

# PLANNING THE JOURNEY HOME



A Forum on Return and Reintegration Program for Women Migrant Workers  
Nov. 27, 2012  
Astoria Plaza, Ortigas Center, Pasig City

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# Forum on Gender- Responsive Return and Reintegration Program for Women Migrant Workers

Despite their declining number in recent years, women still comprise the majority of all overseas Filipino migrant workers from the Philippines. A great number of them are in temporary labour migration schemes and tend to work in traditionally “female” occupations, often marked by low wages, the absence of social services and poor working conditions in the lower skilled category of jobs, such as domestic work. In Southeast Asia, seventy two (72) percent of the total migrants from the Philippines are women temporarily working as domestic workers in the region. The temporariness, the conditions of women migrant workers, the nature of their work overseas and the feminization of migration in general have implications for return migration to the Philippines.

Migration, including returning home, is a gendered process. Often migration policies are framed as gender neutral in principle but most often they affect women and men migrants differently. The different kinds of vulnerabilities that women return migrants face are recognized in the CEDAW General Recommendation No. 26 which recommends that “State parties design or oversee comprehensive socio-economic, psychological and legal services aimed at facilitating the reintegration of women who have returned. They should monitor service providers to ensure that they do not take

advantage of the vulnerable position of women returning from work abroad, and should have complaint mechanisms to protect women against reprisals by recruiters, employers or former spouses (articles 2 (c) and 3)”. It is imperative to engender national policies and programmes affecting all stages of migration, including that of return and reintegration.

The adoption of policies such as gender-responsive reintegration services and support targeting the psychosocial and economic needs of women, their families and communities are essential to a fair and comprehensive migration system which protects workers and their dependents throughout the entire migration cycle. Moreover, women migrant workers often return home with more enhanced skills, experience and capacities gained through their experience of migration. It is most important that what they gained from working abroad will be sustained and maximized to contribute towards enhancing personal, familial, community and national development.

The Philippines is often cited for its good practice in the region and has taken a lead role in protecting the rights and advancing the cause of migrant workers in many international fora such as the Global Forum in Migration and Development in

Mauritius. However, there is also a recognition that there is still much to be done especially on the issue of gender-responsive migration management and reintegration program. There is an increasing recognition of the importance of developing and institutionalizing gender-responsive policies on return and reintegration based on the individual and collective experiences of women themselves.

UN Women, in collaboration with civil society organizations working with women migrant returnees, conducted a participatory action research on gender-responsive reintegration programmes. The research documented the practices of CSOs in implementing reintegration programmes as well as identified capacity-building needs to formulate gender-responsive return and reintegration programmes which are essential for advancing the empowerment of women migrant workers. Several recommendations to the national government agencies implementing return and reintegration program on coming up with a gender-responsive reintegration programme were also identified by these organizations.

The forum aims to bring together women's organizations, the academe, government agencies, local government units, civil society groups and other concerned NGOs to discuss and share current initiatives and practices on gender-responsive return and reintegration program as well as identify needs and gaps. It is also expected that the forum will be a venue to explore possibilities of engaging other stakeholders towards developing and crafting a multi-dimensional and multi-stakeholder approach and perspectives on gender-responsive return and reintegration policy and program.



The forum brought together various migration stakeholders for a multi-perspective discussion on gendered return and reintegration programs.

# Welcome Message

Aida Jean Manipon  
National Coordinator  
UN Women Philippines Project Office

Honorable officers of the Philippine government, esteemed representatives of civil society organizations, advocates of women's rights, our beloved balikbayans and returning migrants,

On behalf of the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment or UN Women, a warm welcome to you all, and thank you for coming to join us in today's forum on Women Migrant Workers' Return and Reintegration.

Migrant workers from the Philippines - or Overseas Filipino Workers (OFWs) - are often hailed as heroes. Their staggering contributions to the economy - from the daily survival needs of many a Filipino family to the national and global economy as a whole - have become essential. As a migrant-sending country, the Philippines has also been cited for its many good practices in adopting policies to protect migrant workers' rights in all stages of the migration cycle and developing programs to address their needs. Such good practices have also been recognized as the by-product of efforts by both government and civil society - often in collaboration with each other, sometimes in dynamic of what one might call healthy tension - and the result of the efforts, or struggles, of migrant workers themselves.



Aida Jean Manipon emphasizes the need for more conversations on gendered return and reintegration during her welcome remarks.

As a State party to the Convention on the Rights of Migrant Workers and their Families as well as to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women, or CEDAW, the Philippines, we note, has increased its attention to the rights, needs and issues specific to women migrant workers (WMW). The nexus that links gender, migration and development is increasingly mainstreamed as a topic in policy discourse, academic research, and migrant rights advocacy. In 2008, the Philippines hosted the first-ever - and the only one to date - International Conference on Gender, Migration and Development just a couple of months before the Global Forum on Migration and Development. Sometime around that time, the first-ever degree-granting academic program on migration studies, with focus on gender and migration, was opened at the Philippines' Miriam College. When the CEDAW-based Magna Carta of Women (MCW), or Republic Act 9710 was adopted in 2009, it contained specific provisions on the rights of women migrant workers; its' Implementing Rules and Regulations (IRR) elaborating on the roles, duties and mandates of specific government agencies in protecting women migrant workers' rights in all stages of the migration cycle - from recruitment and pre-departure, to return and reintegration.

Today we focus on 'return and reintegration.' And more specifically, gender-responsive return and reintegration practices. As we often say, as migration is a gendered process, women and men experience migration differently - this is also true when it comes to experiencing the journey back home. *How do women and men experience 'return and reintegration' differently? How can reintegration programs and practices be more*

*gender-sensitive and gender-responsive? How can gender equality outcomes be mainstreamed in reintegration policy?*

For UN Women in the Philippines, our conversations on this topic began last year when the country was confronted with the repercussions of the Middle East and North African (MENA). We thus conducted a roundtable discussion, inviting officials and representatives from government and civil society, where the role of local government units (LGUs) in facilitating, supporting and implementing gender-responsive reintegration programs was pointed out. There we also noted that the CEDAW Committee in 2005 adopted a General Recommendation (no. 26) on Women Migrant Workers' Rights, which specifically mentioned the need to protect and fulfill these rights even in return and reintegration. UN Women Philippines also initiated a rapid appraisal or analysis of the implications of the MENA crisis on Filipina migrant workers, as well as a participatory action research on gender-responsive reintegration focusing on practices of civil society organizations.

Today we hope to share with you some of the highlights of these research initiatives, and to once again invite you to a discussion. Let us continue our conversations on gender-responsive reintegration - but shall we also take two more steps forward and, by the end of the day, out of the insights we've gained in the past year and especially from the results of our research efforts, identify more concrete proposals or recommendations and commitments toward making 'return and reintegration' more gender-responsive.

Maraming salamat po!

# Opening Remarks

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Jesus I. Yabes  
Undersecretary  
Office of the Undersecretary for  
Migrant Workers Affairs  
Department of Foreign Affairs  
(Represented by Belinda Ante)

Undersecretary Yabes opened his speech by quoting the Chinese saying that “Women hold up half of the sky.” In the case of women migrant workers, they bear the brunt of abuse, depression and other adverse consequences of migrating and of being away from the family.

He then cited statistics from his office, collated from different Philippine embassies and consulates, which showed that although household service workers (HSWs) comprise less than 20% of total migrants, they constituted some 60% of the assistance-to-nationals cases. HSWs, especially the undocumented, are often subjected to inhospitable and at times appalling work conditions, including insufficient food; no off-day; verbal, physical and sexual abuse or harassment; unpaid or underpayment of salary; and forced to work for other households or the business enterprise of the employer. He also mentioned that women nurses and caregivers have to work long hours, while performers have to deal with the sexual advances of drunk customers.

Undersecretary Yabes then revealed statistics from the DFA’s Office of Consular Affairs showing that there are now more Filipino women travelers than men. From August 13, 2009, the day when the DFA first issued electronic passports, to November 14

of 2012, the Department issued a total of 5,769,878 electronic passports, of which 54.72 or 3,157,023 were issued to women applicants. To Undersecretary Yabes, this implied that the purpose of travel of most passport applicants is to take up or return to a job overseas, and quite a number of those who leave the country indicate that they are tourists when in fact their undeclared purpose is to look for jobs. He urged, however, that these statistics be validated and cross-referenced with data from other government agencies dealing with OFWs, particularly the POEA and OWWA.

The Undersecretary pointed out that the increasing number of women seeking employment overseas attests to the perseverance of female family members to be breadwinners, problems in the home, pressure from family and friends, emotional stress and, more positively, the desire for self-development.

He also recognized that it is imperative to set up a comprehensive reintegration program for women to address their socio-economic concerns, given that a substantial part of their remittances, if not all, is spent and splurged on their family’s basic needs and, too often, caprices, instead of being judiciously invested.

Undersecretary Yabes then admitted that, having just assumed his position at the DFA's migrant workers' office just this month, he had already observed that we are engaged in dousing fires from all over, and are merely reacting to each crisis by dispensing financial assistance to distressed Filipinos. In the event of conflict which may put our nationals in harm's way, we dispatch rapid response teams to effect their extraction, relocation and evacuation to the Philippines.

He then noted that to add greater value to the DFA's work, and alter its somewhat reactive nature, he intends to put in place proactive, gender-responsive programs. As an illustration, he cited how he was instructing the assistance-to-nationals units of the diplomatic missions to conduct regular briefings and counseling to the wards and runaways who sought shelter in the Filipino Workers' Resource Center (FWRC) operated by the Philippine Overseas Labor Office (POLO), to include, but not limited to, topics on the laws and regulations of the Philippines and the host country affecting the stay and employment migrants. This will complement the basic training courses on various skills being conducted by the POLO for the Filipino communities overseas.

Undersecretary Yabes also revealed that he plans to produce a pre-departure module for outbound Filipinos applying for passports at the consular offices in Manila and at the different regional consular offices. This will complement the PDOS organized by the POEA for departing OFWs and enable passport applicants to benefit from the



Forum participants from civil society organizations.

wealth of experience gained by DFA personnel who have been assigned abroad, FSSOS who served as ATN officers and desk officers from the migrant workers office. The module can be designed to be country and gender specific.

He ended his speech by stating that with the UN WEomen, partner NGOs, and government agencies concerned with migrants, working in tandem, there is no reason not to hold up the sky together to mitigate the cycle of abuse and displacement of women migrants.

# Keynote Speech

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Hans Leo Cacdac  
Administrator  
Philippine Overseas Employment  
Administration  
(Represented by Nimfa De Guzman  
Director for Welfare and Employment  
and GAD Focal Point)

Administrator Cacdac, through his representative Nimfa De Guzman, began his speech by announcing the POEA's direction to eventually phase-out the sending of women household service workers overseas within a five-year time frame.

He admitted, however, that the agency had been bombarded with questions and media when it made the announcement. There was much doubt about the readiness of the country to do that when the fact is, the demand for and the number of the migrant women population continues to increase.

The administrator noted that despite a policy reform package aimed at reducing the deployment in this vulnerable skills category, through an increased minimum salary of US400 dollars a month, and requiring higher standards of protection, deployment statistics reveal an upward pattern in the services sector.

According to Administrator Cacdac, one of the prime reasons for the skepticism is the still heavy dependence on foreign exchange remittances, a significant source of which comes from HSW markets such as Asian and Middle East destinations. He also noted that the country has a big labor surplus, and that yearly, a significant number of new graduates are added to the labor force, but who

could not be fully absorbed by the local job market. Thus, even the choice of collegiate or technical-vocational courses of many students is influenced by the desire to find employment overseas, and not by an inward-looking career, employment or livelihood path, which is actually the thrust of the government now for local employment generation.

Administrator Cacdac pointed out that the Indonesian government made a similar pronouncement recently, that it will stop sending domestic workers by 2017, and started by halting such deployment to Saudi Arabia in a bid to improve the treatment for Indonesian domestic workers through better employment conditions. This move of another labor-sending country, said Administrator Cacdac, lends validity to the direction that the POEA is bent on taking.

The outlook on how the exposure of women migrants can be checked in often unsafe working conditions abroad, and in being prone to abuse or maltreatment is steadily becoming evident, stated Administrator Cacdac, as the POEA gradually lays the building blocks and also gains considerable ground for such a future scenario.

In fact, according to him, the POEA has actively engaged itself in the process, for the passage by

the International Labor Conference and the Senate ratification of the ILO Convention on Decent Work for Domestic Workers (ILO Convention No. 189) which will affect millions of Filipino household service workers. He expressed that he is looking forward to the final passage of the counterpart legislation for domestic workers, through the Kasambahay Bill, which was already approved at the bicameral level.

The Philippines also actively participates in the development of the instrument to implement the ASEAN Declaration on the Protection of the Rights of Migrant Workers, which Administrator Cacdac described as a landmark document in recognition of the rights of migrant workers in the ASEAN region, that outlined the obligations of the sending and receiving countries for the protection of migrant workers.

The POEA is guided by the policy which regards overseas employment as a reality in a developing country with rich human capital, which is not something to be consciously promoted but rather managed to derive socio-economic gains. Administrator Cacdac emphasized that the POEA's direction is slanted toward the active and continuing negotiation with host governments and concerned sectors to improve the employment conditions and provide corrective measures to undo lingering problems and issues, which put the OFWs, who are mostly women, at a disadvantage. For those who will still choose overseas employment, the thrust is to ensure their protection.

Efforts are keenly undertaken, beginning with various host countries like Saudi Arabia, Jordan, Lebanon, Taiwan, Singapore and Italy, which are destinations to thousands of migrant women in the services sector. The Administrator stressed that an impetus was provided by the law, specifically RA 10022, requiring the deployment of OFWs only in countries that guarantee their protection. A number of bilateral labor agreements and arrangements such as memorandum of understanding and adoption of standard employment contracts, are lined up and/or are in the pipeline, which promise to benefit the workers who choose to go abroad. For the HSWs, the thrust is to tighten the enforcement of the reform package, and to develop alternative livelihood and employment opportunities in the country.

Intermediaries from both the Philippines and the host markets have to deal with stricter rules and regulations before deployment is allowed, based on the principle of the law that prohibits the imprudent sending of OFWs if their rights and protection are not guaranteed. Administrator Cacdac warned illegal recruiters, human traffickers and even licensed agencies and their principals who violate the rules and regulations to beware of facing stiff sanctions for their unscrupulous acts.

The Administrator underlined his office's strategic intent or mission: The POEA connects to the world and in partnership with all stakeholders facilitates the generation and preservation of decent jobs for Filipino migrant workers, promotes their protection and advocates their smooth reintegration into the mainstream of Philippine society."

This mission means that the POEA views migration as a continuum, a dynamic cycle that involves all the players in a global scale, consisting of the government instrumentalities, recruitment agencies, foreign employers, international organizations, civil society, and the migrant workers themselves in all the phases of sending, working, return and reintegration. Administrator Cacdac noted that after decades of having a labor migration program, a institutionalized approach toward effective reintegration is high-time and much called for to be more responsive to the needs of the returning migrant.

The agenda of this Administration is clear on promoting protection and decent work. Administrator Cacdac pointed to the Overseas Workers Welfare Administration (OWWA) which is focused on the other end of the migration process,



Representatives from government and the private sector participated in the forum.

which is the eventual coming home of thousands of OFWs.

The Administrator reiterated his gratitude to the UN Women's invitation to the forum, and cited the UN Women as an organization which gives migration a special concern, distinct attention and support in the development of proactive mechanisms and state policies to deal with the marginalization, discrimination, and violence issues and concerns of women.

The UN millenium development goals, said Administrator Cacdac, can be realized, with incessant dedication and passion. For gender equality and women empowerment and an end to poverty, it may seem a long way to go. But in hindsight, Administrator Cacdac noted that significant strides have already been achieved thus far. Thus, the goals are not insurmountable when a ripple effect is created by the partnerships between government, non-government, the academe, and other stakeholders.

Administrator Cacdac ended his speech by wishing UN Women the best in its efforts to push for more gender responsive initiatives on return and reintegration, to really empower and liberate Filipino women to find their productive niches and vocations here in the country without the need to deal with the social costs and challenges of migration and leaving the family behind.

# Context Setting

Jean Franco  
Department of Political Science  
University of the Philippines

The context for the research presentations on return and reintegration was provided by Prof. Jean Franco. She described a previous study conducted by Scalabrini Migration Center in 2011 for UN Women, which looked at the political crises in the Middle East and North African region (MENA), and how this impacted the millions of overseas Filipino workers who were based in the countries in this region. The MENA crises, also dubbed as the “Arab Spring,” caused the displacement, repatriation and reintegration of OFWs, most of them women.



Prof. Jean Franco presented the results of the Scalabrini Migration Center Study on the repatriation, return and reintegration of women OFWs from the MENA region.

The Scalabrini study, according to Prof Franco, was an appraisal of how the Philippine government responded to the displacement of OFWs in the MENA. The general objective was to review and analyze the repatriation and reintegration of OFWs in connection with the Arab Spring. Given the crisis or emergency situation generated by the Arab Spring in OFW destination countries such as Egypt, Yemen, Libya and Syria, and the gendered nature of OFW jobs in MENA, the results of the study shed light on the displacement of large numbers of OFWs and stressed the gender dimensions in responding to these challenges.

In particular, the Scalabrini Migration Center study sought to: collect data on OFW returnees; review

the framework, policies, programs, and practices on the repatriation and reintegration of OFWs; and propose guidelines and recommendations for future gender-responsive interventions in addressing the needs and concerns of OFWs and their families.

Prof Franco noted the main points of the research findings. She said that governance mechanisms for coping with the MENA crisis, in terms of repatriation, were already in place. In effect, the Philippines has already acquired considerable experience in dealing with conflict-related displacements in different regions, especially since the Gulf War of 1990-1991. However, she also stated that there is no “one size fits all” strategy in repatriation and reintegration, and that any such strategy should be migrant-corridor specific, as well as employ a gender lens.

There are deficiencies in the database on OFW communities in the destination countries, and these deficiencies hampered the organization of OFW repatriation. Existing data on OFW populations, the Scalabrini study found, were mostly total counts and lacked details such as gender distribution and location of OFWs. In order to avert any more problems with repatriation and return, should any crises again occur in OFW destination countries, Prof Franco urged that the government database on OFWs be improved, and migrant communities be tapped in the database efforts, so that even undocumented workers will come under the government’s radar of protection.

Prof Franco also revealed that the gendered nature of employment of OFWs mattered in evacuating

migrant workers in conflict or war situations. The employers’ role in repatriation was a key finding of the Scalabrini study, especially for women domestic workers. In addition, upon their return home, the multiple roles migrant women play also affect their reintegration prospects in the home country.

The Scalabrini Study, according to Prof Franco, came up with several recommendations for moving forward: capacity building of foreign service personnel in dealing with crisis or emergency situations; enhancing the preparedness of Filipino communities; improving the database of Filipino communities abroad and return migrants in the Philippines; capacity building of local governments in providing support to repatriated OFWs; and a regional assessment of how origin countries in Asia responded to the displacement of migrant workers.

Bilateral labor agreements (BLAs) should also be drafted with migrant receiving countries, and these BLAs should not only be focused on employment arrangements, especially in conflict situations, but be gendered in nature. Prof. Franco stated that the government should insist on this gendered approach to labor agreements, since destination countries also have a responsibility over its OFWs, even the undocumented, who help boost their economy.

# Introduction to the Research Projects

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Lucia Cynita Rago  
National Programme Officer  
UN Women Philippines

National Programme Officer Lucia Cynita Rago then proceeded to introduce the audience to the research projects funded by UN Women, conducted by its partner organizations. She emphasized that these efforts were part of a larger project to generate data on migrant return and reintegration, using a gendered lens.

In particular, Ms Rago enumerated the objectives of the research projects, which were:

First, to support the conduct of: a) gender needs assessment among their members and beneficiaries; b) gender analysis of reintegration issues and interventions; and, c) identification and documentation of good practices, gains and gaps in gender capacity development in reintegration programs in Southern Luzon;

Second, to identify a case study of a migrant woman returnee in the Southern Luzon area so as to document and analyze good practices, gains, gaps, lessons and emerging challenges for gender-responsive reintegration;

And finally, to develop recommendations and suggest possible strategies in designing and implementing gender-responsive return and

reintegration programs and projects based on insights generated through participatory research on current CSO practices and initiatives.

# Return and Reintegration: Women' Participation and Gender-Responsive Interventions: A Participatory Action Research

Janice Zamora  
Researcher  
Atikha Overseas Workers and  
Communities Initiative, Inc.

The first presentation was made by Prof. Janice Zamora, researcher of Atikha Overseas Workers and Communities Initiatives, Inc. She described how the project aimed to address pertinent questions surrounding gender-responsive interventions on return and reintegration, as well as to assess Atikha's own initiatives on reintegration.

Prof Zamora added that the research, based in Southern Tagalog – specifically, Batangas, Cavite, and Laguna – utilized focus groups discussions (FGDs) and key informant interviews as a methodology. The researchers also conducted in-depth interviews with Filipino migrant women in Italy, as well as women returnees. The workshop/FGDs included migrant women returnees, migrant women in Italy who are beneficiaries of Atikha, families left behind who are also partners of Atikha, and the staff and board of directors of Atikha.

The researchers found that one of the best practices identified in the study was the fact that Atikha has the only financial literacy module with a social component. Part of Atikha's module is psychosocial counseling, which tackles the family and social problems of OFWs and their families. The module integrated gender issues in the discussion of budgeting, savings, and other topics. Other

innovative programs and services addressed the social costs of migration, and integrated gender issues in its various trainings for migrants, spouses left behind, and the children of migrants.

Another best practice identified in the research, according to Prof. Zamora, was how Atikha developed various information, education and value formation modules, seminars and trainings that helped children of migrants cope with the physical separation resulting from migration. An example of this was the material entitled "Children's Response to the Challenges of Migration," which was awarded the "Panibagong Paraan" by the World Bank. These capacity building tools have been adopted by Atikha's partners.

Atikha also engaged in continuous partnerships with organizations providing assistance to OFWs and their families, such as financial institutions in the area or community, and national government agencies such as the Department of Education (Dep Ed), the Department of Agriculture (DA), and others. Part of Atikha's effort to mainstream gender and migration issues is its close involvement with the Dep Ed and private schools. Atikha's mechanisms for partnership help the organization in its advocacies and in the actual creation of structures,

such as the Migration and Development Council and the OFW Coordinating Council, which serve as vehicles in mainstreaming gender issues and concerns. At present, Atikha is the convenor in the Task Force Migration and Development, together with the DA under the office of Undersecretary Jerry Pacturan.

According to Prof. Zamora, another best practice identified in the study was how significant the competence of Atikha's staff was in its implementation of a gender responsive reintegration program.

Atikha also assists local government units (LGUs) in setting up their Migration Resource Centers by capacitating the LGU staff through trainings, and helping them set up their OFW Coordinating Council.

Prof. Zamora then described the salient features of Atikha's gender-responsive reintegration program. Atikha's program recognized individual to community interventions, through center-based, community-based and school-based programs on return and reintegration. The organization also believes that reintegration is a process, from pre-departure, to on-site, and return. Atikha's interventions include both economic and social aspects, and gender issues and concerns are mainstreamed in its various program components. The program approach is also multi-stakeholder as well as bottom-up. Atikha also identifies and targets migration corridors on-site and for families left behind.

There are, however, still gaps and challenges that need to be addressed. Prof. Zamora stressed the need to have a clear definition of "reintegration" among stakeholders, which should then translate into policies on migration, particularly on the part of government. She also characterized the government's reintegration program as not comprehensive, but reactive and crisis-oriented. Ideally, this program should hone the capabilities of returnees, in areas such as livelihood creation and investment opportunities, and not just focus on crisis interventions.

There is also a lack of synergy among various stakeholders that offer reintegration programs for migrant workers. Some government agencies do not have clearly defined functions in implementing projects on reintegration.

The Atikha research also noted that while it is the role of the LGUs to protect the migrants, they are still in the process of grappling with this role, particularly in formulating gender responsive return and reintegration programs.

On the part of civil society organizations such as Atikha, the challenge is in sustaining and upscaling their reintegration programs even in the midst of financial constraints.

In conclusion, Prof. Zamora reiterated that reintegration is a process that starts from pre-departure to return. It involves economic and social aspects, and should not only involve the migrants but their families as well.

She also noted that a gender responsive reintegration program for migrant women should be integrated in the implementation of migration and development initiatives in the source provinces. Based on Atikha's many years of experience, it is easier to talk to LGUs than to lobby at the national level.

Atikha's research provided several recommendations that should be given attention by all migration stakeholders. First, attention should be given to advocacy on mainstreaming a gender responsive reintegration program to other key stakeholders. Moreover, the inclusion of reintegration in the GAD planning and budgeting of the government will facilitate the mainstreaming of both gender and migration.

Second, reintegration preparedness should be integrated in pre-departure orientation seminars, which should also include the family. In short, return and reintegration discussions and initiatives should not be done only when the OFWs return.

Third, Atikha recommends that Migration and Development Councils be set up in major migrant source provinces to create an enabling environment for gender responsive reintegration programs. The LGUs can thereby prioritize clients and individualize services by identifying migration corridors, in terms of top sending provinces, and top receiving countries.

There is also a need to do further studies on the impact of Atikha's trainings on the changing gender roles of migrants and spouses.



Prof. Janice Zamora stressed the need to sustain and upscale Atikha's return and reintegration program.

Fifth, to assist in the advocacy, upscaling and mainstreaming of gender responsive reintegration programs, there is a need to a) Publish a book on the experience of Atikha in dealing with the challenges and opportunities in mainstreaming gender and reintegration concerns; and b) Develop and publish learning materials for mainstreaming gender, migration and reintegration issues in the Department of Education's curricula.

Sixth, there should be a continuous effort to build the capacities of local governments in major migrant source provinces in setting up Migration Resource Centers that will serve as a one-stop shop to provide economic and social services to migrants and their families.

Various stakeholders, at the international and local levels, should also be encouraged to provide resources for researches on reintegration, and the sustainability of reintegration programs that are already in place.

The multi-stakeholder Task Force Migration and Development at the national level and the Migration and development Councils at the provincial level should have legal mandates, be institutionalized and should have the active engagement of the private sector and the non-government organizations for sustainability.

Ninth, international technical cooperation, which provides small short-term project funding, should also look into long-term sustainability and the upscaling of the best practices that they have funded.

There should also be greater engagement with the Overseas Workers Welfare Administration (OWWA) and the National Reintegration Council for OFWs (NRCO), in order to come up with a common understanding of a gender responsive comprehensive reintegration program, and the role they play with other national government agencies and local stakeholders. This will also serve to consolidate government and private sector resources.

Finally, Atikha recommended that assistance be provided to civil society organizations (CSOs) in upscaling their best practices in gender responsive reintegration programs.

# Return and Reintegration: Women' Participation and Gender-Responsive Interventions: A Participatory Action Research

Mayan Villalba  
Executive Director  
Unlad Kabayan, Inc.

Ms Mayan Villalba, Executive Director of Unlad Kabayan, Inc., then proceeded with the presentation of the organization's key research findings on its gender responsive return and reintegration interventions. She started by enumerating the study objectives, which were, a) To surface and assess the gender-sensitivity and gender responsiveness of migrant reintegration programs carried out by Unlad Kabayan; b) To contribute to building a body of knowledge by distilling good and effective practices in the provision of sustainable gender-responsive interventions; and c) To increase the capacity of the organizations in crafting and improvement of gender-responsive reintegration programs and services.

The study, mostly undertaken in Northern Mindanao (Region 10) and Caraga, included in-depth and focus group interviews with returned domestic workers, teachers, nurses and nurse aides, all of whom were based mostly in Saudi Arabia, Libya, Kuwait and Taiwan. Members of migrant families and local government officials were also interviewed, and a review of existing literature was conducted for the study.

Workshops were also conducted, utilizing various tools such as the gender equality timeline; the



Members of CSOs, the academe and local government units listen to the findings of Unlad Kabayan's research.

historical transect; the seasonality diagram; the economic activity flow; service mapping; appreciating community values; an income-expenditure matrix; the migration cycle; sources of strengths and vulnerabilities assessment; and reintegration and resource mapping. The results of these workshops formed the backbone of the key findings.

Ms Villalba revealed the results of the gender equality timeline, listing the significant events that impacted the lives of returned women migrants. At the international level, or at their destination countries, many women reported abuse, as well as their unplanned and emergency return. At the local level, or their communities of origin, the women also recounted their displacement and abuse because of armed conflict, which also caused fear among the men. There was also a lack of job opportunities and low income for families in the community. However, some women were able to get elected in local posts.

On a socio-cultural level, the women related that the madrasah has resulted in more women teachers, and the increasing number of public elementary schools has helped reduce illiteracy among young girls. On an economic level, an increased demand for professional women workers overseas was a push factor for migration, while electricity connections have improved their capacity for productive work.

Using the tool on Appreciating Community Values, which focused on naming the characteristics and qualities of women, Ms Villalba noted that the study showed that women diligently performed their

social obligations; were patient, caring, loving and sacrificing; were good savers and were resourceful.

Unlad Kabayan's key findings were the following: a) The migration of Maranao Muslim women mainly to the Middle East was made possible by the presence of male family members in the destination countries. These male relatives facilitated their employment and were viewed as protectors of the womenfolk; b) Recruitment agencies owned by Maranao ensured the employment of women in professional and skilled jobs such as nurses and teachers; c) Other women, Maranao and non-Maranao alike who were from other places, were invariably employed as domestic workers and/or caregivers; d) Women in professional and skilled jobs did not experience any contract violation or abuse from employers. Most domestic workers went through work-related problems such as long working hours and some were verbally abused; and e) Culture and religion matter in economic strategies for gender-responsive reintegration.

Ms Villalba then described the results of using the tool Sources of Strengths and Vulnerabilities Assessment, which sought to differentiate the strengths and vulnerabilities of men and women. When it came to strengths, women exhibited inner personal qualities; a strong sense of responsibility; and economic capacity. The men's strengths, on the other hand, were physical prowess; higher educational levels; and a male dominant culture. In terms of vulnerabilities, women reported that they were physically weaker; lived in a macho culture; and had to survive in a gender-based job market. The men's vulnerabilities lay in their

inflexible character; and their sense of “maratabat,” which Ms Villalba described as a strong sense of pride.

Unlad Kabayan also used the Migration Cycle tool, which sought to differentiate the migration cycle of women and men. From these, the results showed that men tended to stay in the same jobs and destination countries, while women made changes whenever an opportunity arose. Men also tended to stay longer overseas, while women were the first to come home whenever there are emergencies, such as caring for ailing or elderly members of the family. Also, it was found that it was more difficult for men to get overseas employment, because there is more demand for women in gender- and culture-determined jobs.

In using the Reintegration and Resource Mapping tool, which discussed the indicators and actual resources for reintegration, Unlad Kabayan found that women acknowledged the presence of and their access to the Pentagon of Assets: human resources (entrepreneurial skills); natural resources (raw material potentials); physical resources (machinery and technology); financial assets (savings, loans, venture capital); and social assets (networks of support and supply chains). There also existed several support and infrastructure services for returned women migrants, such as family, community and government services.

In conclusion, Ms Villalba enumerated Unlad Kabayan's assessment of the policies and programs on return and reintegration. First, she noted that while there are existing policies and programs for returned OFWs in conflict areas, the specific



Unlad Kabayan members from Mindanao attend the forum.

implementation and conditions are still not sufficiently clear. Second, there is no clear policy and strategies on return and reintegration of OFWs. Third, many OFWs have not heard of or read any material produced by the NRCO.

On the matter of current gender competence in return and reintegration, Unlad Kabayan concluded that gender sensitivity and responsiveness is still in the periphery of the government and CSO reintegration radar. The organization is still focused on gender equity more than on gender equality, and current tools for gender analysis and reintegration are not sharp enough.

On partnerships and technical cooperation management in return and reintegration, Unlad Kabayan concluded that the multiple stakeholder approach is not working as desired. Ms Villalba also noted that the burden of reintegration at the ground level lay more on the shoulders of CSOs; and that reintegration programs and services are expensive, and require longer time before any outcomes can be produced.

In terms of accountabilities in gender responsive return and reintegration, Unlad Kabayan believed that the benefits and costs of migration are largely unquantified, often underappreciated, and therefore lack attribution. Hopelessness can also ensue upon the migrant's return, because of lower income and the lack of decent jobs. Housing programs for returned migrants are usually with private real estate developers and are expensive.

Based on the key findings of its participatory action research, Unlad Kabayan came up with several recommendations:



Unlad Kabayan Executive Director Mayan Villalba stresses a point during her presentation.

*On policies and programs in return and reintegration.* First, return and reintegration should be made integral to the migration policies, programs and services of the government, and cascaded down to the local government units, including the Autonomous Region of Muslim Mindanao (ARMM) especially in the implementation phase. Second, information about policies and programs should be effectively disseminated. Third, programs and services for those caught in conflict or war must be clear and implemented to the letter.

*On current gender competence in return and reintegration.* First, there should be further training and documentation of effective practices on gender sensitivity and responsiveness for government and CSOs. There should also be a balance between gender equity and gender equality in reintegration. Last, there should be an improvement of tools of analysis to sharply and effectively surface the gender-specific responses to reintegration.

*On partnerships and technical cooperation management in return and reintegration.* Stakeholders should be identified and their roles in reintegration should be clarified, to establish formal partnerships and sharing of costs. Second, there should be more roles for government, especially LGUs and the ARMM. Finally, government should have a realistic and adequate budget for reintegration, so that efforts will be strategic and sustainable.

*On accountabilities in gender responsive return and reintegration.* A study should be commissioned to look at the quantification and attribution of benefits and costs of migration to guide women's

entitlements. There should also be psycho-social services in reintegration especially for men who feel hopeless upon return. An affordable and accessible housing program for returned migrants should also be offered by government.

Unlad Kabayan also came up with gender-responsive recommendations for government on reintegration. First, gender disaggregated data on reintegration should be collected and made available, especially on the reasons for return, options for reintegration, and the psycho-social conditions of returning women. Second, there should be an inventory of opportunities for returned women migrants. Third, the government should harness the strength and support of CSOs in gender-responsive reintegration, especially in mainstreaming innovative approaches and good practices, ensuring partnership instead of competition, and the provision of logistical support.

# The Government's Return and Reintegration Program

Josephine Sanchez Tobia  
Welfare Officer  
Planning and Development  
Division  
Overseas Workers Welfare  
Administration (OWWA)  
Representative of  
Administrator Carmelita Dimzon

Ms Josephine Sanchez Tobia, Welfare Officer of the Planning and Development Division of the Overseas Workers Welfare Administration (OWWA), gave the presentation on OWWA's return and reintegration program, on behalf of Administrator Carmelita Dimzon. Entitled "Emphasizing Economic Empowerment," the presentation focused on the OWWA's skills upgrading of OFWs for productivity, to enhance their employability and smoothen their reintegration.

As a background, Ms Tobia reiterated that the Philippines sends 1 million OFWs abroad annually. Thousands of them return to the country with skills, cross-cultural experience and savings. Thus, these skills and experiences gained by the OFWs are instrumental to their economic and social integration.

Skills upgrading according to global standards, emphasized Ms Tobias, is a strategy that would enhance the capacity of OFWs to earn regular and sufficient income upon their return. Globally certified computer skills for OFWs also provide them with a new sense of empowerment and dignity while ensuring their economic security and social reintegration.

Based on OWWA's data, most returned migrants are either victims of deceptive recruitment and labor exploitation; are constantly threatened and pressured, and have decided to go back to the Philippines; have insufficient savings; have immigration-related problems, such as expired or non-issuance of visas; are victims of sexual exploitation such as molestation or rape; or are victims of human trafficking.

Ms Tobia characterized the principles and goals of OWWA's case management. These are: a) Integration of services, which encourages positive interaction among the services to be provided to the clients; b) Continuity of care, which provides not only comprehensive by continuous therapeutic interventions; c) Equal access to services; d) Quality, effective and efficient care and service delivery an continuous service improvement; e) Advocacy, which involves the representation of concerns and interests of the client; f) The whole person or holistic approach, which ensures that all aspects of a client's personality are addressed; g) Client empowerment, to ensure full acceptance and participation of the client during the helping process; h) Evaluation of impact on the client, which determines the effectiveness of the actual

processes involved and services provided; i) Gender sensitivity, which recognizes the special needs and equal opportunities for both men and women; and j) Confidentiality, which respects the privacy of the client being cared for.

OWWA's return program comes in three phases, according to Ms Tobia. First, the migrant worker is immediately assisted by the Philippine embassy in the host country. Second, the migrant is repatriated by the OWWA. And last, the migrant is provided with the Total Reintegration Needs Approach, which consists of psycho-social interventions, including medical and legal assistance, and economic assistance and guidance.

There are three stages in managing cases, said Ms Tobia. 1) The overseas post (OP) provides on-site services to Filipino migrant workers; 2) The home office (HO) delivers the needed assistance upon the return of the distressed migrant workers; and 3) The Regional Welfare Office (RWO) provides and sustains OWWA services to Filipino migrant workers and their families.

The most common issues of returned migrant workers are the psychosocial effects of an exploitative migration experience; stigmatization; financial difficulties (coming home empty-handed and indebted); lack of re-employment opportunities; and lack of opportunities and support to start and sustain a viable business.

OWWA could also boast of success stories when it comes to migrant return and reintegration. Some returned migrants joined together and established a ready-to-wear garment production business. Some resorted to food processing and running retail

stores. These efforts expanded and generated employment for others in the community.

Based on its experience on return and reintegration, the OWWA has already learned several lessons. First is that there should be continuous capacity-building for OWWA case officers. There should also be strong networks between and among migrant stakeholders. Last, there should be a continuous development and implementation of economic assistance programs.

According to Ms Tobia, the OWWA approach has yielded a positive impact on its clients. The provision of holistic integration services has minimized the adverse effects of exploitation and trafficking. The interventions provided by OWWA have addressed both the psycho-social (legal and medical) and economic needs of the returnees to support their eventual reintegration into their families and communities.

OWWA's clients have also been provided with the necessary preparations that enabled them to work out family relations while pursuing income generating activities. Counseling activities focused on strengthening family values formation and guidance on entrepreneurial activities and other return options, including local and overseas employment.

# The Need for Data Warehousing: Reaction to the Presentations

Mary Grace Tirona  
Undersecretary  
Commission on Filipinos  
Overseas (CFO)

Commission on Filipinos Overseas (CFO) Undersecretary Mary Grace Tirona was invited to react to the presentations. She introduced herself as a gender advocate who served during the term of President Fidel V. Ramos in her position in the private sector. She was named as a Commissioner for Women, and helped with issues of violence against women (VAW) and was among those who helped establish the Philippine National Police (PNP) women and children's desk.

Thus, she reminded civil society organizations that it was important to collaborate and work with the government, frustrating though it may seem at times. It was the best way to influence policies and programs. After only two years with the CFO, Undersecretary Tirona has already had a long list of complaints against the agency; it was difficult to change the existing policies and attitudes that people were already used to.

Undersecretary Tirona echoed Atikha and Unlad Kabayan's views and recommendations on return and reintegration, and urges other government officials to listen to different sectors to improve their services. For her part, she noted that the CFO was better off than the POEA and the OWWA, because it is less known and low key. In fact, it was

a small agency, with less than 60 staff and a small budget.

She also raised the question of why the NRCO has not been in the limelight, given its importance, media reports on its large funds, and the issues on where it should be placed.

Undersecretary Tirona opined that there was an important gap in data warehousing when it came to return and reintegration. Based on CFO's experience with large amounts of data, all they are capable of doing are stock estimates. With 10 million Filipinos overseas, the samplings shown by Atikha and Unlad Kabayan are merely a drop in the bucket. Thus, the government should take a major role in data management, because facts are the basis for decision-making. The Undersecretary recalled a recent visit from the United Nations Rapporteur on human trafficking, who noted that there were so many migration-related agencies but little coordination in terms of data gathering.

The Undersecretary also emphasized the need to impart the idea of roadmapping and planning to the people, whether they are leaving for overseas work or not. While financial literacy is very popular As far as women migrant returnees are concerned,

at present, financial planning and family planning are also part of responsible decision-making.

In terms of migration, return and reintegration, roadmapping becomes more important, from pre-departure to return. Government agencies involved in migration need to classify the people who need return and reintegration services: whether they are distressed; not distressed; those who just want to go home because of retirement age; have expertise; have money for investment; will not return permanently, and so on.

She also underscored the need for environmental scanning on the part of both the government and civil society organizations. This will lead to better development planning and opportunity seeking. Regular impact assessments should also be conducted, for monitoring of how many have been reached and the impact of the services rendered, the transfer of abilities, and increase of the



Undersecretary Tirona of the Commission on Filipinos Overseas (CFO) shares her views on the Unlad Kabayan and Atikha researches.

# An Exit Strategy for Massive Migration: Reaction to the Presentations

Andrea Anolin  
Consultant for Return and  
Reintegration  
Batis Center for Women

Ms Andrea Anolin, former Executive Director and now the consultant for return and reintegration of Batis Center for Women, extended her congratulations to Atikha and Unlad Kabayan, for their contributions to the store of knowledge regarding women, migration, return and reintegration.

Speaking from more than a decade of experience as frontline service provider with the Batis Center for Women, which has assisted women returnees from Japan, Ms Anolin recalled how initially, return and reintegration efforts focused mainly on crisis interventions. However, these have now been expanded to include reintegration and build long-term interventions. Batis has established helping relationships with their women clients, and have seen them and their children grow old. She also noted how education was a powerful weapon especially to women vulnerable to exploitative migration.

Ms Anolin related how, based on her experience with Batis, when women are in exploitative migration, their children often follow and inherit their vulnerabilities as migrants. Building on their mothers' unfulfilled dreams is often push factor for migration.

Ms Anolin enumerated three points as a reaction to the presentations by Unlad Kabayan and Atikha.

- 1) Opportunities should be provided for women to heal. These may include an impact assessment of their migration experience; formal or nonformal education; gender sensitivity training especially for victims of violence; and a reimagination of the concepts of sexuality.
- 2) As reflected in the researches of Atikha and Unlad Kabayan, interventions for return and reintegration are needed which address not just individual needs. These interventions should closely involve families. She mentioned how Batis cannot alone provide all interventions, because the primary support network in healing, rebuilding and reintegration remains the family. Other support networks should also be mobilized, such as LGUs and community-based organizations. Batis includes community-based interventions in its return and reintegration programs, precisely because the community is more in touch with women's vulnerabilities and social channels. For instance, when a victim of violence come home, they face the stigma of being failed migrants, so the community should also provide support.

3) There is now a need for an exit strategy for massive migration. Ms Anolin observed that the current labor migration phenomenon is different from the natural movement of people. The past 30 to 40 years has been characterized by the massive movement of people away from the country. Thus, the question arises: When is the massive return coming? The Philippines has recently felt trickles of return from the MENA's Arab Spring, the Saudization phenomenon, the Japan earthquake and tsunami. Eventually, massive return may happen when the policies in the migrant destination countries change, or during and after man-made or natural disasters. The Philippines should learn from historical experience of previous sending countries such as South Korea. Ms Anolin notes that migration for work will soon plateau, and thus the urgent need to craft policies on return.

Ms Anolin ended her reaction by stating that the researches of Atikha and Unlad Kabayan show that men and women experience migration differently. Now is the best time to pilot-test gender-responsive R and R, and learn from the experiences of these organizations.

# Por Gud Ka Na Ba?

## Introductory Message from the Film Producer

Chary Digno  
Producer  
Por Gud Ka Na Ba? Mga Kwento  
ng Pagbabalik 'Pinas  
Imagic Productions

Good morning to everyone!

In 2003, I made my very first video that touched on the subject of overseas work and migration, which became the PEOS video of the POEA. here I began to understand the very complex relationships between the overseas worker, the employer, the licensed employment agency, and the government and the NGOs. It wasn't easy to extract the rules from what I learned. There was no rule that said it was either right or wrong to go abroad and work for your family. But one of the biggest things I learned was from the POEA administrator, then Rosalinda Baldoz, who told us, make sure that you show in the video that if there is work here in the Philippines, then they should not go abroad anymore.

Years passed and several videos on migration later, I developed my own standpoint, not just as a filmmaker but as a Filipino. I wanted each video to serve a more important purpose, I wanted it to guide my fellow Filipinos about what it really means to work abroad – the good and the bad. the real big picture. In 2005, we made the film *Handa Ka Na Ba* for the International Labour Organisation (ILO) and the POEA to use, but honestly, I do not know if this was used very much. It showed pointblank the stories of the Filipino women being trafficked

abroad, those that jumped from the windowpanes of their employers' homes just to get away. Many times I wished it could have been shown more often so that more women may have been spared from those kinds of atrocities.

Last year, when the UN Women commissioned our production house to make this film, I was very excited but secretly, a little bit afraid. How truthful can we get, to whose perspective do we want this to cater to, and my greatest fear – will it make a difference? I think and I want to hope again, that it will.

One of the biggest differences that we tried to make is that aside from sharing the narratives of Filipino women working overseas, it was more important this time to focus on their return. Whether it was for good or because of the forces that they had no control of, for the very first time, we would be able to tell our audience that one day, you must return again. And life continues upon your return and hopefully a better life than when you first left and a much better life than when you were gone.

Before I end, I would just like to acknowledge our very young director, Joanne Valdez, who is here with us today, but much too shy to talk here in front of

you. And she is joined by our cinematographer who shot the film for us, her brother JR Valdez.

Thank you UN Women for this chance given to us – to make even just a small difference.

I hope you will all enjoy this.



The film "Por Gud Ka Na Ba? MGa Kwento ng pagbabalik 'Pinas'" dealt with the multiple narratives of returned women migrants.

# Open Forum

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Cy Rago of UN Women then opened the floor for the open forum.

Lita Hizon, president of the Philippine Association of Mediterranean Agencies Deploying Labours (PAMADEL), a coalition of recruitment agencies, brought up several points. First, she emphasized that unless and until the government offers alternative pro-poor jobs, the POEA cannot stop the deployment of household service workers. This is the case especially in Mindanao, where jobs for non-skilled, grade school or high school graduates are scarce. Ms Hizon also noted that the problem lies not in OFWs who leave as licensed workers, but with the illegally recruited. There is money in illegal recruitment. The Bureau of Immigration should be castigated for its inaction. Lawmakers, although they listen to recruitment agencies, also make policies against licensed agencies. Ms Hizon also addressed the NGOs, and stated that they are allies against the illegal recruiters. Regarding reintegration, Ms Hizon suggested that licensed agencies should be part of any programs because they are the ones who talk to applicants every day.

Renegold Macarulay, of the POEA Regional Center for the Visayas, agreed that licensed agencies should be included in reintegration programs. But only those recruitment agencies who have the hearts to serve.

Belinda Ante, of the DFA, agreed that most of the problems at the receiving country do not lie with licensed workers, but with the undocumented. Licensed workers have recourse, but the unlicensed fall within the radar of the DFA, which are bound by the host country's rules. She then raised the question, in reintegration programs, do even unlicensed workers have access to services? Ms Ante believes that eventually, all OFWs will have to come home. But what is the absorptive capacity of the Filipino economy to have them all back here? They can build businesses, or the government can create jobs for them. She recommended that the DTI and the DOH be invited to future fora if we want long-term solutions, because the DWSD's approach is more short-term. She noted that when Filipinos go abroad, they do well, so why can't we harness them here? She urged the government and the NGOs to concentrate on the plight of the undocumented. There is an ongoing repatriation of workers in Syria, but many come to the DFA begging to go back there because they cannot find work here. Hopefully the LGUs will have working reintegration programs.

Jean Manipon of UN Women urged the participants to find more ways to meet, because they are brimming with things to say. The challenge to international organizations, as mentioned in the

video documentary, is that the migration phenomenon is very complex. It is not because there are no jobs available in the Philippines, but because it is a global phenomenon, and transmigration is here to stay. So we need to look at the vulnerabilities and critical gaps. It is not a matter of preventing people from going abroad to find work, but it should be a choice, not forced. Second, reintegration should be planned, and a choice. In a rights based approach, duty bearers including the UN have to protect both the documented and undocumented workers. The stronger reintegration programs we have, the more accessible they are to women, but they should also empower women.

Janice Morales of Atikha opined that the idea is not just to be gender sensitive, but to be more gender responsive. This implies changing traditional gender relations, transforming the family. What drains the OFW family are the social issues they encounter. For example, men often don't want to do household chores while the women are abroad.

Mayan Villalba of Unlad Kabayan added that it takes further analysis, time and resources to be gender responsive. For instance, when talking about decision making, how do you make women more decisive in the family, in the community, by herself? It is hard for a woman to make decisions because she always thinks of the larger issues. When it comes to deciding to become an OFW, she has to think of her children's care, her house, etc. So it's not that simple for her. So even the effects and outcomes of gender responsive services have to consider this. It is a big challenge to be gender responsive, poor-responsive. These are the dilemmas CSOs have to face. So they should pool the resources and

experiences together in this, because the Philippines is not yet ready to say, this is it.

Christopher Lomibao, of the Committee on Overseas Workers Affairs of the House of Representatives, expressed that he was happy to note that mention was made of the LGU's involvement in the overseas employment program. He stated that under RA 10022 or the Amended Migrant Workers Act passed in 2010, the PEOS was already mandatory and institutionalized. Under the law, the national government was mandated to coordinate with LGUs and NGOs, and should put up migration desks. This is to combat or fight illegal recruitment, one of the intentions when RA 10022 was crafted, so that even in the countryside, people are equipped with all information they need. Regarding data, Atty. Lomibao also mentioned that the law institutionalized this in RA 10022, under the shared government information system or SGIS. In forming the law, Atty Lomibao related that the lawmakers found many government agencies were doing this. So the Committee talked to the National Computer Center, to provide technical expertise to unify their platforms. So this is just a question of implementation. He further said that the Committee will check the POEA's year-end Report to Congress regarding implementation of the SGIS, so congress can exercise its oversight function if there is a lack of implementation.

Undersecretary Mary Grace Tirona of the Commission on Filipinos Overseas spoke up regarding the SGISM. She said that this was an example of where there is an existing law which lacked implementation on the ground. Ms Tirona also pointed out that the disembarkation card can

be revised so it could be used for return and reintegration. She suggested that the Department of Labor and Employment (DOLE) and the DFA collaborate on this. As of now, when NGOs ask what has happened to the SGIS, the government cannot show them any results.

Ms Myrna Padilla, a returned OFW, reacted to Jean Manipon's statement that migration should be a matter of choice. She related her personal experience of being a 3<sup>rd</sup> year high school student, who had to stop her schooling and work as an HSW to help feed her parents and siblings. She said that she chose this painful path for herself and her own children. But for many OFWs, migration is not a matter of choice, but a tragic choice. Ms Padilla also addressed Ms Janice Zamora's statement that one year is not enough to implement a reintegration program. For her part, she believes that a reintegration program doesn't need one year. There are simple principles that OFWs should be taught. First, whether in going abroad or staying here, workers should know what they want, and build a personal roadmap. Second, they should focus on what is really important. Some OFWs leave the country for the dollars, but don't see the immense risks, their vulnerabilities, or their lack of training. For return and reintegration, the roadmap is still relevant and should be shared by the entire family. Ms Padilla also noted that technology should be harnessed for distressed OFWs. The government should know if an OFW has cut communication. For domestic workers, the cellphone is a weapon, they do text brigades to the embassies to ask for assistance. Ms Padilla also noted that the business process outsourcing (BPO) industry offers a lot of jobs, and can be harnessed as an alternative to



The open forum featured a lively discussion from several different viewpoints.

migration. She also noted that the success or failure of the OFW's migration experience depends on the recruitment agencies. Therefore, just like hotels, can the POEA also not provide a ratings system for agencies?

Ms Hizon then expressed that even though the PEOS is already mandatory, it should also include recruitment agencies, so that it will be more intensive. For the OWWA country-specific PDOS, she hoped that even the recruitment industry can give these trainings, because they are also concerned about those they deploy, and they know the deployment process.

Atty Lomibao answered that the law is silent on who can give the PEOS, so recruitment agencies can participate in the PEOS in their capacity as recruitment agencies. They only need to coordinate with the POEA.

Alona Tagai, of Batis Aware, reacted to the movie. She shared the organization's experience in Japan, with a male Filipino construction worker who had a "successful migration experience" because he fell from a structure, was paid, sent back to the Philippines, and was able to send his children to school using the money from the settlement. Another example was an OFW who became "successful," earned a lot of money, but what happened to her family? They became used to luxuries. She emphasized that we need a definition of what is "successful."

Ricky Tana, of the House Committee on Overseas Workers Affairs, added that he knew of an OFW mother, who used her earnings to send all her children to school. But her children still despised

her for abandoning them while they were growing up. So, not every OFW who earns a lot of money is successful.

Raquel Ignacio of Achieve then asked Atikha how its programs helped bridge the gap between and among genders. Were the programs talking about men, women and gays, or just women? She emphasized that OFWs and overseas Filipinos are not just women and men, they include other social orientations. She also challenged the recruitment agencies and the business sector, who say they want to take part in reintegration. How willing are they to allocate their resources for return and reintegration?

Ms Hizon replied that recruitment agencies have corporate social responsibility (CSR) that they can tap for resources.

Cy Rago of UN Women added that the business sector includes banks, real estate agencies, telecommunications, etc. Because these companies are earning a lot from migrants, so they should also contribute to programs on return and reintegration.

Renegold Macarulay of the POEA Regional Center for Visayas, noted that under the POEA Governing Board Resolution No. 6 Series of 2006, there should be a full disclosure policy on household service workers, and no placement fee should be charged to them. But in Hong Kong, agencies are collecting P120,000 as placement fee. Many domestic helpers are sent home after only three months, and they are unable the P120,000 loan they acquired. Some agencies make workers sign waivers and quitclaims, so they will be unable to get their money back. When we find out these violations, we should report them.

Cy Rago of UN Women responded that we should direct the question to the one with the monitoring function. Mr Macaruloy replied that this is the POEA's function, but many workers are often brainwashed against reporting these violations for fear of being blacklisted by other agencies.

Gina Yap of the Batis Center for Women recalled that in the past, the campaigns focused on minimizing migration, and encouraging women to stay in the country. But now, this call is no longer tenable, because there is a phenomenon of movement of people. Many look to the Philippines for making good use of its human resources, so other countries are now promoting human development oriented towards migration. But here in the Philippines we have refined our programs, we have gone full circle, we are now talking of return. Ms Yap commended the paper presentors, and urged everyone to make use of this as knowledge capital for development. But she also questioned why the socioeconomic and the family are always the focus of return and reintegration programs. Why not also because of a desire to come back to a better country? Reintegration is not just a matter of going back to earn a living, but to help rebuild the country out of a sense of identity. So in terms of reintegration, she urged stakeholders to factor that in.

Amer Doro of the POEA Satellite Office in Bongao, Tawi-tawi, raised the matter of Filipino deportees from Sabah. Most of the Filipinos deported by the Malaysian government to Tawi-tawi are from the Visayas and Mindanao. He asked the government agencies present if there are return and reintegration programs for them.

Belinda Ante answered that the DFA only takes care of onsite service. The relevant agency is OWWA.

Caroline Jimenez replied that the Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD) has a return and reintegration program and a task force based in Zamboanga, which has expanded its partnership to Tawi-tawi, and augment the funds of the LGUs there. She related that a big slice of the funds goes to bringing the deportees home. Upon their arrival, the DSWD has a processing service for them. She admitted that it is still not comprehensive, but the DSWD is trying to improve it by partnering with NGOs. But 70% of the deportees want to go back to Sabah to work, so the DSWD is also assisting them in regularizing their papers so they can go back.

Melissa Gibson of Tigra admitted that she was new in the Philippines, having previously been based in the US doing CSR, especially in migration. She noted that in the studies presented, the researchers tapped a lot of stakeholders, but not a lot of private sector stakeholders, such as banks. She added that banks often they track members' remittances, and therefore have the capacity to monitor how the OFWs use their money or plan their futures. They can help, first in providing data, but also in CSR. She suggested this as an area of improvement.

Janice Morales of Atikha addressed the question from Hanging question from Raquel Ignacio and Myrna Padilla. She clarified that in saying that a return and reintegration program cannot be accomplished in one year, she was subtly referring to the relationship between an NGO and its funder, which always focuses on output. But NGOs cannot just implement a one-year return and reintegration

program and come up with output. For the programs to have more impact, they should be long-term. Thus, she challenged funders to sustain its programs. Regarding the question on the gap in issues of gender, she said that Atikha addresses these issues in its school-based programs, so children are introduced early to issues of gender. When it comes to going beyond men and women, she admits that the organization first determines whether the community is ready for discussions on LGBT. She said they focused first on gender relations.

Mayan Villalba of Unlad Kabayan observed that many women OFWs also leave to escape, and be free because they are controlled by their communities, families, husbands. This is the case for many workers in Taiwan, Hong Kong, Singapore. She also mentioned that she was saddened to hear someone from government say that we cannot absorb our migrants. This means we are a failure as a government, as a nation. Reintegration means we are reducing the vulnerability of people who are outside of the protection of our laws.

Jean Manipon of UN Women concluded the open forum by commenting that Europe and other receiving countries are also saying that they have no absorptive capacity for our OFWs any longer. Thus the OFW is like a ping-pong ball - when needed, she is pushed forward, but when no longer needed, she is thrown back. But that is not just in the Philippines, Ms Manipon noted, but a global phenomenon. Diasporic Filipinos and cyclic migration is here, but a paradigm shift is needed. Return and reintegration should be a viable and attractive option for those who want to come home, even the distressed. She ended by stressing that

all stakeholders in the migration issue need resilience.



The open forum allowed government and non-government migration stakeholders to raise and address their concerns on return and reintegration.

# Workshop: Identifying Initial Activities Toward Crafting a Gender- Responsive Return and Reintegration Program

Jaime Antonio  
Facilitator  
UN Women Consultant on  
Participatory Gender Audit (PGA)

The participants then took part in a short workshop aimed at identifying initial activities toward crafting a gender-responsive return and reintegration program for women migrant workers. The workshop was led by UN Women Participatory Gender Audit (PGA) Consultant Jaime Antonio.

In setting the stage for the workshop, Mr Antonio outlined several gender issues in return and reintegration.

- Labor migration has a woman's face- she will be, for the most part, from the rural; married and with children. Poverty and marginalization pre-disposes her to migration and a determination, against all odds, to provide a better life for her family.
- Gender discriminatory practices and the weak position of many women in societies are often the causes of their vulnerability in the migration process.
- Economically imposed migration appeals to a woman's personal growth. Work abroad tends to be very well remunerated compared to salaries in the Philippines. Women experience increased economic empowerment and autonomy relative to their home community and family, and this may

even continue when she repatriates back to the Philippines.

- Migration for work, both international and local, has been recognized as a long-term structural feature of the national economy with women making up 50 percent of overseas workforce. According to the Philippine Development Plan 2011-2016 the economy has been healthier in decades for various reasons: Thanks to overseas remittances, surpluses on current account have been run consistently since 2003.
- Migrant workers are among the most vulnerable segment of the employment market and women migrants are most vulnerable of all by virtue of their concentration in low-skilled and low-paid jobs.
- Men are usually found in more skilled jobs and are therefore less likely to suffer to the same degree as women.
- Upon their return home, some women face social stigmatization - returning migrant women are *thought-out* to be in need of moral rehabilitation- Such social stereotyping affects their relationships with their children, husbands and partners and can break down marriages.

- Most migrant women return home only to find that they have no savings, and that the remittances they have sent have been squandered away in conspicuous consumption. If ever the money has been invested, it would likely be in the name of her husband.
- Current return and reintegration programmes tend to reinforce gender stereotypical notions that are associated with women and men- and there is a danger of pushing returning migrants to the informal economy.

Mr Antonio then instructed the participants to identify 3-4 strategic activities that should be initiated to start a gender responsive return and reintegration program, in the following key areas: Policies, Programs, Capacity building and Partnerships.

Here are the results of the workshop:

#### Programmes

- Financial literacy, for OFW and families left behind;
- Business assistance;
- Planning (future objectives, long-term);
- LGUs and agencies orientation of the families left behind;
- Repatriation and crisis assistance;
- Return and reintegration planning;
- Socio-economic reintegration assistance;
- Education and training (skills development, self-empowerment);



Mr Jaime Antonio presents the conceptual framework for the workshop.

- Community-level multi-stakeholder balikbayan events (welcome home);
- Holistic programs including legal, medical, entrepreneurial, economic, social components (ie. sharing);
- Savings-matching programs like Tres-Por-Uno ;
- Gender needs analysis for migrant returnees;
- Reactivation of one-stop processing center (OSPC) in Bongao, Tawi-tawi for Filipino deportees from Sabah;
- DOLE, POEA, OWWA, DSWD, DOH, DFA, TESDA, ARMM, provincial government to establish training center for women migrant workers;
- LGU-level social welfare development office for returning distressed overseas Filipinos (livelihood assistance, transportation assistance, skills training, psychosocial interventions);
- GAD programs and gender sensitivity training added to reintegration module.

#### Policies

- Municipal gender assessments;
- Market development for Philippine products, especially domestic market but also for export; and for women-owned and migrant-owned businesses;
- Rights-based and development-centric PEOS and PDOS;
- Community Reinvestment Act for financial institutions geared towards risk-

sharing mechanism between lenders and OFW families, communities;

- Local job generation as main priority of government;
- Look at DSWD policies under the Migrant Workers' Act (RA 10022);
- Municipal OFW mapping;
- Participatory gender audit (PGA) of frontline offices (DOLE, POEA, NRCO) that focus on reintegration;
- Re-migration bilateral agreements;
- LGU plans for Return and Reintegration;
- Divorce law;
- Review remittance policies.

#### Capacity building (for institutions, government, individuals)

- Training courses and scholarships for women at local government level;
- Organizing and official development support for organizations of migrant returnees and their families;
- Skills training in non-traditional jobs and trades;
- Patient-capital programs, venture capital;
- Retooling of staff at local and national levels in gender-responsive reintegration programs;
- Institutionalize the Pre-Employment Orientation Seminar (PEOS).

#### Partnerships

- Strengthening partnerships among GOs, NGO, CSOs; MOA signings and regular meetings;
- Women's migrant groups all over the country;
- Partnerships with migrant-receiving countries;
- Task Force on Migration and Development;
- Partnerships with private sector (banks, recruitment agencies, non-bank financial institutions, real estate,) to help with data;
- Telecommunications companies can help with connecting OFWs to their communities at the regional level;
- Partnership-building with migrant returnees and support groups;
- Improve LG/AG/NGO collaborations.



The results of the workshop showed what the participants viewed as the priority areas in return and reintegration.

## Next steps

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Lucia Cynita Rago  
National Programme Officer  
UN Women Philippines Project Office

Cy Rago then outlined the next steps to be undertaken after the forum. She noted that more venues and opportunities for discussions are opened, and these in turn should open up bigger discussions that are all interconnected.

Ms Rago thanked everyone for coming and sharing input and comments on return and reintegration, and assured the participants that UN Women will take their recommendations in their planning and communicate these to the concerned agencies.

## Closing Remarks

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Aida Jean Manipon  
National Coordinator  
UN Women Philippines Project Office

In closing, Ms Jean Manipon expressed her thanks to those who came, even from as far away as Baguio, Tawi-tawi, and Japan.

She expressed her appreciation for the researches conducted by the Scalabrini Center for Migration, and the three civil society organizations who conducted researches on return and reintegration, specifically, Dawn, Atikha and Unlad Kabayan, Inc.

She also thanked the UN Women consultants who lent a hand in the forum: Bong Antonio, Jean Franco, Charie Dino and Wowie Lomibao.

Ms Manipon also recognized the help extended by the partners in the UN family, especially the International Labour Organisation (ILO).

She thanked the UN Women staff who worked so hard for the forum, Trish Mendoza and Cy Rago.

Finally, she noted that the forum only meant that there was more work to come, and that the networks formed during the forum should bear fruit in terms of concrete results for the women migrant workers we have chosen to serve.

# List of Participants

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## Government

Undersecretary Mary Grace Tirona, Commission on Filipinos Overseas (CFO)  
Belinda Ante, Department of Foreign Affairs (DFA)  
Caroline Jimenez, Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD)  
Beatriz Sanga, Committee Secretary, Committee on Women and Gender Equality, House of Representatives  
Christopher Lomibao, Committee Secretary, Committee on Overseas Workers Affairs, House of Representatives  
Joseph Richardson Tana, Committee on Overseas Workers Affairs, House of Representatives  
Maurene Papa, National Economic and Development Authority (NEDA)  
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Gina Yap, Batis Center for Women  
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Carlos Camion, International Labour Organisation (ILO)  
Hilda Tidalgo, ILO  
Lita Hizon, President, Philippine Association of Mediterranean Agencies Deploying Labours (PAMADEL)  
Melissa Gibson, Tigra  
Ma. Angela Villalba, Executive Director, Unlad Kabayan, Inc.

## Academe

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Jaime Antonio

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OFW Returnees

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Norhata Tuan

Myrna Alonto

Elsa Belarmino