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M. Rezaul ISLAM[1]

Abstract

In Malaysia, the highest number of labour force has been contributed from Indonesia. This paper highlights the importance of partnership research between Malaysia and Indonesia. It is seen that the quality of labour force is declining over time in the one hand and the labour conflict is rising on the other. However, there are the questions of labour market situation i.e. the quality of the services for the foreign workers, security, immigration and labour policy. Now a day, partnership research has proved its importance and potentiality to deal many social aspects like labour welfare. This paper mainly highlights two important areas- how the research partnership indentifies Indonesian labour problems who migrated in Malaysia, and then show the role of partnership research in labour welfare policy implication so that both countries can be benefitted through this partnership research.

Keywords: partnership research, labour force, labour welfare, Malaysia, Indonesia

Introduction

Malaysia and Indonesia are bound by deep and common bonds – historical, social, economic and cultural. The histories are entwined in ways that are un-covering. Many Indonesian are living in Malaysia from long time ago, and they are contributing hugely to these communities and society. Research has a key role to play in enabling two countries to forge a new and lasting relationship based on

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friendship, understanding, mutual respect and common interests. As a major emerging economy, Malaysia is expanding its industrial and higher education sectors, developing excellent research, and training institutes. As global research leaders, both countries have much to gain from closer collaboration and widening opportunities for their researchers. There is a growing recognition in both countries that the arts and humanities, as well as generating cultural and economic wealth, enhance quality of life and that both have valuable lessons to learn from each other. Partnership enables organisations to achieve more together than they would work on their own, and this is never truer than when working across national borders.

It is indisputable fact that Malaysia is home to a significant number of legal and illegal foreign workers. The official figures show that migrants comprising about 17 per cent of Malaysia's total labour force of about 11 million. Amnesty's figures mean that legal and undocumented migrant workers comprise a substantial 40 per cent of Malaysia's labour force. Malaysia has been the largest employer of foreign workers in the region since 1999, with migrant workers vital to all key economic sectors: manufacturing, plantation agriculture, construction and services (Kaur, 2006). According to the Ministry of Manpower and Transmigration in 2006, there were 2.7 million Indonesian citizens working legally abroad, these workers constitute approximately 2.8 percent of the Indonesian workforce (ILO, 2012). There are number issues around the labour migration between two countries. This raises a number of questions about the link between interstate conflict and labour migration. Aside from the obvious question of what causes the conflict to emerge at a particular point in time, another question, less studied in the literature, is how the interdependent relationship shapes the way in which the conflict plays out (Nesadurai, 2013). It needs to develop partnerships in order to create the knowledge base for practice in a way that challenges professional hegemony and improves labour welfare. However, the process of developing partnerships in research takes place against a background of academic research traditions and norms, which can present obstacles to collaboration.

Indonesian labour force in Malaysia: Trends and present situation

Malaysia has become increasingly reliant on migrant workers, both legal as well as undocumented, a process built up over three decades and through three phases of post-war labour migration into Malaysia. In the first phase, following an initial influx of Indonesian professional workers, the 1970s saw unskilled Indonesians moving to Malaysia, usually as illegal workers, to take up jobs in Malaysia's thriving plantation sector (Yaakub, 2009, p. 152). By 1984, there were an estimated 500,000 undocumented migrant workers in the country (United Nations, 2008, p. 56). A second phase occurred after the mid-1980s, when demand for migrant workers in manufacturing and in domestic service (maids) grew; 83 per cent of these incoming migrant workers were Indonesians (Pandu, 2007, p.

13). The number of migrant workers in Malaysia grew from one million in 1990 to one and a half million by 1995 and close to two million by 1997, when the Asian financial crisis broke – a figure that excludes one million undocumented migrants (Yaakub 2009, p. 153). The third phase of labour migration took place following the economic recovery after the Asian crisis, reaching a high of three million documented migrant workers at the end of 2008 (800,000 undocumented). The number fell to 1.9 million in 2009, following retrenchment and repatriation of workers during the global financial crisis (Ministry of Finance, Malaysia, 2010). Recent statistics show that there are about 1.817 million registered or regular migrant workers who have entered Malaysia legally and possess valid employment permits and around 50% are from Indonesia. The rest (estimated to be between one and two million) are irregular or undocumented foreign workers (Ministry of Human Resources of Malaysia, 2013). Amnesty International, however, puts the migrant worker population in Malaysia at 4.4 million, of which only half are documented (Amnesty International, 2010, p. 4; Kaur, 2010).

Migrant workers, especially illegal workers, are often viewed as security problems in receiving countries, even if their economic value to the host state is substantial. When migrant workers are abused or treated unfairly in another country, empathy and anger may be evoked in the larger 'community of fate' in the migrants' home country. Joseph Liow's (2003) observation that the conflict between Malaysia and Indonesia was worsened by poor diplomatic communication, Malaysia's weak implementation of policies against illegal migrant workers and Indonesia's inability or unwillingness to patrol migrant outflows points to the importance of state governing capacity in shaping the course of conflict. Aside from the variables outlined in Liow (2003), an effective governing capacity in the case of labour migration must include being able to deal with the potential conflicting impact of migrant workers on different dimensions of security as revealed in the preceding discussion. In addition to the various operations to flush out illegal migrants, legislative and policy changes were also introduced that made illegal migration into Malaysia is a criminal, rather than immigration, offence. In 2002, the Immigration Act 1959/63 was altered so that foreigners working in Malaysia without a valid visa or work permit faced fines of up to MYR10,000 (USD3,200 at current exchange rates), jail of up to five years, as well as six strokes of the cane or the whip (Zainal Abidin 2005, p. 38).

Partnership research: Views and objectives in the light of labour force

Research is a widely applied instrument for harnessing knowledge and providing insight into complex development issues. It helps in generating options for policy, management and action, and in empowering people and organizations in developing and transition countries, as well as industrialised countries. Ultimately, this should make it easier to cope with the challenges of sustainable development under increasingly difficult circumstances. Research for development is therefore

frequently placed in an application-oriented context, in which concepts like inter and transdisciplinary research, equity, ownership, participation, etc. are widely accepted, but are not always put into practice. Research partnerships of various types and intensities, involving research institutions in industrialised and developing or transition1 countries, are important means for contributing to knowledge generation and capacity building (SDC, 2002; Laws et al., 2003).

Classical research partnerships, as understood by the Swiss Commission for Research Partnerships with Developing Countries (KFPE, 1998), comprise a combination of result-oriented research activities and capacity-building components at individual and institutional levels, or both levels simultaneously (see also SDC, 2002). Typically, such research partnerships bring together research institutions and individual researchers or research groups from developing or transition and industrialised countries. Research partnerships enable exchange and mutual learning based on complementary skills and knowledge, and therefore leads to an increased quality of research as well as to building of research capacity in the two countries. In addition, the partnership scheme was considered as a door opener. These include primarily increasing visibility and attractiveness, in particular for local actors, increasing their influence and improving their access to new resources (funding schemes, infrastructure, contacts, information etc.). It promotes better access to information, to new fields of research, and to enhance radius of contacts and interaction, reducing scientific isolation, enhancing confidence, facilitating access to international scientific outreach e.g. in peer-reviewed journals. It also promotes to access to communities and policymakers and better opportunities to give voice to delicate issues, in particular through the external (independent) partner.

There are a number of pre-conditions to develop such partnership research i.e. mutual interest, trust, understanding, sharing of experiences, and a two-way learning process. In an ideal partnership, all partners will work together on an equal footing at all stages and levels. This is particularly important during the agenda-setting process, when research projects or programmes are being designed, as well as for implementation and management. This requires mutual respect, honesty and openness. The partners must be able to communicate effectively, and must be prepared to commit themselves to a long-term involvement. In addition, research relevant to development should have results that are visible and palpable for the local community. The considerable experience of local people should be taken seriously and made use of whenever possible. A basic requirement for the establishment of mutual trust is a continuing dialogue and the exchange of experience among all those involved, including the members of the local community. This includes the people who do not have an official voice, especially the women (such as domestic workers). In spite of the rigours of scientific work, there is a need for personal – even emotional – involvement, and an inner readiness to take part in what is going on. Not only do they need to be modest, but they may well find that the project makes greater demands on their time, endurance and perseverance than their work has done in the past. Tackling common problems together can motivate all the partners to cooperate actively. The best possible division of tasks and responsibilities, based on the different strengths of the partners, offers

the best chance that synergic effects will be produced and made use of, and that all those involved – right up to the end-user – will really benefit from the research activities. Like any kind of cooperative enterprise, research partnership must always be orientated towards particular goals and a specific setting. Research partnership is therefore not always easy to categorise, but three levels can be distinguished in connection with the type, scope and duration of the collaboration: Cooperative Projects, Cooperative Programmes, and Institutional Cooperation. Research partnership essentially develops in four stages. i) One or more partners are found who share an interest in doing research on some aspect of the problem. ii) The partners work together to clarify the theme, and make concrete plans for carrying out the work, including details of organisation and financing. iii) The partners work together on the research, sharing the responsibility for leadership and preparing reports and publications together. iv) Finally, the collaborative effort must be brought to a conclusion. The partners may go their separate ways, or they may continue to work together on new tasks, for example putting the results into practice, doing further research along the same lines, or tackling new problems together (KFPE, 1998).

The 11 principles developed by the Swiss Commission for Research Partnership with Developing Countries (KFPE, 1998) play a crucial role in realising such (ambitious) research partnerships (see *Table 1*).

Table 1: Principles of partnership

Name of principles	Defining principles
Decide on the objectives together	Who originally proposed the project
	Well understanding, understand the theme and secure participation of all relevant actors
	Take interests of all the participants, fit the theme into national or regional research policies
	Consider social, cultural, political, economic, & ecological needs
Build up mutual trust	Partners know enough, and trust each other
	Descriptive outlines and references available for partners
	Plans to make a systematic search
Share information; develop networks	Regular contact at both organisational and technical levels
	Adequate opportunities to make contact and both are sufficiently
Share responsibility	Partners be included in the scientific supervision and the administrative Responsibility
	Responsible partners have an opportunity to see relevant documents
	Personal, organisational and financial conditions necessary for the taking over of responsibility

Create transparency	Mutually agreed financial and other contributions and the rights and duties of all partners recorded in writing
	Partners be fully informed about where financial and other resources come from, how their use is planned, and what they have in fact been used for
	Clear and fair rules about who has the authority to make what financial decisions
Monitor and evaluate the collaboration	Partners are actively involved in internal evaluation
	Jointly defined the criteria for internal evaluation
	External evaluation is advisable
	Adequately monitoring and evaluate the planned or promised financial resources
Disseminate the results	Must access to or dissemination of the results of the research
	Publications for a wider audience planned as well as scientific papers in international and national journals
	Concrete plans for passing on the new knowledge resulting from the project to the people who are directly affected?
	Plans to include appropriate people out of the target groups (i.e. opinion leaders, stakeholders, important local and regional actors) in the process of spreading the information and putting it into practice.
Apply the results	Concrete plans, considering the local, national and regional conditions, to use the results of the research for the benefit of the target group(s)
	Political decision-makers, government bodies and NGOs be informed periodically about the progress of the research, and possible steps towards application be discussed with them
	All the people concerned take part in the plans to put the results into practice, including the members of the target group(s).
Share profits equitably	Partners be appropriately considered when the results of the research are published
	Make the decisions about joint publications
	Have binding agreements been made about the rights of all partners in case the results prove to be of potential commercial value
	Decide the use the economically valuable results, and under what conditions.
Increase research capacity	Planned collaborative research activity will contribute to increasing the scientific capacity of all the partners
	Plans for the exchange of partners for further training
	Concrete support measures are foreseen with the aim of strengthening collaboration.

Partnership research: A tool for problem identification

Partnership research is a newly developed branch of social research. Still this theme did not get strong academic discourse in social research. This paper attempts to develop a framework of this research within social research paradigm. However, more emphasise is given how this partnership framework work to identify the Indonesian labour related problems who are migrated in Malaysia and how both countries can be benefitted each other by this partnership research. The literature describes a number of problems related labour forces in Malaysia. ILO (2010) stated that the problems encountered during the recruitment process in Indonesia, many labour migrants are vulnerable to exploitation and abuse upon arrival in the destination country. Common problems faced by Indonesian labour migrants in destination countries fall into two typical categories, namely labour problems (for example wages that are below agreed rates, unpaid wages, passports and other documentation being retained by employers, excessive working hours, insufficient or no rest periods, inhumane working conditions, restrictions on access to information and communication, insufficient food) and problems related to violence (for example sexual abuse, rape, torture and murder).

Now a day, the important issues are included in labour forces i.e. legal issues, criminal activities, dismissal, labour abuse, recruitment policies, labour management, functions of trade union, power and authorizes of agencies, and. migration policies. The most important task for this partnership research is to identify existing practical problems so that it can be solved in a scientific manner. We have developed a partnership research framework (*Figure 1*) which shows how this research can identify labour related problems. This framework has four wings such as research lenses, research focus, expanded knowledge domains, and research contents and methods. The first wing holds research lenses, which identifies potential Malaysian-Indonesian research communities, such as partner universities of both countries, and governmental and non-governmental research organizations who conduct such kind of research. The second wing identifies the research topic as we have selected partnership research between Malaysia and Indonesia: A case of labour welfare. Here, the research topics should be identified according to both countries' demands and choices. It is significant, as we have mentioned earlier, that there are some preconditions to conduct such kind of research and a number of principles should be followed in order to identify the topic of this research.
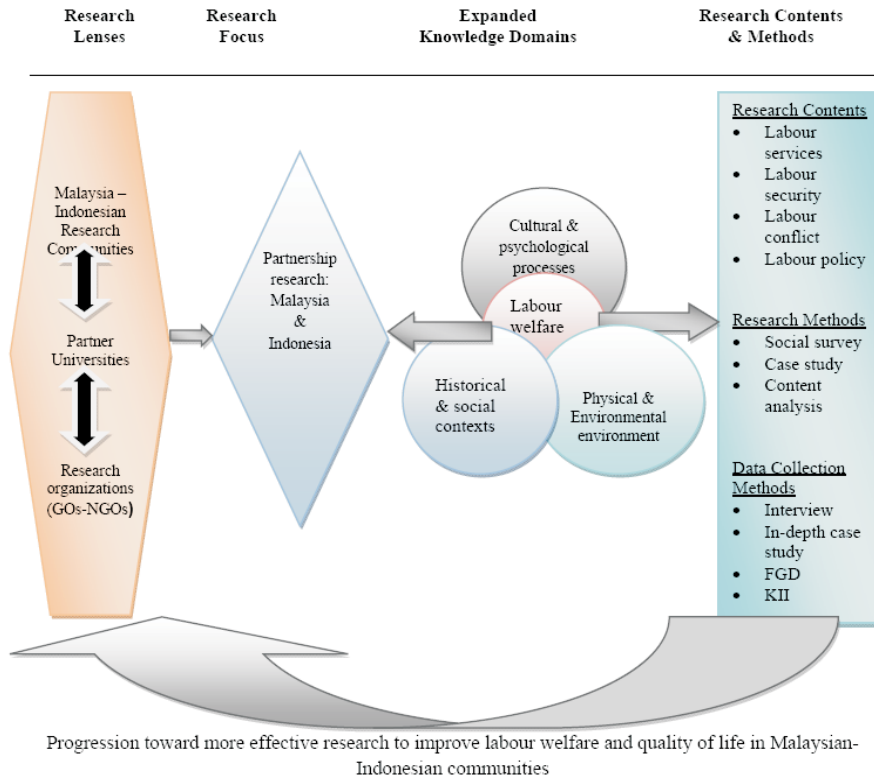
Figure 1. Partnership research framework for problem identification

The third wing helps to expand knowledge domains. Here, this is very important to identify all aspects where the knowledge can be innovated through this partnership research. In our selected labour welfare case, we want to know about the historical and social context, cultural and psychological processes, and physical and economical environment of labour welfare. The historical and social contexts include the labour trends, historical evolution of migrant labour, government laws, rules and regulations, labour management, labour unrest, labour conflict, legal provisions, criminal activities, social security, labour abuse, and related issues. The cultural and psychological processes include labour recreation, labour satisfaction, labour motivation, labour management, labour discrimination, and labour unrest. The physical and economical environment include industrial setting, industry law, physical facilities and infrastructural design, expansion of industrial manufacturing, labour wage and bonus, labour financial incentives, environmental pollution, and environmental facilities and related issues. The fourth wing is about research contents and methods, which comprises research contents, research methods, and data collections methods. The research methods and data collection methods depend on which area has been selected as research topic and what are the main research objectives. Each research method and data

collection method has different advantages and disadvantages. It depends what particular method is using and what is the setting of the research. Partnership research has many substitute options, where one method can supplement with another. Now a day, in most cases, the partnership research use multi-method or mixed method approach, where it is possible to minimize the advantages and disadvantages of the methodological challenges. But a number of procedural level challenges such as reliability and validity, complexity and diversification of human behavior, unavailability and inaccessibility of data, research ethics, and power relations are important consideration in partnership research (see detail Islam & Siti Hajar, 2013). In our case, our research contents can be labour services, labour conflict, labour security, and labour policy. The possible research topics can be used social survey, case study, or content analysis. The data collection methods for such research methods can be interview, in-depth case study, focus group discussion (FGD), and key informants interview (KII). In most of the time, for quantitative information we use social survey as research method and interview schedule as data collection method. In some cases such as labour security, in-creasing labour services, or for policy changes we use case study as research method and in-depth case study, FGD and KII for data collection methods in order to get qualitative data.

Partnership research: A tool for policy implication

The relationship between social research and social policy is widely discussed internationally with an extensive international literature drawing on a range of different perspectives. This relationship is neither linear nor unidirectional. Policy formation is a complex process, in which many factors other than evidence need to be considered. Over the years, however, many policymakers have been disapp-ointed with the assistance they have obtained from behavioral and social science research. The major problem has been that different research studies on the same question have reported conflicting and contradictory findings and conclusions, leaving policymakers puzzled as to which findings were correct and which should be chosen as the foundation for policy recommendations (Hunter & Schmidt, 1996). We know that research is one way for policy-makers and other stakeholders to identify which policies are most effective and how they can best be implemented in different contexts. Yet there remains no systematic understanding of what, when, why and how research feeds into development policy. The massive diversity of cultural, economic, and political contexts here makes it difficult to draw valid generalisations and lessons from existing experience and theory. In addition, international actors have an exaggerated impact on research and policy processes. A better understanding of how research can contribute to pro-poor policies, and systems to put it into practice, could improve development outcomes (Court & Young, 2003). Policy-making today is unavoidably complex, reflecting historic patterns, institutional structures, operational legacies, cultural influences, inter-national constraints, etc. It is this inherent complexity that has increased the need for research inputs to develop the comprehensive frameworks or models which are required. However, it is important for both researchers and analysts to

recognise from the outset that research is unlikely to provide a 'silver bullet' solution (Ruane, 2010). Key issues concern prevailing narratives and discourse among policy-makers; the extent of demand for new ideas (by policy-makers and society more generally); and the degree of political contestation. Political resistance often hindered change, despite the existence of clear evidence, and bureaucratic factors often distorted public policies during implementation. At its broadest level, it seems that the degree of policy change is a function of political demand and contestation. The nature of political culture and degree of openness are also significant in enabling the use of research in development policy-making (Court & Young, 2003).

Within this debate, we would argue that more important thing is whether the research provides needs based data according to the policy issue. We would reconginse that the political issue has become important factor in policymaking process in many countries like Malaysia and Indonesia. However, the partnership research is more need based, applied, and action oriented rather than basic research. The partners organise this research, when they need to improve services, adaptation new policy and regulations, modification of the existing services and policies, or evaluate the services. Regarding labour force in Malaysia, ILO (2010) report mentioned that the overall, reforms are needed to improve the situation for Indonesian labour migrants. Particular focus needs to be given to increasing the level of knowledge amongst labour migrants about safe migration and human and labour rights, while ensuring all labour migrants are protected by the government rather than by for-profit recruitment agencies. In the long term, the Government of Indonesia also needs to consider improving the skills of labour migrants, thus diversifying Indonesia's labour supply. Improving the skill levels of labour migrants and placing them in better-paid jobs, will usually result in better protection, and migrants will be more likely to acquire useful skills abroad. They will also be able to remit more money to their families, thus contributing to poverty alleviation in Indonesia. Labour migration has the potential to be a positive force in the development of Indonesia. There is, however, an urgent need to strike a balance between deriving economic benefits from international labour migration and ensuring the effective protection of labour migrants.

The partnership policy is for a formal working arrangement involving two or more independent bodies, who share responsibility and agree to co-operate towards a common goal. A formal agreement is made by partners to achieve specific outcomes. The application of partnership research is to provide evidence based findings and use all tools and techniques. Based on our selected topic, the purpose of our partnership research is to improve labour policy in Malaysia, and the objective of this policy is to secure labour welfare so that both countries can be benefitted though this partnership research. Based on this example, we have developed a framework (figure 2) which shows the role of partnership research in policy formulation. We mentioned earlier that policy formulation is a complex task and a number of issues should be addressed in this process. At the left side, the framework shows the tools and techniques of partnership research, and at the right side, it shows the steps of a policy formulation. In order to formulate a policy, at the first stage we need to identify the problem. Here, all possible gaps,

limitations, demerits, scope of the problem, and possible negative and positive impacts of labour issues are identified, so that the policy can cover all possible implications and it would be sustainable. A number of partnership research tools, such as documentation/literature review, and social survey can be used to identify the problems. For example, through literature/documentation survey, we can know the historical evolution of the Indonesian labour migration in Malaysia, the rules and regulations so far taken, evidence based published research findings, present form of labour policy, newspaper articles etc. can give many information. In addition, the survey can be conducted to take the opinions from the stakeholders.
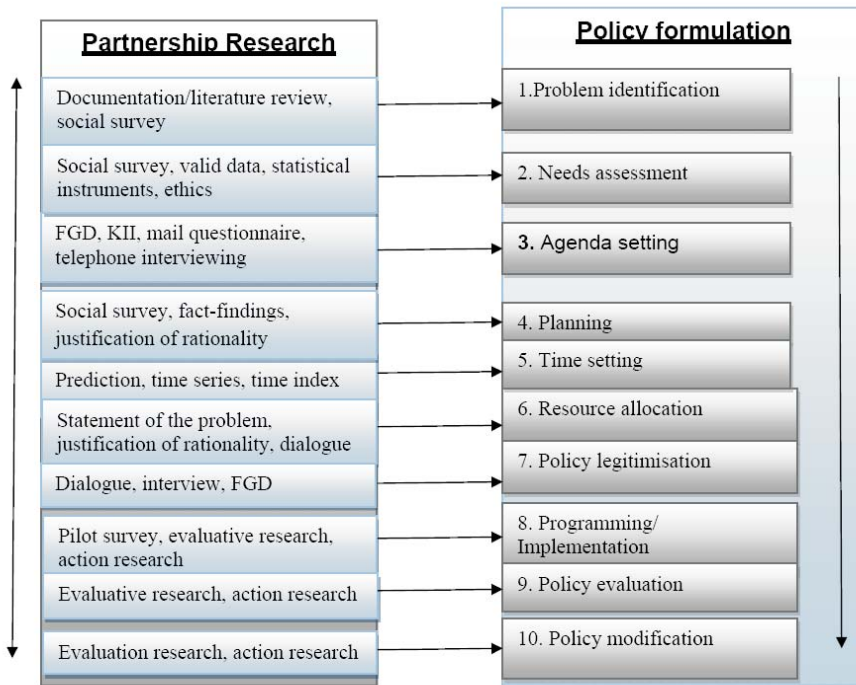

Figure 2. The role of partnership research in policy formulation

We want to assess the needs at the second stage. In order to know the thrust of the policy, it includes all needs in the labour welfare so that this policy can be more practical and effective. The possible needs are terms and conditions of work, education and skills, age, recruitment, amount of wage and other financial incentives, working hours, recreation, recreation, labour security, and VISA process etc. Partnership research has a number of tools, which can be used successfully to assess these needs. Social survey is the strongest tools, which provides all needs related valid data very quickly. The statistical instruments, such as mean, mode, median, correlation, etc. can visualize data so that the concern people can use it properly. For example, how many percentages of stakeholders

do not like the existing labour law, or how many crimes are reported due to labour conflict etc. In all cases, the partnership research follows ethical guideline so that all data can be strictly used with privacy and confidentiality. At the third stage, we need to set up policy agendas, such as which issues will get more priority, how it would be achieved, and who will be responsible for this. Here, the research tools FGD, KII, mail questionnaire, and telephone interview can be used as required. Planning is the blueprint of the policy. It covers how policy will be implemented, who will be participated, what are the strategies, distribution of task, etc. The partnership research rationalizes all mentioned variables through valid data. Any item will not be considered if there are no valid data against these variables. At the stage of time setting, we can divide the plan into long-term, medium, and short term. We use time series and time index, and we can predict from the previous evidence that what time can take to achieve this policy. At resource allocation stage, we determine what are the local and external resources and types of resources, such as human, social, financial, physical and natural resources will be utilized for policy implementation. The partnership research justifies all possible resources through statement of the problems, justification of resources, and if necessary, there can be policy dialogue through FGD or interview. At the policy legitimization, we determine the legal authorities, approval, delegation, accountability, and legal representatives, where interview and FGD can facilitate for policy dialogues between two countries. At the programme implementation stage, we determine what are the best interventions, how many phases the policy will be implemented, and which one will get priority according to needs, and who will execute these programme. We can determine it through pilot or feasible survey before beginning the policy. We can also use evaluative research and action research at the initial stage of the programme implementation. It saves possible losses of the policy. At the policy evaluation and policy modification, we use evaluative research or action research to see the impacts of the policy, when needs; we can change or modify the effectiveness of the policy.

Concluding remarks

Partnership research is a new metaphor in the academic disciplines. This kind of research can open many windows, which may not possible through other kind of research. The advantages of such kind of research is that this is committed to conduct with particular principles, such as mutual trust, shared information and responsibility, equitability, increased capacity, transparency, collaborative, and disseminate and apply results. But we should be careful about the risk factors of this kind of research. The possible risk factors are lack of understanding, lack of trust, non-cooperation, and lack of flexibility. The political decision and state level policy changes can stop such kind of research. However, this research is more action, applied, and result oriented. We have shown the application of this research in two areas, such as how this research can be used as tools for problem identification and policy formulation. We have developed two frameworks in our discussion. For problem identification, the framework shows four wings, such as research lenses, research focus, expanded knowledge domains, and research

contents and methods, and it explains how labour force related problems can be identified through this partnership research. The second framework shows about the application of such research in labour welfare policy formulation. The framework shows the application of tools and techniques of partnership research in different level of policy formulation. We would argue that this framework is not new rather it is based on the tools and techniques of social research. However, it gives a new discourse of academic discussion, and we would believe that the researchers and policy makers can get valuable guidelines from this paper.

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