for many temporary migrants (Grzywacz *et al.* 2006).

Additionally, the research record raises theoretical questions about how temporary work schemes contribute to and sustain segmented labour markets within the host communities and globally (Castels & Miller 1998). Ethnographic research has raised the question of whether or not temporary migrant labour can reinforce and reproduce local (host society) inequalities and associated prejudices (Holmes 2006). Further, the local labour shortage raises questions about why locals are no longer prepared to labour in these sectors and the ethics and economic implications of employing those from underdeveloped or developing nations to take up work that locals are no longer prepared to do.

Most industrialised countries have multiple programmes to admit temporary workers and while it has been established that there can be gains for the temporary migrant, the country of origin and the host country, it is also the case that temporary migrant programmes have been historically problematic, particularly for migrant workers who are low or semi-skilled and who are migrating from less developed countries to developed countries. Most host nations are aware of the issues and concerns outlined above and have increasingly moved toward developing policy that addresses roles and responsibilities more explicitly (Martin 2008; Katseli 2008). Increasingly too, some policy initiatives attempt to provide what is referred to as 'a triple win', which includes the migrant, the source country (or region) and host society all benefiting from the policy (Ramasamy *et al.* 2008). These triple win policies, including the RSE policy in New Zealand, explicitly address development and the role temporary migration can play in development initiatives (Martin 2008; Katseli 2008; Ramasamy *et al.* 2008). However, while contemporary policy makers grapple with addressing the

aforementioned issues and concerns, some also observe that no temporary migration policy will eradicate the underlying inequality that underpins the migration of low and semi-skilled workers and the ability of host societies to attract them and retain them on a temporary basis (Martin 2008). Others observe there are significant areas of potential conflict that need to be negotiated if desirable outcomes for all parties are to be achieved (Ramasamy *et al.* 2008).

In part the temporary migrant policy in New Zealand – specifically the Recognised Seasonal Employer policy has sought to anticipate inequity and discriminatory practice by making social security provisions available for some ‘classes’ of temporary workers, by regulating and monitoring working, housing and health conditions for these workers and by attempting to ameliorate negative impacts locally and in the migrant home communities. However, the RSE policy is still very new and whether some of the issues that emerge from the international literature will become issues with respect to this policy will not be evident for some time. Emergent questions will not be answered comprehensively until the RSE policy has not only been running for longer but also until researchers produce evidence based appraisals.⁷

Temporary Migrant Policy and Schemes in New Zealand

There are currently five visa and work policies for temporary seasonal work in the agriculture, horticulture and viticulture industries provided by Immigration New Zealand.⁸ These policies are:

- Recognised Seasonal Employer (RSE) Work Policy
- Transitioning to Recognised Seasonal Employer Policy (TRSE)
- Variations of Conditions (VOC)
- Working Holiday Scheme (WHS)
- Working Holiday Extension (WHE)

This paper focuses on the Recognised Seasonal Employer (RSE) Work Policy.

In 2005/2006 the Department of Labour piloted seasonal work permits in the horticulture and viticulture industry, initially involving the

placement of 4,000 workers. In April 2007 a new seasonal labour policy was introduced, the RSE – Recognised Seasonal Employer Work Policy. While the largest proportion of temporary workers (19 percent) in New Zealand are from the United Kingdom, followed by China (12 percent), the great majority of seasonal temporary workers that are targeted under the RSE policy and those destined to work in horticulture and viticulture are from the Pacific. The RSE policy is open to all Pacific Forum states, initially involving the participation of five countries, Kiribati, Tuvalu, Vanuatu, Samoa and Tonga and more recently including the Solomon Islands. There is currently a cap of 8,000 work permits that can be issued a year and the average permit is granted for a period of six months, with the exceptions being no longer than nine months.⁹

New Zealand employers must meet a number of conditions to be a Recognised Seasonal Employer and must meet a number of responsibilities toward the temporary migrant workers. The steps involved are: 1) the employer must apply to be a Recognised Seasonal Employer and be able to meet several criteria, including the ability to pay the minimum wage for thirty hours a week, provide accommodation, provide pastoral care, and pay half of the worker's return airfare (Department of Labour 2008; Ramasamy *et al.* 2008) employers' must obtain an Agreement to Recruit (ATR), which allows them to employ overseas workers to plant, maintain, harvest and pack crops, and, 3) the prospective worker who has an offer of employment linked to an employer with RSE status and who has an Agreement to Recruit (ATR) can apply for a visa offshore. Workers must apply for a Seasonal Work Visa (SWV), which involves obtaining certain clearances including confirmation of a current and valid passport, undergoing a police check, tuberculosis screening, provision of a medical certificate and a return air ticket. Workers must also attend a pre-departure workshop. There is an optional return for the worker in the following season if various conditions have been met. These conditions include evident compliance with immigration requirements, a continued labour shortage in New Zealand, and a new Agreement To Recruit (ATR) held by the employer (Department of Labour 2008; Ramasamy *et al.* 2008).

Whilst the number of temporary migrant workers employed under the RSE scheme is not large in relation to all migration movements, it is an interesting development and one that has parallels internationally, particularly in North America and Western Europe. Australia is also

currently developing a temporary migrant scheme that will address their labour shortages in agriculture and where they intend to seek labour from Pacific nations (DOL (2)). A number of legislative and policy and guidelines have been developed in New Zealand in response to this initiative; ensuring that these workers are protected by New Zealand employment and workplace legislation, in particular those concerning health and safety conditions at work.

The research record internationally suggests that temporary migrant workers are often vulnerable to exploitation and poor working conditions, especially when the system relies on self reporting of breaches of their employment rights. Certainly, it appears that the New Zealand policy makers have attempted to address these potentialities, but policy cannot insure against all vulnerabilities. Importantly, self reporting remains a feature of these protective policies and under-reporting is potentially an issue when breaches of employment rights arise. The research record in New Zealand is in its infancy, but anecdotal evidence suggests that some workers have had experiences that parallel the experiences of temporary migrant workers internationally (DOL (1)). Yet, it is also the case that some employers and communities have managed the process very effectively (DOL (1)). It would however be naïve to assume that New Zealand will manage this scheme without incident (Lovelock & Leopold forthcoming)¹⁰ and that all of the developmental initiatives will be fully realised.

The preferential status of workers from the Pacific is conditional on the failure of local recruitment, or when an employer does not have an established relationship for recruiting workers from other countries. Labour recruitment links with the Pacific have historical precedence and in part this has predetermined the Pacific focus (Levick & Bedford 1988; McPherson 1981; Spoonley 2006). Like its predecessors this policy also addresses development issues and concerns, but does so with the benefit of having these schemes to reflect upon. The RSE policy is also arguably more ambitious than its predecessors; attempting to realise what is referred to as the triple win for migrants, their countries of origin and their destination (New Zealand) through promoting co-development; this policy sits along other international policy initiatives with an explicit 'pro-poor migration' agenda (Martin 2008; Ramasamy *et al.* 2008; World Bank 2006a).

Remittances and Development in the Pacific

While remitting income back home is the dominant practice of temporary migrant workers globally, and it is acknowledged that these remittances contribute significantly to the economic wellbeing of kin in the countries of origin, typically development initiatives are not developed beyond these individualised transactions (World Bank 2006). The RSE work policy differs in this respect. Underscoring this relationship with the Pacific is an explicit intention to assist with development within the Pacific and to build on established aid relationships with Pacific nations (DOL (1); World Bank 2006; World Bank 2006a). Whilst the remittances back to Pacific countries will have an impact, managing this impact has been considered since inception (DOL (1); Gibson *et al.* 2006). Additionally, for some the exchange is not just one way as some of the employers in New Zealand have entered into joint venture enterprises in the Pacific and thus potentially will be providing employment opportunities in these countries as well as opportunities to work temporarily in New Zealand.¹¹

Explicitly using migration as a means to alleviate poverty is a relatively new approach and one that has emerged as increasingly agricultural nations have required temporary migrant labour to meet their production needs. Increasingly too, semi-skilled workers are globally in demand, and consequently many industrialised agricultural nations requiring this labour are re-evaluating existing policy and developing policy that addresses development needs in the regions they seek labour from.¹² Referred to variously as - pro-poor initiatives – or development sensitive immigration policies, these policies usually involve the development of bilateral agreements which attempt to address the needs of both the source and host societies – or where there is at least a conscious intention to develop a policy that is based on a greater degree of co-operation and reciprocity. However there is usually a caveat here and that is, that migration should not be considered the sole panacea for poverty in developing nations.

Thus, with respect to the RSE policy, the development of policy involved considering the needs of various Pacific nations and exploring how temporary migration might assist with respect to these needs whilst simultaneously addressing labour shortages in New Zealand (DOL (1), DOL (2)). Specifically, high rates of unemployment amongst the young is an issue

for a number of communities in the Pacific and the RSE initially intended to target this pool of labour and address the issue of rising youth unemployment for these countries. However, in the first year that the scheme has been operating the average age of workers recruited was in the mid 30s. Evidently these recruits were not those that were originally discussed as being the ones in need and those that would be targeted. One explanation that has been offered is that the source communities were concerned the first recruits make a good impression on the host communities and not undermine the further development of the scheme, and older migrants were perceived as being more dependable (Gibson *et al.* 2008). If this is the case it remains to be seen if younger recruits will be targeted in the future. Some temporary workers were disappointed on arrival and reportedly did not have very realistic understandings of what working in New Zealand would involve (McKenzie *et al.* 2007). These misunderstandings are being addressed through pre-departure induction programmes run by the Department of Labour.

Pastoral care for temporary migrants whilst in New Zealand has involved addressing issues of accommodation, language translation, transportation and general induction into life in New Zealand, including the provision of recreational opportunities and religious observance where appropriate. The Department of Labour is also in the process of developing pre-departure programmes and onsite induction. Employers are also engaged in developing relationships with the communities their workers come from with the return of these workers anticipated for the next season. All stakeholders seem to concur that this potential labour pool will be increasingly sought after, in particular by Australia, and that long term the employment experience and the strength of relationships with the workers' communities will be key in sustaining access to this labour supply for agriculture, horticulture and viticulture in New Zealand.

Research on employer and temporary worker experiences in New Zealand is to be undertaken by the Labour Department, but to-date most feedback on the experiences of these workers and these communities has been largely anecdotal. Further evaluation will also be conducted by the Department of Labour exploring how the scheme has been operationalised, what support has been provided to the participating Pacific countries and their workers, short term outcomes and how risks have been managed (DOL (2); Ramasamy *et al.* 2008).

Follow up research on the RSE scheme in Tonga and Vanuatu has recently been undertaken and explores the benefits and challenges for participating Pacific countries and New Zealand, while final analyses were not available at the time of writing, results to date suggest that it will be difficult to generalise. That is, the impacts will vary between participating nations in as much as there are differences culturally, institutionally, infrastructurally and developmentally, between participating countries (McKenzie *et al.* 2008). For example, what is possible in Tonga will not necessarily be possible in Papua New Guinea or Vanuatu. Those islands that have greater English language competency, stronger infrastructure, and are less dispersed geographically, will be more likely to attract joint ventures from New Zealand enterprises (Gibson *et al.* 2008). This potentially means that the more disadvantaged might remain disadvantaged.¹³

It is also clear that there are considerable costs associated with participating in the scheme, including visas, airfares, health checks and clearance, internal transport and the cost of remitting payments back home (Gibson *et al.* 2006, 2008). Both Tonga and Vanuatu's finance sectors are attempting to address these costs with upfront loans for workers (Gibson *et al.* 2008). It is evident that there are considerably more men accessing this scheme, than women. It has been concluded that it is too early to observe the impacts on households, however, initial indications are that the recruitment process has proceeded smoothly (albeit with some variability) and the RSE policy has opened up migration opportunities to poor rural households (Gibson *et al.* 2008).

Conclusions

While early indications suggest new opportunities have been presented for the rural poor in the Pacific through the RSE scheme, it is also clear that ongoing research is necessary given that the scheme is still very new and given that many of the social, economic and cultural implications of this scheme will only become evident over a longer time frame. The international research record clearly demonstrates that temporary migrant workers are often very vulnerable and it would be naïve to assume that all vulnerabilities have been circumvented in the New Zealand case. For example, New Zealand as a settler society has considerable experience in

settling the 'permanent' yet this process continues to be problematic. There is much less experience in 'temporary settlement' and we must ask what we have learned from past experiences. Will these temporary migrants experience racism in rural New Zealand? What other forms of social exclusion might operate – both here and back home? What will the long term implications be for these temporary migrants, local communities and their home communities?

There are many questions that need to be asked about the New Zealand context and ongoing questions that need to be explored in participating Island communities. It is clear that we need to remain cognisant of existing and long standing economic, social and cultural differences in the region if the risk of perpetuating, reinforcing and exacerbating existing regional inequality is to be avoided. All of the stakeholders agreed that schemes like the RSE are not a 'fix all' for poverty in the region, however, all also were optimistic that such schemes offer the opportunity for partnerships and a means by which various communities can offer employment to the rural poor.

There remains scope for research that explores what the implications are over a wider time frame both in the Pacific communities participating and in host communities in New Zealand. While the scale of temporary migrant workers employed in agriculture, viticulture and horticulture in New Zealand is smaller than that occurring in some other countries, it is nonetheless an important development and one that warrants ongoing research. It is equally critical that research which explores schemes and policies in New Zealand be situated with respect to international research in this area and that researchers ensure that good intentions do not serve to obscure outcomes and/or serve as a substitute for critical evaluation of this and other temporary migrant schemes in New Zealand.

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Notes

- ¹ Interviews: Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries, Meat and Wool New Zealand, Horticulture New Zealand and the Department of Labour.
- ² Clearly this has wider implications with respect to the population composition of some rural areas, where increasingly the young do not stay to work, young families move to find more secure employment etc. It is beyond the scope of this paper to discuss this in any detail, but ultimately it will have implications for seasonal workers also.
- ³ Space prevents a fuller discussion here, but clearly this has implications not just for those seeking to recruit workers, but also ultimately might have implications for the workers (Lovelock 2008).
- ⁴ Australia is currently developing temporary migrant policy to address labour shortages in their agricultural and horticultural sector and it is anticipated that they will also seek this labour from the same Pacific nations that New Zealand is currently targeting (DOL (1)).
- ⁵ Definitions of “skill” vary over time as too do certain skill demands. Yet even if these definitions are malleable, and they often are when host societies have immediate labour needs, it is seldom the case that a shift occurs that completely erodes the notion that skilled equals educated, professional and potentially permanent, and unskilled, equals low levels of education, labourers and invariably temporary (Martin 2008; Levick & Bedford 1988; McPherson 1981).
- ⁶ “Blurring” suggests that it is increasingly difficult to differentiate between “permanent”, “temporary”, “settler”, and visitor, circular, and or return. Arguably this might be the case for some, but not necessarily the case for all. “Blurring” even if unintentional, implies equity – an equal degree of choice over mobility and stability.
- ⁷ Some of which are currently being undertaken by the Department of Labour and some by the Pacific Island – Migration Study. Waikato University.
- ⁸ As of the 26 November 2007. These can be accessed online via <http://www.immigration.govt.nz.nz/migrant/stream/work/hortvit/>.
- ⁹ Department of Labour website <http://www.dol.govt.nz>
- ¹⁰ Lovelock and Leopold current project on temporary migration and employment in agriculture, horticulture and viticulture, will be completed in 2009.
- ¹¹ Interview 3, DOL, Wellington 2008.
- ¹² For example, Canada (Bram 2006) and Australia (World Bank 2006; McLellan & Mares 2005; 2006).

- ¹³ Observation made by Professor Vijay Naidu, University of South Pacific at Pathways, Circuits and Crossroads: New Research on Population, Migration and Community Dynamics, Annual Meeting, June 2008.

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