Dr. Alfredo J. Ganapin Advocacy Forum Series IV

"Pinay X-Abroad": Stories of Tears and Triumph

Center for Migrant Advocacy-Philippines (CMA)

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INTRODUCTION

Philippine labor migration has a woman's face. According to the Philippine Overseas Employment Administration (POEA), in 2003, more than 70% of the total number of workers who migrated are women. Most of the women are between 25-29 years old. Women migrants live and work in more than 192 countries and destinations. They work as professional and technical employees, nurses, clerical and sales workers, entertainers, caregivers, and domestic workers. Many are employed in jobs which traditionally have been undertaken by women.

Due to the economic and political crisis in the Philippines as reflected in the increasing poverty, lack of employment, corruption, deteriorating peace and order situation and absence of good governance, labor migration has become the first option for many Filipinos. Some of the women migrants were unemployed or had jobs in the Philippines which were unpaid or undervalued. They also experienced discrimination in their former workplaces.

After more than three decades of labor migration, this is an opportune time to revisit the tortuous journeys of Filipino women migrant workers in their search for a better future for themselves and their families.

"Pinay X-Abroad": Stories of Tears and Triumphs

The fourth Dr. Alfredo J. Ganapin Advocacy Forum Series focuses on women migrant workers who have returned to the Philippines. What does returning home mean to the women migrants and their families? What is the home that one returns to? What about the community they left behind? To what extent has migration affected the life of women migrant and their families?

The forum seeks:

- to highlight the gender dimension of Philippine labor migration;
- to identify the urgent concerns and needs of women migrant workers prior to coming home and upon their actual return; and
- to share and reflect on existing reintegration programs and initiatives that aim to respond to the concerns and needs of women migrant workers.

OPENING REMARKS

Chat Garcia-Ramilo
Vice President, Board of Trustees, Center for Migrant Advocacy

Chat welcomed the participants. As a migrant to Australia in the '80s, Chat stated that two elements come into play when a women migrant worker returns home, namely choice and agency. Choice refers to jobs that a women migrant worker can find as opposed to jobs she wants. Agency is the capacity to do something when she returns, to deal with her experiences in migration and to reinvent her self. She has to confront reintegration problems including the social and psychological effects of migration and the family and financial difficulties. The environment she finds herself in is also important, including the availability of jobs, support systems and skills trainings. They would have to address their health situation, stigma related to their return, inadequate or wasted savings, lack of remunerative employment, and how to file complaints when one was exploited or abused.

In 2003, the International Labour Office (ILO) produced a booklet entitled "*Back Home: Return and Reintegration of the Information Guide-Preventing Discrimination, Exploitation and Abuse of Women Migrant Workers*." The ILO differentiated the manner by which migrant workers return, either by a) force or involuntary, including deportation or b) voluntarily. The circumstances in each case are very different in terms of conditions, problems and their needs.

Is coming home the end of the story? Coming home is definitely not the end of the story. It is the start of another. The testimonials would show how the new story can be a good one.

Andrea Anolin
President, ***Network Opposed to Violence Against Migrant Women*** *and Executive Director,* ***BATIS Center for Women***

"The Network Opposed to Violence against Migrant Women (NOVA) was formed 10 years ago and its history runs parallel to the phenomenon of the feminization of migration. As NOVA addressed all forms of violence against women through research and advocacy, an increasing number of Filipino women left the Philippines to undertake work overseas that are considered difficult, dangerous and demeaning.

Over the years, NOVA has been very active in launching campaigns to raise awareness on violence against women and women migrants. The stories of Filipina migrant workers that we will hear began as tales of hopes and dreams and of improving life situations and economic conditions. For many migrant workers, these hopes and dreams quickly unraveled as the risks and realities of overseas work began to set in.

But their stories are also tales of triumphs as women migrant workers courageously struggled and fought to overcome the many challenges of an overseas worker's life, including violence against women. The outcomes of their journeys may have been different from what they had hoped for, but they have not given up. Filipina migrant workers continue to confront the challenges of surviving daily life. For some, their experiences have served as catalysts in their desire and effort to work for social transformation."

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Gender, Migration and Social Change: The Return of Filipino Women Migrant Workers

Caridad T. Sri Tharan
Founding member, Migrant Forum in Asia

Very little has been written on the situation of women migrant workers when they return to the Philippines. There is a need to make visible and central the gender issue in migration. There is also a need to study the impact of migration, to view migration as dynamic and to analyze it at three levels: 1) macro level – how the state largely contributes to migration; 2) impact of migration; and 3) at the level of the migrant woman herself. International labor migration, particularly of women, produces an enormous impact on the sending country, communities, families left behind and the lives of individual women migrants. Several studies have documented the migrant women's lives while abroad, including their conditions of employment, relationships with employers, day-to-day living in a foreign land, adjustments, hardships and coping mechanisms. Very little attention has been paid to their lives after migration, that is, when they return home for good.

The interviews with women migrants documented their lives after returning home to the Philippines. They brought out the depth and richness of their experiences, borne mainly by their daily struggles to have decent lives not just for themselves but mainly for their families. However, one has to view the totality of the migrants' experiences to understand their lives after migration. It is important to examine the process involved in the decision to return home.

Reasons for Returning to the Philippines

One could return home involuntarily as when a migrant encounters problems with conditions of employment, such as having no job at all, being cheated by the recruiter or having fake documents; and when contracts are terminated prematurely for various reasons. In certain cases, events beyond their control such as the 1990 Gulf war and the civil unrests in Iran, Israel and Palestine forced thousands to return home. For others, the decision to return home is based on other factors.

Aida went to Kuwait hoping to work for a couple of years only to realize shortly upon arrival that she was a victim of illegal recruitment. She, along with her colleagues, were detained by their agent and not given any food. She escaped by jumping out of the window and later found herself in the hospital for the next nine months with a broken leg which rendered her physically disabled. Lina worked for three years in Jeddah but was not paid by her employer for the last seven months of her work. She left and found a job as a waitress in a hotel but was always afraid of being arrested since she no longer had a valid work permit. Ultimately she met a Filipino, a migrant worker, got married, and had two children after which she decided to return to the Philippines.

Their personas as daughters, sisters, mothers or wives are not suspended while they are away from home.

Ana was a domestic helper in Saudi Arabia in a house where she faced constant threats of sexual abuse. In a particular incident, a struggle ensued between her and her male employer. It was an act of self-defense. She grabbed a knife and stabbed him. Ana was given 60 *rotan* (rattan cane) strokes and was thereafter deported back to the Philippines. Not long after, she applied for overseas work this time to Taiwan. She worked for six years and with her earnings was able to buy a piece of land and build a small house. But when Ana's working visa expired, she remained working in Taiwan and was eventually caught by the authorities. She was jailed and fined and once again, deported.

Vangie worked as a staff nurse in a hospital in Saudi Arabia for nine years and came home for three-month vacations every two years. During her last vacation, she decided to stay home for good as she had saved some money. Her children were in school and she thought she would look for a job in the Philippines. However, Vangie faced difficulty in

securing a job for lack of a *patron* (influential supporter). She therefore entertained thoughts of applying again to work overseas.

Another reason for returning home concerns reproductive health issues. Angie came home for good after finishing her second contract as a domestic worker in Singapore. She wanted to have a second child. She was able to save most of her salary and decided to use it as a start-up capital for a wood carving business.

Illness in the family as well as problems with husbands and children left behind are compelling reasons for the women migrants to return home. While Dorothy was in Hong Kong working as a domestic worker, she left her two children with her husband and her own mother. After 8 1/2 years of overseas work, she decided to come home when her mother fell ill. Now she earns some money tending a convenience store. Maria had high hopes that the remittances she religiously sent to her husband would be put to good use as they both agreed upon. However, this was not the case as her husband indulged in drinking and gambling. Maria, therefore, decided to return to the Philippines and set up a small business but all the earnings were once again consumed by her husband's vices. She left for overseas work, this time, to Taiwan but only for four months as she faced problems with her employment agency. Back in her community, Maria is now engaged in small trading.

Problems with unfaithful husbands compelled Flor, Ninya and Marta to come home just in time to save their respective marriages. Melina was a single parent with one child when she was working in Singapore and later in Hong Kong for about five years. When her son started having troubles in school and getting poor grades, she decided it was time to come home. Likewise, when Tita who worked for 10 years in Kuwait as a hospital porter, learned that her son was arrested and put in jail for possession of drugs, she returned to the Philippines for good.

The homecoming may in itself prove a massive disappointment and the impetus to begin a new diasporic journey.

For some, the return was premature as it occurred not too long after they settled in the host country. "After eight months, I could no longer endure how we Filipinos were lowly regarded," remarked Bernadette. "The local people looked down on us, thinking that we Filipinos are very, very poor. Our employer did not provide us with enough food. We worked long hours and some of my friends even had to sleep on the floor. Moreover, our clients at the beauty salon were too difficult to please."

Others decided to come home when their goals were achieved. Yoly's main goal in working overseas was to send her eldest child to college. When this goal was realized, she decided to return home. The son completed two bachelor degrees in mathematics and electronics communication. He now has a good paying job, married with a child and takes care of his younger brother's college expenses.

Some migrant workers decided to return home not because they have realized the goals they have set for themselves but because they simply felt they have been away too long. Remy, who became a widow while working overseas agonized on her decision to return to the Philippines. “It took me a long time to make the decision. I knew it would not be easy for me to get a job once back home. I did not have money to bring back even after working for 13 years in Hong Kong because I had to spend for all sorts of eventualities in my family such as illnesses and deaths. As a union leader, I could already feel the burn-out from stress and work. Above all, I realized that my only child, my son, has been separated from me for too long. I told myself it is time to go home and there is no turning back.”

For Sylvia, a college graduate who worked for about seven years in Saipan and Macau, coming home was precipitated by her desire to teach, one of her ambitions.

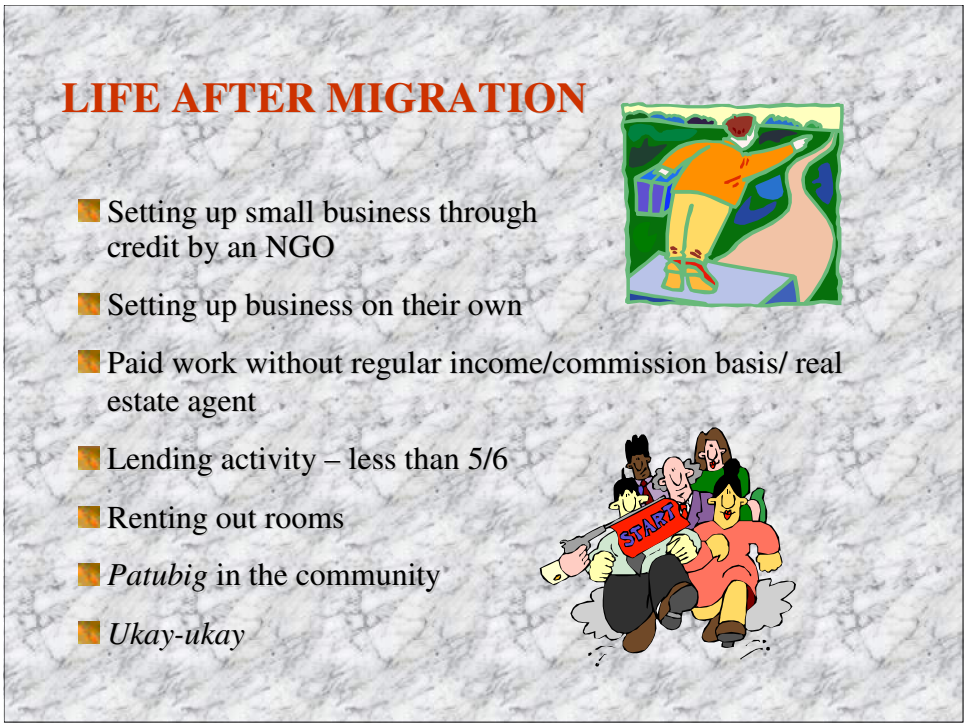
What is the home that the migrant worker returns to?

Women return to a changed home. A daughter who did not see her mother for 15 years was angry and hated her. She wanted to punish her mother and thus gave her all sorts of problems. A son who was the main reason for the mother working abroad completed college, became an engineer and landed a good job. Another mother who had wished her two sons could become engineers was disappointed. A husband mismanaged his wife’s earnings and lent the money to his siblings so they could go abroad but the loans were not repaid. Another husband squandered money on drinking, gambling and womanizing. However, one husband played his role well and took very good care of the children and the household.

When I came home, I expected my family to be complete and happy as it was before I left. We used to share our problems, eat our meals together, exchange anecdotes, and share dreams. When I came home, each one leads his or her own life. There is no one to talk to at times. No one is at home. Things have changed. Something is now sorely lacking. What is important to me now is that I have returned after being away for eight long years.

Prior to my leaving for abroad, we had financial difficulties. Now life has improved but the funds are still insufficient for our needs. While abroad, your family was proud of you because you could provide for their wants. Now that you are back, they no longer appreciate you because you are not able to provide anymore.

Upon returning home to the Philippines, Sylvia had to take a one-year course so that she could qualify to teach high school. She passed the course with excellent grades. She was the most promising candidate when she applied for a teaching post but because she did not have a *patron* (influential supporter), she did not succeed. Out of sheer frustration, she engaged in mission work with young people in Cebu for about six months after which she returned to her hometown. She decided to learn how to bake and set up her own bake shop. She earns just enough to keep her going. Her sales peaked during the planting and harvesting season and she seems contented being a baker and an owner of a small business herself.



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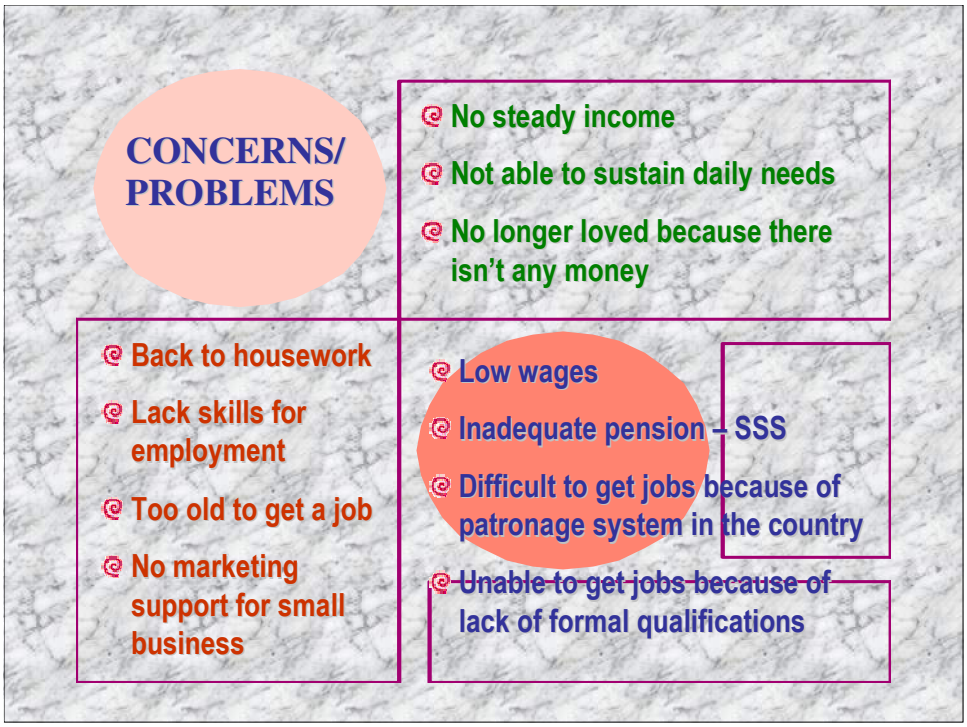
For Ana, coming home from Taiwan meant separating from her unfaithful husband who misused her earnings. She is back to being a farmer and setting up a home all by herself. She left the land and the small house she built earlier in another province because she no longer wanted to see her former husband.

Now in their fifties and early sixties, Tersing, Pacing and Adel are once again small farmers, planting and harvesting *palay* (rice stalks) and vegetables mainly for home consumption. The small surplus is sold in neighboring towns.

When Lily's husband died, she returned home for good after working for ten years in Hong Kong. Her husband served both as father and mother. He invested Lily's earnings and purchased land and vehicles for hire.

Mila returned to a home where she had difficulty living with a husband who had become unfaithful in her years of absence. "I swallowed my pride, I did not create a scandal," she remarked. "I wanted to separate from him but my father asked me not to since his unfaithfulness was his only 'sin of commission' in our marriage."



Mila's earnings abroad in Cyprus, Korea and Saipan where she was a domestic helper and factory worker supported her carpenter husband, a sister who was a battered wife, two adopted children and her own daughter who completed secretarial course and later went to Cyprus to be a domestic helper. Mila has become a leader in a federation of migrants' groups in her home province and actively serves as its president.

Zeny came home only to learn that her son, her only child resented her return because this meant he no longer enjoyed the status of being a child of a migrant worker and of being showered with gifts and nice clothes. Since Zeny no longer had a stable source of income, her son who was still in college received a meager allowance. He became insecure thinking he will not be able to complete his college education. Zeny and his son argued and fought each other. After 13 years of working abroad, Zeny yearned to come home but her son could not understand why she had to return at a time when he was already much older. The son recalled that whenever his mother came home for a visit, he was 'super spoiled' by her and received many toys. Though his mother was away for 13 years, she visited him at least once a year and even took him to Hong Kong yearly during the summer school break. He said, "I had gotten used to her absence. My grandmother took care of me very well. I was her favorite grandchild. I had an aunt who was most special and most loving. I was also taken cared of very well by another woman who was hired to look after me. She too was special to me. It was difficult when my mother came back as we no longer had enough money. We had arguments and fights over many things, both small and big. My mother remarked that I was so used to a good life and I needed to experience hard life. But I argued that we needed money so that I could complete my education. Finally, we both got tired of quarrelling."

The first few months of my return were difficult. *Nahirapan akong ibalik ang loob ko sa mga bata at kay Mister*. (I found it difficult to feel the same way towards my children and husband (as I did before I left).) I was used to doing things on my own while away but now, I have to inform my husband or even ask permission from him. I was also used to having a fixed income at the end of every month. This is not the case any more. At times, when I run out of money, I think of going abroad again to work but I am not that young any more. I feel that my husband is more caring towards me now than before. He easily worries for example, when my blood pressure increases a bit." His circle of friends who used to have drinking bouts with him while she was abroad, can no longer come to the house as often and this pleases her. She also feels more valued for her hard work and contribution to the family's well-being.

Nila's second son suffered because of her absence from home. He felt he did not have anyone to turn to for comfort and advice although his father was around. His father was a soldier who worked in a nearby military camp but his free hours were spent with his friends drinking and eating into the late hours of the night. The second son had to take care of the youngest child in the family while the eldest studied in college. He also ran all sorts of errands for the father. At age 15, he had a child with a young woman whom he dated.

Establishing Small Businesses as Sources of Income

Two women migrants availed of a credit program of a social development organization in their locality and with the loans set up small businesses. The spouses shared in the workload. The women felt an equal relationship with their respective spouses has grown and developed.

Another woman, a widow, tried a small jewelry business but it failed. She spent her savings on her daughter. She paid her hospital bills and supported her since she stopped working. Her daughter married a man without a job. She bought him a tricycle for hire and thus earned some money. All her savings are gone. She does not have any regular source of income. She is a real estate agent and only earns if she is able to sell a lot or a house which is quite seldom. She feels alone and rejected by her daughter. Life is hard and she can barely meet her daily needs not even her daily meals. "I am getting old. Life could be a bit easier if I could get a loan and set up a small business of my own. I can cook and set up a food stall."

A single parent who had saved $4,000 after working for 10 years used the money to add rooms to her house and rents them. She also set up a stall selling soft drinks and ice. She bought and sold blankets and clothes and lent money. Cecilia (not her real name) is now sixty years old, with eight grandchildren and is proud to have a granddaughter who is a college graduate. "I have gone through all sorts of difficulties in life," she says. "But life is much better now, for myself and my children."

After working for 12 years in the Middle East as domestic helper, caregiver/nanny and hotel worker, Amy's husband said, "Twelve years is enough." She went home for good

only to find out that the money she had dutifully sent through the years was given to her husbands' siblings to help them go abroad. It was meant to be a loan but it was never repaid. Amy was furious, she felt the husband did not value her years of hard work. She rebelled, left home for two months and used her money to spend time with her friends drinking and going out. When she returned home, a confrontation ensued this time with her son. He berated her for the years she was away and for the long time he was deprived of her love and care. Amy decided to take decisive steps. She had their house repaired. Her husband took a loan and purchased items for the house. She now works as a real estate agent and her only daughter is preparing to go to Japan to work as an overseas performing artist.

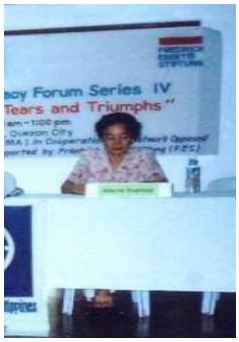
Cora, a widow, tried all sorts of work to earn an income. She operated an office canteen which generated a decent income. But it was too tedious and demanding and she gave it up after six months. Having been a union leader, her experience was put to good use. She gave lectures to departing overseas workers but this did not provide her a regular income. Cora started to set up a convenience store but neighbors purchased goods on credit and before long the business closed down. Two rooms were added to her modest home and for a while she had tenants. Cora also had a soap business in addition to a stall which sells second hand clothes. For Cora, life has been a constant struggle and at one point, she contemplated on just giving it up.

Anita does not have a regular job. She engages in money lending and occasionally gives talks at recruitment agencies to share her experience abroad as a domestic worker. Fely tried to venture into business so she would not think of working overseas again. She set up a boutique but ultimately, she spent all her capital. She started to build a house but fell into debt. Now she is thinking of going abroad again.

Fe, the eldest in a brood of six, decided to come home for good in 2000 after working for seven years in Malaysia and Hong Kong. She got married thereafter. Part of her earnings went to a small mining project but it was not successful. She sold vegetables and scrap materials. However, these were not profitable either. She offered manicure services, which she learned while in Hong Kong. All these efforts were inadequate to meet her family's needs. Her husband is a bill collector and earns a meager income. She is thinking of going abroad again as this may give her a regular income. She feels scared of going into any business venture now.

With their savings, some women have been able to set up small businesses, including variety stores, selling food, raising chickens and pigs, and vegetable farming.

SHARING



(CMA Photo Library)

A Member of the Community and Society

Gloria Supsup, Migrant Committee Member, Bannuar Ti La Union (Association of Migrant Workers in La Union)

In 1967, I graduated from St. Louis University with a degree in Commerce. I worked as a cashier in John Hay Air Base, Baguio City with a salary of ten pesos a day. Later, I married my husband, a taxi driver, whom my parents disliked. I was cursed by my parents. Life was tough as we went through many difficulties. I had no parents to run to for help and to share my troubles. However, we raised a strong and happy family.

The difficult decision I made was leaving my children in the care of my husband. In 1979, my three children were in primary school. My two eldest sons were both in grade four. My girl was in grade two and my youngest son was in kindergarten. We planned and dreamed of a good future. One day, I was invited to a school meeting. I met a lady who was on vacation from Hong Kong. She talked about her life abroad. I was inspired and asked to visit her at home which I did. She gave me a contract and instructed me to submit all requirements while she promised to look for an employer. I paid her two thousand pesos.

After a year, I did not hear from her. Later, I joined my friends to inquire from a recruitment agency in Manila. I passed the interview, submitted all the requirements and paid for my placement fee of three thousand pesos. After waiting for three months, God answered all my prayers. Praise the Lord.

Life as a Migrant Worker

In 1980, I left my family in Baguio. I was employed by a Chinese family with a salary of 980 Hong Kong dollars (HKD). I was the 11th helper in this household with the previous domestic workers leaving their jobs. The female employer told the agency that I would have to work for her for two years or else she would not hire any more migrant workers.

My employer was very demanding. Her grandmother lives with her and takes care of her one year old baby. Communication was very difficult due to the language. My housework was nonstop. I ate my meals while standing in front of the stove. My meals consisted of an egg and a bowl of rice for lunch and a bowl of noodles for dinner. I felt exhausted and hungry at times and I missed my children. I had to hide my tears. My work days were very long while I only had four hours to rest at night. Every Saturday evening, my employer would hand me all my letters and instruct me to read them only after all my work is done or during my holiday.

My monthly remittance was insufficient. Based on the exchange rate at that time, I was only earning P1,200. I needed to take on additional work to earn more. I accepted extra work during my holidays. The grandmother asked me to clean her house and she paid me 200 HKD a month. My employer increased my salary to 1,400 HKD a month when I started to clean her two cars on a daily basis at 6am. During winter, it was very cold. She kept and saved my extra pay. Two months before my contract finished, she gave me all my savings.

At the time that I left for Hong Kong, we did not have any property. I arranged to purchase a small lot in the Philippines. The transaction was completed but my son was listed as the property owner. This created a gap between him and me. But I just remained silent.

On July 16, 1980, the Philippines was hit by an earthquake. Our house completely collapsed and my children were homeless. My younger children were cared for by my eldest son. Their father was nowhere to be found. My daughter was rescued by her instructor from the Baguio Colleges building that completely collapsed. I saw the television news which showed how the Philippines suffered. There was no electricity, water, and means of communications. People stayed on the streets. How I wished I could have flown home. But both my employers were on holiday in America. I had to look after their two children. I had no alternative. I just prayed and asked God to protect us.

Assistance to Filipino migrant workers

During my 23 years of stay in Hong Kong, I joined the Filipino Group at St. Joseph's Church. We organized religious groups and formed choirs for both English and Filipino masses. I attended two leadership trainings, a Bible Seminar, classes in the Art of Socialization, which includes hospital and prison visitations, and the Art of Chinese language.

I also joined other social activities. We assisted Filipino migrant workers whose jobs were terminated. We assisted mothers in hospitals find temporary homes for their babies, assisted in getting passports, and solicited airplane tickets. We visited Filipino migrant detainees in prisons, served as a means of communication with their relatives, and provided religious articles. We assisted undocumented workers, provided information, helped them find temporary homes and solicited for their food and airplane tickets.

Impact on my family

My children learned and accepted the value of my absence at home. When they were young, they learned how to spend their allowances. They sent me their test papers as a means of regular communications between us. My two sons finished their two year courses. My second eldest son finished Electrical Engineering at St. Louis' University, Baguio City and obtained his masters at Mapua University in Manila. He is now employed at De la Salle in Dasmarinas and is taking his PhD at the University of the Philippines (UP). My daughter finished her degree in Political Science. My husband was a graduate of Agriculture at UP Los Banos. I was able to provide furniture for our house. I purchased four tricycles that are now the source of income for our family. We also purchased a car jointly with my son who is now working as an engineer in Brunei and my daughter who worked in Hong Kong for nine years. I also invested in land that is now the source of rice for our family consumption. I received long service payments from my three employers whom I served for ten, five and six years respectively.

How migration changed my life as a person

On May 8, 2003, I returned to the Philippines. I felt I was a stranger in my home. I went back at a time that the possible spread of SARS (Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome that was identified only in November 2002 in relation to an outbreak of respiratory illness starting in China) alarmed the country. People were frightened and scared that I came from Hong Kong. Only three members of my family came to fetch me. They were brave and eager to see me. They showed me great encouragement and support while other people kept their distance. I assured them that I was very healthy.

A few months after my arrival, I joined a group of overseas Filipino workers in my *barangay* (village). This chapter was active for a year. *Kanlungan* Center Foundation, Inc., a non-government, non-profit service and advocacy organization for overseas Filipino workers, especially women, and their families, conducted a re-orientation briefing which was followed by an election of officers. People with busy families were reluctant to accept responsible positions. I was elected treasurer and my husband became the president. Livelihood projects were introduced. Members sold mushroom. Some gathered dried banana leaves. Some were employed as workers.

I attended municipal meetings representing our village. I accepted the post of Vice President of the municipal chapter and later became its President. Trainings were conducted for 8-14 village chapters. Bannuar ti La Union, a municipal chapter, started its micro-lending program through the assistance and supervision of Kanlungan. Every village chapter has its own ongoing livelihood projects including fish ponds of tilapia, prawn and mudfish, mushroom culture, rice dealerships, and convenience stores.

In March 2005, I was elected secretary to the provincial Bannuar. We attended trainings conducted by Kanlungan. Presently, we are the ones conducting trainings and seminars for our chapters. We cover ten municipalities namely, Naguilian, Burgos, Bauang, Pugo, Aringay, San Fernando, San Gabriel, Sudipen, Santol and Bagulin.

(CMA Photo Library)

"Ang Aking Paglalakbay" (My Journey)
Victorina Lloren
President, Batis Aware (Association of Women Migrant Workers from Japan)

I grew up in a conservative family in Calbayog, Samar. I grew up fearing my father. I was forced to marry a man I neither knew nor loved when I was 14. We had children but we eventually separated.

I was in college when the first opportunity to go to Japan came. I opted to do this for my children. I joined the Bayanihan Dance Troupe in the 80s. I worked there thrice and was able to provide for the financial and other material needs of my family and my children. My siblings, even when they already had their own families, also depended on me. I endured hardships and loneliness in Japan all for my family and children because of the poverty in the Philippines.

I married a Japanese man, thinking he was a good man and dreaming of living happily ever after. We had one child. But I found it hard to follow the Japanese traditions and culture. I endured the hardships of being married to a Japanese man. I forced myself to follow all his policies and instructions. I suffered his brazen womanizing and worked like a maid. He neither regarded nor respected me as his wife. He embarrassed me before his family. I was a victim of domestic violence. I could no longer bear my situation and I hit him with a samurai and escaped with our child.

My child and I hid in Japan for five years until I was arrested by police and immigration officers. I was treated like a murderer and like a person who has a communicable disease. I was forced to go back to the Philippines but I had to leave my child behind. When I got home, I was confused and suffering. Yet, my family and friends even blamed me for what happened. They thought badly of me.

I resumed taking care of my family and my children. I learned about Batis Center for Women from a television program. I approached the organization. I learned about women's issues and women's rights from their seminars. I met other women who had different experiences. I regained my self-confidence. I became firm, courageous and determined in my decisions. Nowadays, I share my experiences.

I helped organize Batis-Aware through the assistance of *Batis* Center for Women. *Batis*-Aware is an organization of former Batis Center clients. We have income-generating activities including food stands that sell hamburgers and *lugaw* (rice porridge). We sewed, created bead jewelry and offered catering services. We also organized the *Teatro Batis* (*Batis* Theater) that performs plays depicting our experiences.

RESPONSE

Elsa Villamor Belarmino: From Domestic Worker in Taiwan to Entrepreneur

Rosario Canete, Unlad Kabayan

Elsa Villamor Belarmino, a returned Filipina migrant from Taiwan, worked for seven years as a domestic worker. She left the Philippines to work as a caregiver in Taiwan to support her family. She also wanted to save money to set up a business. She wanted to give her children a good future. Although her contract stated her employment as a caregiver, in reality, Elsa worked as a domestic worker. She paid a placement fee of P50,000, more than the legal placement fee for caregivers. Her second employer, for five years, was kind. However, her contract still stated that she worked as a caregiver even though she was working as a domestic helper.

During Elsa's first contract, she worked for two years without taking a day off or holiday and yet she wasn't able to save any money. Most of her income went to her loan which she used to pay the placement fee. Separated from her family and her two children, she coped with homesickness by going to church, meeting other Filipinos in Taiwan and constantly communicating with her family. During her last two years in Taiwan, Elsa joined Hope Workers Center's reintegration program, which partnered with Unlad Kabayan in the Philippines. They formed a savings group composed of 10 members. They helped the members plan for their eventual return to the Philippines.

When Elsa learned about a business opportunity in my province, Matin-ao, Maiinit, Surigao del Norte, she presented the opportunity to fellow Filipinos in Taiwan and they agreed to buy a rice mill. Elsa went home to manage it. Through the recommendation of Hope Workers Center, Unlad Kabayan provided technical and financial assistance to the enterprise.

Challenges after Returning Home

Women migrant workers face various challenges in different arenas. They find it difficult to adjust in the family and many times feel estranged from their children. They also feel estranged from their communities or towns. Neighbors believe that they are better off financially and could lend money. Setting up businesses is difficult due to the lack of capital. If indeed income is generated from the small businesses, the funds are used to pay loans.

Policy Recommendations

Elsa feels that she has come a long way from being a domestic worker to an entrepreneur. She challenges migrant workers to start preparing for their return home by saving their money. Work abroad is not permanent and they should be conscious about preparing for their return. She also challenges both labor-sending and receiving countries to support migrant workers in the reintegration process.

Elsa also recommends the following:

- The Philippine Government needs to sign bilateral agreements with labor-receiving countries to ensure the legal protection of migrant workers. Through the bilateral agreements, both labor-sending and receiving countries can strictly monitor collection of placement fees (should be no more than one month's salary) by recruitment agencies and provide benefits to migrant workers including holidays and health insurance coverage.
- Both labor-sending and receiving countries should promote reintegration of migrant workers.
- Labor-sending countries should provide support (financial and technical assistance) and implement programs which support enterprises initiated by migrant workers.

OPEN FORUM

Esteban Daligdig, Maya Bans-Cortina, William Gois, Ande Anolin, Mike Bolos
(CMA Photo Library)

Lack of assistance from the Philippine government

Gloria Supsup: We help victims of illegal recruitment. One time, we went to the Philippine Consulate to ask for assistance for domestic workers who wanted to return to the Philippines. The Consulate was closed because the staff claimed it was a holiday. When we called their counterparts in the Philippines, we realized that the Consulate was closed not because it was a holiday but because the staff were in Hong Kong Disneyland. We solicited contributions from other Filipino migrant workers and bought the plane tickets for domestic workers as well as "*pasalubong*" (gifts) for their families. When the Consulate re-opened, they looked for the domestic workers who needed help. We told the Consulate staff that we bought the plane tickets for the domestic workers since we could only help them during our day off. The consulate staff said "*OK na pala sila*." (So they are now ok.)

Mary Lou Alcid: This proves that the government is not helping migrant workers. It's the migrant workers themselves who help their fellow migrant workers.

Importance of Reintegration Programs

Mike Bolos: Even before an individual leaves to work abroad, the migrant worker must already be informed about the reintegration program.

Mary Lou Alcid: The government's role is very important. It must provide resources to support endeavors that will facilitate the reintegration of migrant workers.

CLOSING REMARKS

Joanne Carmela B. Barriga
Assistant Programme Coordinator, Philippine Office, Friedrich Ebert Stiftung,

Social justice and peace cannot be achieved if half of the world's population - the women - are continuously discriminated, violated, marginalized and remained voiceless. The theme of this forum is not only important but also personal for many of us Filipinos. Who among us do not see the face of our mother, our sister, our aunt, our cousins, our *lola* (grandmother), our classmate, our classmate's mother, our best friend, ourselves each time we hear *Pinay* (Filipina) migrant worker?

We are part of the generation of women who grew up hearing stories of Maricris Sioson, Sarah Balabagan, Flor Contemplacion and the many nameless women migrant workers who struggled for better lives for their families and themselves. Truly, the reasons for migrating as well as the demand for women's work abroad are very much "gendered". As emphasized by our speakers today, though the influx of remittances to the economy keeps the country afloat, the social costs of Filipino labor migration weigh heavily on the women migrant workers, their families and our society as a whole.

Our Resident Representatives, Dr. Heinz Bongartz and Mrs. Beate Martin, extend their congratulations to the Center for Migrant Advocacy-Philippines and the Network Opposed to Violence against Migrant Women for organizing this forum and the three previous Dr. Alfredo J. Ganapin Advocacy Forum Series.

Thank you to our panel speakers, Caridad Tharan, Gloria Supsup and Baby Lloren for sharing their work and experiences with women migrant workers. They continue to remind us that women migrant workers are not only tearful victims in these circumstances but agents of social change.

I would like to end with a quote from Heinz. He once said to me when we were discussing migrant workers, "Our work with migrant workers does not end on writing, studying, talking about them. Words are not enough but action might help them in their plight."

The road to achieving the protection of human rights of Filipino women migrant workers is long but with our collective action, the journey is bearable and our destination not unreachable. And as *Pinay* migrant workers dream, we too have ours. We dream of a time:

- when Filipinas no longer choose to leave because of the lack of opportunities in our country which is rocked by political instability, poverty, and economic and gender inequalities;

- when women's voices are no longer murmured, unheard and forgotten;
- when the freedoms and human rights of women migrant workers and their families are protected and promoted by the government; and
- when sustainable and gender-responsive reintegration programs for women and men migrants are available, appropriate and accessible.

APPENDICES

PROGRAM

Dr. Alfredo J. Ganapin Advocacy Forum Series IV
"*Pinay X-Abroad"*: Stories of Tears and Triumphs
December 1, 2005, 9:00am-1:00pm
UP Balay Kalinaw

PROGRAMME

Opening Remarks

- *Chat Garcia-Ramilo, Vice President, Board of Trustees, Center for Migrant Advocacy*
- *Andrea Anolin, Executive Director, President,* ***Network Opposed to Violence against Migrant Women and*** *Batis Center for Women*

Panel Discussion

- Gender, Migration and Social Change: The Return of Filipino Women Migrant Workers, *Caridad T. Sri Tharan, Founding member, Migrant Forum in Asia*
- A Member of the Community and Society, *Gloria Supsup*, *Migrant Committee Member, Bannuar Ti La Union (Association of Migrant Workers in La Union)*
- "*Ang Aking Paglalakbay*" (My Journey), *Victorina Lloren, President, Batis Aware (Association of Women Migrant Workers from Japan)*

Response
From Domestic Worker in Taiwan to Entrepreneur, *Rosario Canete, Unlad Kabayan*

Open Forum

Closing Remarks
Joanne Carmela B. Barriga, Assistant Programme Coordinator, Philippine Office, Friedrich Ebert Stiftung

List of Participants

Victorina Lloren – Batis Aware
Carrie Tharan – Migrant Forum in Asia (MFA)
Gloria Supsup – Bannuar Ti La union
Malou Alcid – University of the Philippines College of Social Work and Community Development (UP CSWCD)
Ellene Sana – Center for Migrant Advocacy-Philippines (CMA)
Anna Navarro – CMA
Irynn Abaño – CMA
Mike Bolos – CMA
Sri Wahyono – Indonesian Institute of Sciences
Judith Guinto-Agnoletto – Filipino Women's Council-Rome
Ande Anolin – Batis Center for Women
Rafcer Dhanya – Kairali T.V.
Dhanya Nair – Kairali T.V.
Maya Bans-Cortina – Kanlungan
Esther – Kanlungan
Chat Garcia Ramilo – CMA
Loida Bernabe – Kanlungan
Helen Dabu – Kanlungan
Ginger de Guzman - Kanlungan
Nicki Saroca – Australian National University
Victoria Barcelona – sister/niece of OFWs
Atty. Tess Lora – National Labor Relations Commission (NLRC)
Gloria Fuentes – Kanlungan ng mga Migranteng Manggagawa at Kapamilya (KAMIGMA)
Adelaida dela Cruz – KAMIGMA
Roma Solis – Kanlungan
Marie Angelie Villapando – Office of the Press Secretary, Office of the President of the Philippines Sari Cañete – Unlad Kabayan
Milky dela Cruz – Unlad Kabayan
Goyi Solis – Philippine Rural Reconstruction Movement
Joanne Barriga – FES Manila
Mabs Licmoan – Migrant Forum in Asia
Esteban Daligdig – Committee on Foreign Affairs, House of Representatives
Kim Yang Younghee – Batis Center for Women
Cherry de Dios – Office of Senator Jinggoy Estrada
Julie Javellana – Arab News
Milagros Erediano – KAMIGMA
Yooni So Jung – Batis Center for Women
Jhun Milegrito – Samahan ng mga Manggagawang Migrante at Kapamilya (SAMMAKA)
Lucresia Buenaste – SAMMAKA
Candelaria Martin – SAMMAKA
Juana Morlega – SAMMAKA

Gina Modesto – SAMMAKA
Imelda Rebata – Kanlungan
Meps Artagame – Kanlungan
Becky Gaddi – Philippine Rural Reconstruction Movement (PRRM)
Lilibeth Taclan – **BCS-CMMG**
Rey Gonzales – Peoples Movement for Empowerment and Development
Justin Nicolas – MFA
Jillian Roque – PSLink
Vim Santos – Peoples' Global Exchange
Lucia Tangi – University of the Philippines
Celeste Marasigan – Philippine Migrants Rights Watch
Jojo Tobias – Overseas Workers' Welfare Administration (OWWA)
Mohhammed Nor – Overseas Filipino Worker (OFW)
Farida Abuk – OFW
Delia Diaz – OFW
Veronica Uy – INQ7
Peach Quebral – Black Soup
Ligaya Obera – Philippine Global Exchange
Rene Raya - CMA

REFERENCES

1. GENDER, MIGRATION, AND SOCIAL CHANGE: The Return of Filipino Women Migrant Workers
Caridad T. Sri Tharan

2. Asian Women Migrants: Going the Distance, But Not Far Enough
Maruja M.B. Asis

3. Many OFWs Face Bleak Life after Migration
Philippine Center for Investigative Journalism

GENDER, MIGRATION, AND SOCIAL CHANGE: The Return of Filipino Women Migrant Workers

Caridad T. Sri Tharan

Objectives of the Study

The proposed research aims to contribute to the literature on labour migration in three important ways. First, it includes the perspective of the sending country in terms of issues it considers crucial. Second, it makes visible and central the gendered dimension of migration. Third, it adopts a comprehensive approach to the study of migration experience by using gender as a tool of analysis and by employing various levels of analysis. These three aspects are significant elements largely lacking in the field. In particular, the research seeks to determine the impact of the international migration of Filipino women on their lives, their families left behind, their communities and on the Philippine nation as a whole. While most studies dwell on the migrant women's conditions in the country of destination, this research will focus on the consequences or the outcomes for the Philippines of the migration of Filipino women, the benefits and the costs entailed both in economic and social terms.

Specifically, the research will examine the various factors which led to the preponderance of Filipino women migrants and in the process analyse the gendered dimension of migration. The study will seek to determine whether or not migration has benefited the migrant women workers and their families and in what terms. It will assess the consequences of the feminisation of migration on the Philippine society as a whole, its national identity and its goals of nation-building and national development.

My basic contention is that international migration particularly of women, produces an enormous impact on the country (the sending country), on the communities, on the families left behind and on the lives of individual migrant workers. Some of the key questions that I propose to explore are the following: What happens to a country that mainly depends on the export of labour and mainly women's labour, to keep its economy afloat and to respond to the persistent problems of unemployment and underemployment?

What is the sense of security or insecurity that migration provides for the Philippine nation as a whole, for the migrant workers themselves and for their families? What does a culture of migration mean for Philippine society? What happens to women, married with young children, or single in their reproductive years, professionally trained or college educated, who are away for 5, 10, 15 years working abroad mainly as domestic helpers or caregivers? What happens when they come back to the home country 'for good'? Are they re-integrated? Dislocated? Better off than before they left? Or is it that they can never come home or be home? Or there is no home? What happens to the families left behind, the households, and their gender relations, the dynamics of power, of sustenance? What is the impact on the communities in terms of the perceptions of migrants and migration, new values infused? Inequalities exacerbated? Overall, what are migrants' and communities' perceptions of who gains and who benefits in the phenomenon of migration?

Locating the Topic in the Field: Why Women, Why Gender in Migration?: Feminist Critiques of Migration Theory

The twentieth century marked a turning point towards far greater female migration. The enormous increase in the female labour force has partly resulted from the greater number of women migrants. Today, women account for approximately half of all global migrants and in terms of labour migration, their numbers have expanded in all areas other than construction or heavy industry (Sharpe, 2001). Notwithstanding this, Hania Zlotnik contends that 'the extent of women's involvement in international migration has generally been overlooked, mainly because women have been viewed as "dependents", moving as wives, mothers or daughters of male migrants. Such stereotypes are evident in the statistical systems used to measure migration and, not surprisingly, have pervaded the study of international migration.' (Zlotnik 1993, p.229) Writing in 1993, Buijis remarked that there have been 'few attempts to look beneath the surface of the mass movement of people and to disentangle the specific experiences of women. (Buijis 1993, p.1) Until the mid-1970s, women were not visible in studies of migration and when they did, were treated as dependents of men.

The book, *Women, Gender and Labour Migration,* (Sharpe, 2000) illustrates how women migrants were far less likely than male migrants to be categorized according to what work they did in official records; that while women were visible in the government records of nineteenth century Australia, their economic role was ignored; how domestic service is central to understanding women's historical migration; and also that in Ireland, from the 1870s, more women than men migrated to the United States and that although many accounts suggest that young women left Ireland to secure a marital partner, Delaney's chapter shows that in rural Ireland women were expected to find an occupation that would give them an independent income (Delaney, 2000, p. 220). Interestingly, one chapter demonstrates that distant motherhood (transnational families/households) is hardly a new phenomenon as one might imagine from contemporary sociological and anthropological studies and as shown by the movement of wet nurses from Slovenia to Egypt in the second half of the nineteenth century (Sharpe, 2000, p.5).

'It appears that until the mid-1980s, the circumstances of female migration were little discussed by anthropologists, sociologists or policy-makers. Since then substantial accounts have been written about the invisibility of the female migrant and the ingrained assumption that the typical migrant was young, single and male with economic motivations for moving' (Sharpe, 2000, p.4).

Kanaiaupuni argues that despite calls for the inclusion of women in migration studies over the decade of the 1990s, 'social researchers still lack a major theoretical paradigm that applies to women's migration' (2000, p. 1335). Thus, her study of migration patterns of men and women from Mexican communities to the USA is framed by the theoretical argument that migration is best understood as a series of relationships between social and economic factors and gender.

Heering et al also contend that 'migration theories are assumed to be gender neutral and despite the fact that gender is now recognized as an important dimension in migration research, existing theories do not recognize this increased awareness'(2004, p. 327).

According to Thanh-Dam Truong, international migration theory has limited usefulness to women because of its gender blindness. The two main paradigms, the push-pull approach and the neo-Marxian, are based on a 'narrow conception of the national and international economy—both overlook or do not problematize much of the work that women do in the maintenance of the labor force'(1996, p.31).

Annie Phizacklea (1996) raises the need for a more serious and analytical account of the gendered dimension of migratory processes particularly how a world market for women's labor and service continues to be mediated by the policies of individual nation-states and hence contribute to the reproduction of women's subordination and dependency in traditional forms.

In tracing the work of feminist scholars in migration, Parrenas (2001) contends that by considering the constitution of social relations in institutions, they have significantly advanced the intermediate level of analysis. They have shown for instance that institutions are sites of patriarchal ideologies (Pessar, 1999). Moreover, they have analyzed how the social relation of gender organizes, shapes, and distinguishes the immigration patterns and experiences of men and women (Hondagneu-Sotelo, 1994; Pedraza, 1991 as cited in Parrenas); the different social spaces and networks men and women create and inhabit in the migrant community; the varying experiences in the migrant family (Friedman-Kasaba, 1996; Kibria, 1993 as cited in Parrenas). Further analysis of social relations in migration has also illustrated how gender intersects with class and generation and in the process creates social conflicts. Other studies have shown how migration, which involves 'movement from one system of gender stratification to another'(Zlotnick, 1990, p.372), reconstitutes the position of women in the labour market and household. It also shows that migrants retain a certain degree of liberation because of their earning power but that nevertheless, patriarchy persists in migration. For the most part, women remain secondary migrants because they migrate to create or reunify a

family but this does not mean their role is secondary since their migration is part of a family strategy for survival.

Outline of the main elements of the argument of the thesis

The main arguments of the thesis are: first, that there is a need to make visible and central the gendered dimension of migration particularly in terms of the specific experiences of women; second, in the discourse of international migration, the perspectives and issues defined by the sending countries (in this case, usually the poor, developing countries) have been neglected and therefore require due attention; third, that there is a need to study the impact of international migration particularly as it affects the social fabric, political identity and goals of nation-building and national development of sending countries; and fourth, as a corollary to the third argument, that the current debate on migration and development needs to move beyond the economic dimension and that the migration process be viewed as a dynamic whole and as a 'lifelong process which affects all aspects of a migrant's existence...' (Castles 2000, p.16) I strongly support the position of Castles (2000, p. 15-16) that there has been a loss of comprehension of the overall migratory process because of the fragmentation of research into fields of study which conflicts with the lived reality of migrants.

Essentially following Parrenas' approach, I propose to adopt three levels of analysis with a concentration on one. The first, the macro-level, will seek to capture the structural processes and factors which explain the increasing feminisation of migration in the Philippine context. I also propose to analyse how the state and its apparatuses, policies and programmes largely contribute to this phenomenon of migration and ultimately what this means for the Philippine society in terms of its national identity and goals of national development. The second level, the intermediate level, will dwell on the impact of migration on the distribution of economic, social and cultural roles within households of the women migrants and determine how migration changes the power and control others have over their lives as well the resultant changes in family formation, reproduction, child care and nurturing. The third level of analysis will focus on the migrant woman herself. As she narrates her life of being away from home for several years, she is able to look back and to reflect the meanings of her experiences as a migrant worker in a globalised environment, of her work (mainly as domestic work) in a foreign land, of her identity as a non-citizen, of her relationships with her employers, with fellow nationals, etc. She will be encouraged to assess for herself how she coped with years of separation from loved ones, from the familiar, from the community, from the home country; what changes she has experienced in how she views the world, how she perceives values, traditions, culture. She will be encouraged to determine what benefits international migration has brought to herself, to her family, her community and to her country and at the same time also to reflect on the costs, the pluses and minuses, in economic and non-economic terms.

Methodological Approach

The study will adopt mainly a qualitative approach, a feminist methodology of research, in particular, the life history method in the form of personal narratives. About 15 women migrants of varying civil status (single, married, separated or widowed), ages, and coming from the three main islands of the Philippines will be the key informants. These women would have worked mainly in so-called unskilled labour for a period of at least five years overseas. A questionnaire which will serve to complement the qualitative research will be administered to a sample of women migrants. The number will depend on how many migrant women who have returned to the Philippines can be traced and accessed since there is no existing official mechanism for doing so.

Feminism is about finding adequate political responses to the oppression of women. It presents us with difficult questions that force us to think about 'what it means to be a woman in our society, whether we want to change that meaning and if so, how, as fully conscious human beings, struggling with the contradictions of our existence.' (Marshment 1997, p.151) As Kelly, Burton and Regan (1994) clearly enunciate, "feminism for us is both theory and practice, a framework which informs our lives. Its purpose is to understand women's oppression in order that we might end it." (Kelly et al 1994, p.28) Feminist research, therefore, is an integral part of the process of discovery and understanding and includes the responsibility for creating change, for liberating women from subordination and oppression. What distinguishes feminist research? Kelley argues that it is the questions that we ask, the way we locate ourselves within our questions and the purpose of our work (Kelly 1994, p.14). Feminist research is concerned with reflexivity, with reflecting and critically examining and exploring analytically the nature of the research process in order to examine gender relations. A gender approach extends the analysis from women and men to the broader interconnecting relationships through which women are positioned as a subordinate group in the allocation of resources and responsibilities, attributes and capabilities, power and privilege (Kabeer, 1994, p.65). The researcher is also a subject in her research and her personal history is part of the process through which understanding and conclusions are reached. Other distinct features of feminist research are its insistence on its political nature and on the potential to bring about change in women's lives; the production of knowledge which would transform patriarchy and the importance of research for the category of persons they are taken to represent (Kelly et al 1994, p.14).

The choice of the research method is shaped by the aims of the study, the topics of inquiry and the perspectives that the researcher brings into the research. Collecting life histories will enable the women and the researcher to explore questions of gender and migration in a reflexive manner. The use of life history method springs from the position that 'knowledge is grounded in the everyday, common-sense world, and in the constructions and explanations, members of that world (the migrant women) describe their reality and actions' (Jones cited in Illo,1997, p.13). The focus is on women's knowledge and experiences thereby taking an epistemological position that women can be "knowers", that their beliefs can be 'legitimized as knowledge and that women's beliefs and ways of knowing and thinking (their "subjective truths") can count as knowledge'(Harding, 1987, p.3). Often, the voice of the migrant woman is suppressed or muted because of the circumstances of her life in a foreign land, working usually as a

domestic helper and therefore stratified in the lower if not lowest rung of society. Hence, telling one's story can be empowering, validating the importance of the migrant's life experiences, uncovering the complex web of feelings, of pains and satisfaction as well as contradictions, the dislocations (see Parrenas, 2001) or discontinuities and continuities in their lives. The process of relating one's life history is important as it focuses on the '…dynamic unfolding of the subject's viewpoint and go behind the conventional expected answers to the woman's personal construction of her own experience.' (Anderson and Jack, 1991, p.23) A hallmark of feminist methodology is that it is a dynamic unmeasurable process so that the woman (the interviewee, narrator, oral historian of her own life) should be encouraged to be herself '...to be the subject of her own life, to express her feelings, to reinvent herself, to reinvent history, especially to interject herself into history and to act. Her answers will not always fit her questions, nor "ours" either' (Hale, 1991, p. 125).

Listening to women's voices and learning from women's experiences are vital to the feminist reconstruction of our understanding of the world. Women's personal narratives illuminate several facets of gender relations such as the construction of a gendered self-identity, the relationship between individual and society in the creation and perpetuation of gender norms as well as the dynamics of power relations between women and men. The narratives also provide a crucial entry point for analysing the interaction between the individual and society in the construction of gender. While social constructions of gender impact on the individual, they are themselves shaped by human agency. 'Women make their own lives (and life histories), but they do so under conditions not of their own choosing' (The Personal Narratives Group, 1989, p.5). The Personal Narratives Group further maintains that personal narratives reveal the logic, the rationale, the working out within a specific life situation of individual courses of action and the effects of system-level and structural constraints within which these life courses evolve.

Chapter 1. Introduction

This chapter will provide the background to the study, why it is fascinating and important to research and what it seeks to find out. It will also outline the theoretical framework and the methodology to be utilized in the study.

Chapter 2. Theoretical Framework

The second chapter will review the literature in the field of gender and migration and in the process locate the research study in the field and provide the theoretical framework for the study itself.

Chapter 3. The Advocate for Migrants' Rights: Methodology

3.1 Feminist Ethics: Locating the Self

The researcher is as much a part of the study, of the research. Having come from a family of different waves of migration, having been an advocate for migrants'rights by belonging to a network of migrant support groups in Asia, and having moved, worked and lived in different parts of Asia with migrants, this chapter will narrate the researcher's own migration experiences. A key question to be raised in the context of

advocacy will be the type of strategies and programmes undertaken by support groups to respond to the causes and consequences of migration.

3.2 Research Methodology: Feminist research methodology, life history/personal narratives method and quantitative survey.

Chapter 4. The Philippines and Feminisation of Migration

Migration trends in the Philippines will be discussed and the phenomenon of feminisation will be analyzed in terms of the underlying factors, political, ideological, social, cultural and economic and the dynamics of the phenomenon in so far as it further subordinates women. The role of the government in promoting migration will be highlighted. Is the preponderance of women migrants an unintended consequence of the export of labor strategy or a deliberate policy or an inevitable consequence of the phenomenon of globalization and global inequalities between the core and the periphery?

Chapter 5. The Migrant Filipino Woman Comes Home- Case Study: The Women's Voices

This chapter will explore and analyze the various processes entailed in coming home or returning to the country of origin after working overseas for 10 years or more mainly in so-called unskilled work. What does returning home mean? For good? How are decisions to return home made by the migrant woman? What is the home that one returns to? What is the situation of the family left behind, the community left behind? What dynamics of household relationships have ensued or occurred in view of the migration of the woman (be she a mother, a sister, a daughter) of the house?

Chapter 6: Life After Migration – Case Study: The Women's Voices

The main reason for migration given by migrants and governments is to improve the livelihood of families. In addition, women also leave for other reasons such as to escape failed relationships, to explore and experience other places in the world, to liberate themselves from oppressive situations, etc. To what extent has migration brought about a changed life in terms of the migrant's and families' well-being, migrant's sense of empowerment, of agency, and perceptions of the world, of their values, culture and tradition? This will be explored through the life history accounts and personal narratives. Case studies of groups of migrant women who have returned under various circumstances (such as those deported or repatriated and those who returned under their own volition) will be developed to portray the depth and breadth of life after migration.

Chapter 7. The Culture of Migration: Implication for the Society, Policy Making, State Discourses and Responses

This chapter will analyse the impact of migration on Philippine society in terms of the notions of national pride and identity and goals of national development. Has there been a deep and thorough reflection and assessment of the government policy of exporting labour, a policy enforced for about 30 years? If so, what have been the various policy implications and policy responses? What is the nature of the culture of migration which has seeped into the fabric of Philippine society? Has this culture created counter values or distortions in the society? Has it frayed the society, if so, in what way?

Chapter 8. Conclusion

Findings from the field work and from secondary sources will be synthesised and analysed within a framework that will combine the macro and micro perspectives in studying the lives of migrant women workers. In the process, the contributions to the field of women, gender and migration will be delineated. The migrant woman worker, her voice, her experiences, her life, her story will be brought to the centre to provoke further debates, more studies and greater soul-searching.

Asian Women Migrants: Going the Distance, But Not Far Enough
Maruja M.B. Asis

(This paper was originally published in the *Migration Information Source* of the Migration Policy Institute.)

In some parts of Asia, such as the Southeast, journeying was traditionally a male preserve. Those returning could expect not only a warm welcome but also an esteemed place in the community, as the completion of a journey gave them a badge of honor. In more recent times, particularly in the last 30 years, journeying in Asia has meant international labor migration, initially to the Gulf countries in the 1970s, and to the dragon economies in Asia from the 1980s. And men are not the only ones engaged in it.

In the beginning, labor migration involved mostly men from South, East, and Southeast Asia availing themselves of job opportunities in the Gulf countries. The slowing down of infrastructure projects, the second oil crisis in 1979, and the changing labor needs of the Gulf countries resulted in a lower demand for male workers and an emerging need for female workers to fill the demand for medical personnel, maintenance workers, and domestic workers.

At about the same time, the expanding economies of Japan, Hong Kong, Singapore, South Korea, Taiwan, Malaysia, and Thailand became new destinations for migrant workers in the region. Since then, labor migration within the region has increased tremendously. The number has climbed from about a million migrant workers in the major receiving countries at the start of the 1980s to at least 6.5 million at this time, including both legal and unauthorized migrant workers.

What unfolded in the Asian region is a gendered migration process: male migration in response to the requirements of industrialization (construction and manufacturing; plantation work in Malaysia), and female migration in response to the shortage of domestic and childcare workers (with Hong Kong, Singapore, Malaysia, and Taiwan as major destinations in East and Southeast Asia). In the past 30 years, most female migrants have come from three countries: the Philippines, Indonesia, and Sri Lanka. In these three countries, women comprise some 60 to 80 percent of migrants legally deployed every year. Legal migration from Indonesia and Sri Lanka is dominated by women who take up domestic work in Middle Eastern countries, with Malaysia, Singapore, Hong Kong and Taiwan as other secondary destinations.

In the Philippines, female migrants began to outnumber male migrants after 1992; moreover, although the majority is in domestic services and a large number are in entertainment work, there are also women taking up professional, clerical, sales, and production work. Compared with their counterparts from Indonesia and Sri Lanka, Filipino women migrants are found in all the world's regions. Thailand and Burma are also major countries of origin of female migrants, but these are mostly unauthorized flows. Other countries of origin (Bangladesh, India, and Pakistan) do not allow or have

very restrictive regulations concerning female emigration, which their governments consider fraught with danger. Nonetheless, female migration does occur, but through irregular channels (including trafficking), resulting in even greater dangers and risks to women and girls on the move.

The participation of women in migration has raised both prospects and pains. The fact that women are migrating on their own rather than as part of family migration seems to suggest greater freedom and choice. However, their concentration in vulnerable sectors has generated much debate on how migration can have a positive impact on women's lives. Both domestic work and entertainment are not covered by labor laws in many countries, hence, women's working and living conditions are very much dependent on the "charity" of their employers. In the case of entertainers, the dangers include being pushed into prostitution, violence, and run-ins with criminal elements.

From the time female migration has become visible, the protection issues raised have been the same issues that migrants and migrant advocates fight for today: minimum wages, adherence to basic protection standards, and protection from brokers and agents in source countries who often charge migrants excessive fees. For the most part, however, women migrants cope with their situation by tapping their own strengths, relying on the support of their networks, and accessing non-governmental organizations' assistance where available.

Responses to Women Migrants

Although female migrants face many challenges, the phenomenon is not likely to fade away. Unlike male migration, which is subject to variable economic conditions, female migration has proven not only to be stable but also resilient in the face of economic changes. Countries of origin and countries of destination have different perspectives and responses to this durable phenomenon.

The volume of remittances and the employment generated by labor migration weaken the resolve of countries of origin to demand better wage scales and labor rights, which would lessen their workers' competitiveness. The revenues of some source countries $6 billion for the Philippines in 2002 and about $1 billion for Indonesia and Sri Lanka have also, to some extent, encouraged a degree of national economic dependency that discourages concern about the social costs of massive outflows of citizens. For similar reasons, the initial hopes harbored by most source countries that labor migration could be temporary have faded.

For their part, all countries of destination in Asia have insisted on keeping labor migration temporary. In contrast, highly skilled and professional workers are welcomed. Some countries, like Japan and South Korea, maintain an official policy not to admit less-skilled workers. In most destination countries, foreign workers are held to contracts of limited duration, usually two years. Some countries (e.g., Singapore and Malaysia) establish levies on the hiring of foreign workers to discourage dependence on cheap migrant labor. When the economy falters, such as the 1997 economic crisis in the region,

countries of destination may decide to repatriate migrant workers to make way for local labor.

In some ways the women-dominated domestic and family work sector has proved more resistant to such measures. While the period post-1997 saw a temporary decline in demand for migrant workers in construction and manufacturing, the demand for foreign domestic workers was unchanged. Studies conducted in some countries of destination have suggested that families and households have become dependent on foreign domestic workers. This is the major reason why government policies to limit the hiring of foreign domestic workers have not made a dent. Prospects of declining and aging populations in the advanced economies foreshadow continuing demand for migrants, including migrants to care for the elderly.

Women's migration reflects how globalization has affected and reordered family life. By taking care of all things domestic, women migrants make it possible for local women to take up paid work outside the home. Despite their contributions to their host countries, women migrants are not generally assured of basic protection. As part of the efforts of some countries to ensure that migration is temporary, women migrants cannot easily change employers, even if their conditions are far from satisfactory. Nor can they move to a different job outside of domestic work. In some countries, there is a perception that migrant women childcare workers could have a negative cultural impact on their wards. This includes the concern that children could become closer to their nannies than they are to their own parents. At best, women migrants receive an ambivalent welcome.

Also hidden from the picture are other costs that are shouldered by families in the countries of origin. Sociologist Rhacel Parrenas has observed that, as "servants of globalization," women migrants, in turn, transfer their caregiving responsibilities to other female family members or other less-privileged women in the countries of origin. In the process, while migrant women contribute to making family life more comfortable and easier for their employers, they are separated from their own families, who have to fend for themselves.

Up until now, labor migration has been a very inequitable process. It does not have to be. Countries in the region can foster more cooperation to make migration more humane and more equitable. This cooperation is critical in view of the increasing incidence of unauthorized migration and trafficking in people, especially women and children. In recent years, concerns about trafficking have resulted in regional discussions to curb this business, which channels women into roles as sex workers, brides, or forced labor. Ideally, such regional cooperation on trafficking could lay the groundwork for more cooperation on labor migration as a whole. One fundamental change will involve viewing migrants not just as workers but also as human beings. Another will be valuing reproductive work or care work as very important to human and social life, and as work that should be shared by women and men alike.

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Many OFWs Face Bleak Life after Migration
Philippine Center for Investigative Journalism

Since the 1970s, overseas Filipino workers (OFWs) have been significant contributors to the Philippine economy, and have even been said to be a major reason why the country did not falter too much in the Asian Crisis. Just last year, remittances of these workers reached $7.4 billion, or 75 percent more than the total value of the country's 1998 exports to Japan, second among the Philippines' top trading partners. Yet the government that benefits from this largesse has yet to return the favor, and seems to be at a perpetual loss over how to ensure that the joy almost all OFWs feel upon coming home will last.

Not that the government hasn't tried helping OFWs find a stable means of income once they return for good. Indeed, since 1988, the Overseas Workers Welfare Administration (OWWA) has run a livelihood program aimed at helping facilitate the gradual reintegration of the returnees into the economic mainstream. But labor experts say such efforts have not had much effect, and are reflective not only of an inept bureaucracy but also of the shortsightedness of state planners.

A case in point is that of Leni (not her real name) and her family. Leni's husband had worked in Saudi Arabia in the 1980s before becoming a lecturer for the Philippine Overseas Workers Administration (POEA). But he was simply not making enough to provide a decent education for their three growing girls. So that her husband would not have to work abroad again, Leni borrowed P50,000 through OWWA's Expanded Livelihood Development Program (ELDP).

Leni wanted to have her very own sari-sari store. Following OWWA instructions, she prepared several documents, including a simple business plan. Soon enough, credit investigators visited her home and she received the money after six months. Leni then attended a half-day training seminar at the OWWA, deemed an instant entrepreneur, and was sent on her way to set up her small business. Four years later, her husband is once again overseas and Leni now owes OWWA P85,000. As for her store, she says, "Sad to say, it went bankrupt and so repayment has been difficult."

OWWA Plans and Programs Director Antonieta Dizon herself concedes that loan availees need more than a seminar to make a go of their businesses. "You have to support them in terms of training, you have to closely monitor them, provide a supervised credit,'' she says. "Basically, if you do not continue to guide them, the project will eventually dissolve because it will only eat capital and earnings. Then it's finished."

OWWA insiders say this is essentially what has happened to countless small businesses initiated through the ELDP. Failed businesses, however, only mean those who took out the loans will have difficulty making repayments. Unsurprisingly, the ELDP has a low repayment rate. According to EDLP Project Development Officer Serge Borgueta, only 20 to 30 percent of those who avail of the program's loans eventually pay their debts. To Borgueta, though, the reason for this is not the lack of business training or support from

OWWA, but because of the "dole-out mentality" that he says is characteristic of Filipinos.

David Dicang, officer-in-charge of OWWA's Publication and Information Division, agrees with this view. He even adds, "Government should not be seen as an agency doling out. There really has to be a degree of responsibility for those you help to put back on track…We've encountered many people that file for loans not to put up a business, but just for the heck of having a loan because there's a window."

Yet nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) that offer the same service to the same clientele say the opposite. UNLAD Kabayan, which began operations just three years ago, even says its repayment rate is improving. In 1997, it stood at about 60 percent. This year, UNLAD Executive Director May An Villalba puts the figure between 78 to 80 percent. Villalba also says their loan amounts range from P2,000 to P112,000, while the OWWA has a loan amount ceiling of P50,000 for individual clients. Why there is a vast gap between the repayment rates of those who take out loans through the ELDP and those who borrow from UNLAD may therefore be more than a matter of one having more clients with the so-called "dole-out mentality."

In truth, Dizon concedes that the ELDP needs a generous infusion of funds that could be used for monitoring clients. She insists that this is needed in order for the businesses they put up to succeed. But the problem, she says, is that since the repayment rate has been dismal, the board that calls the shots at the OWWA has even reduced the budget for all the program's support services—thus all the more increasing the chances of the ELDP clients' businesses to fail.

Dicang, though, argues that the expectations for such programs may be too high. "For $25 (welfare fee paid by each OFW) you contributed two years ago and all of a sudden you come back and you want to file a loan for P50,000, and it's not only you," he says. "The scenario is not really balanced. Basically, we cannot accommodate that. How could you expect that much?"

But then the OWWA is not exactly destitute. Its net worth in 1997 was P2 billion. That year, according to the annual report of the Commission on Audit (COA), it collected more than P327 million in overseas workers' welfare fees, which made up 72.5 percent of its 1997 income. Yet less than a third of what it collected from OFWs was spent on programs and projects; the bulk of its expenses went to operation expenditures.

Still, OWWA did manage to extend training and scholarships to some 40,000 people, as it claimed in the COA report. About 27,000 workers and their families also got livelihood and entrepreneurial assistance that year. But it is ironic—as well as telling—that the agency that aids OFWs set up their own businesses scored low on the presentation of financial statements. According to COA, there were "negative balances" in the agency's 1997 books and unliquidated funds amounting to hundreds of millions of pesos. The P173 million balance in receivable loans was also "unreliable due to management's

failure to support the accounts." In the report, Auditor Maria Bautista said that the basic information was incomplete.

Interviewed recently, Bautista elaborated that upon applying for loans, ELDP clients had given all pertinent data that were then evaluated by the OWWA's credit investigators. "But then after several months or years, there were instances that these OFWs changed addresses," she said. "Also, many times, there weren't any dates." Bautista blamed the missing information on "lapses in recording." And while she said she could not remember exactly how many loan applications in the subsidiary ledger were unverifiable, she stressed that "the numbers are quite impressive, that's why we arrived at this (unfavorable) finding." Among the COA report's overall assessment of OWWA's 1997 performance: "Management wasn't able to deliver promptly the programs and services which are intended to advance the interest and promote the well-being of Filipino overseas workers."

To be sure, problems have hounded the ELDP since it began more than a decade ago. At the time, the program, which catered particularly to marginalized OFWs, featured a non-collateral loaning window with lower rates than the banks. But repayment even then was abysmal, and so banks were brought in as conduit. The thinking behind this move, apparently, was that repayment rates would then improve. But in a 1998 evaluation report on the ELDP, the OWWA's very own Plans and Programs Office questions the involvement of what it calls "profit-oriented institutions" in what is essentially an aid program.

The report also criticized the 1993 decision of the OWWA Board of Trustees to impose a minimum collection rate of 70 percent on all regional offices. The Board had made the minimum rate a condition for the release of funds "presumably," said the report, "because of the belief…that the repayment or collection rate is a major determinant in defining program success." Instead, it merely slowed down operations considerably since the regional offices could not meet the required repayment rate.

Real estate was soon adopted as preferred collateral by 11 of the 15 regional offices, thereby immediately disqualifying those that required assistance the most. Says Malou Alcid, director of Kanlungan, an NGO that works with abused migrant workers: "Women survivors of violence and unsuccessful migrants are the people who they should prioritize. These are the people that need the credit most. But this isn't the way the program is designed."

"On paper, it looks nice, but when you actually try it, it's different," says Remy Borlongan, who came home several months ago, after 12 years as a domestic helper (DH) in Hong Kong. "There are so many requirements. They ask for a land title, TVs, appliances. And it takes a long time, up to a year. You might as well go to a loan shark. Who has collateral? And if you had property, why would you go for a loan?"

Some OWWA officials try to dodge questions regarding the ELDP by saying that the agency has not been remiss in strongly advising OFWs before they leave the country to

save and invest in small businesses. But to save for sufficient funds for a business takes many years, and OFWs often not only have to attend to the needs of their immediate families back home, but also to those of relatives who refuse to believe that working abroad is not synonymous to striking it rich.

Thus, in a survey conducted by the POEA last year, setting up a business was ranked last among the spending priorities of overseas workers. Instead, the respondents said, they spend their remittances primarily on education and basic needs, such as food, shelter, clothing and medicine. Borlongan herself spent much of her earnings on the education and the needs of her son. In addition, she and her sister, also a DH in Hong Kong, poured a considerable amount of their incomes to rebuilding their family home in Tarlac. The house, once made of wood, had caved in under the weight of Mt. Pinatubo's ashfall in 1991. Eight years later, it is a concrete, three-bedroom abode, albeit an unfinished one. The washroom still lacks a ceiling and bathing facilities. In the backyard stands a half-built boarding house.

It may take a while before that structure is completed, along with the rest of the house. The money Remy Borlongan managed to saved before she returned was spent just months after her homecoming. A widow who is a semester short of a college degree, she has since been supporting herself and her son with the little she earns from odd jobs. Only in her 40s, Borlongan is considered too old by most employers. She figures her only hope of keeping her small family fed is having a modest business of her own.

Labor experts say there is no question on who is ultimately responsible for the fate of ex-OFWs like Borlongan: the government. Adds Noel Vasquez, former researcher at the Center for Social Policy and Public Affairs at the Ateneo de Manila University: "What has been lacking in the Philippine case is the linkage between contract migration and the needed structural reforms within the economy. The annual remittances, substantial as they are, have not been sufficiently channeled into investments, either at the national level or by the individual worker…." "Unfortunately," he also says, "the benefits of contract migration may have encouraged complacency about facing the economy's serious structural problem."

Interestingly enough, the NGO UNLAD Kabayan, which specializes in OFW savings mobilization in host countries, fund management and enterprise development, was born out of a 1994 study that had similar conclusions. "Despite documented abuses, families splitting up, infidelities, parentless children, migrants still left because there was no opportunity for work," says UNLAD head Villalba. "So then we conducted a study asking the question 'Is it possible to have life after migration? And what kind of life is it?' We looked into the viability of a planned and organized reintegration." She recalls, "The research came out with two things which would become the building blocks of UNLAD Kabayan. First, migrants are capable of saving. Second, micro-enterprises can be built and are viable in the Philippines…That was the impetus that brought reintegration as a program in place."

Villalba, who was formerly the director of the Asian Migrant Center in Hong Kong, is decidedly upbeat about her young organization and the work it is doing. Last year alone, she says, UNLAD helped set up almost 40 family-based micro-enterprises. It has also assisted more than 100 individuals with savings and investment planning since it began operations in 1996. For an NGO with a staff of only seven and an operating budget of over P2 million a year, this is no mean feat. But Villalba says, "When you're in crisis, you're always creative."

Roger Bohning, director of the International Labor Organization's (ILO) Southeast Asia and the Pacific Multidisciplinary Advisory Team (SEAPAT) acknowledges the sterling showing of NGOs like UNLAD in mobilizing the savings of OFWs "in a particular location such Hong Kong and Japan." But he says they do less well when it comes to economic support. Bohning points out that these NGOs must rely on charity funds or one-off projects that are intermittent. More often than not, he says, such projects come to an end before the micro-enterprises become self-sustaining.

Villalba, however, is not easily dissuaded from her optimistic outlook. "The least that can be done is to create a job for yourself as an alternative," she says. "And if you can create jobs for others, then they're not compelled to go overseas. On a micro-level, you could build a vibrant economy."

Back cover

The Dr. Alfredo J. Ganapin Advocacy Forum Series is a quarterly public forum of CMA. It focuses on labor migration and issues affecting overseas Filipino workers.

The Center for Migrant Advocacy honors the memory of Dr. Alfred J. Ganapin, an overseas Filipino worker and committed advocate, by naming the forum after him. Alfred passed away in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia in 2004. Alfred advocated for the integration of the concerns of Filipino migrant workers in the national agenda. He engaged and called on government officials and legislators to serve and protect the interests of migrant workers. He was a reliable *kababayan* (compatriot) who helped migrant workers in Saudi Arabia and other places.

The Center for Migrant Advocacy Philippines (CMA) is an independent policy advocacy group that promotes the rights and interests of overseas Filipinos, particularly the disadvantaged and marginalized sectors. CMA works to improve the economic, social and political conditions of migrant Filipinos and their families through policy advocacy, information, networking, capacity-building and assistance facilitation for migrants in distress.

CMA is a member of the Philippine Migrants' Rights Watch (PMRW), the Network Opposed to Violence against Migrant Women (NOVA) and the Freedom from Debt Coalition (FDC) in the Philippines. It is also a member of the Migrant Forum in Asia (MFA).

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