



A MIGRATION AND DEVELOPMENT AGENDA: A CALL TO PHILIPPINE GOVERNMENT INSTITUTIONS POLICY BRIEF

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I. Introduction

The migration–development nexus is a significant dimension that should be considered in the formulation of international migration and development policies in the Philippines. At this point, the Philippines needs to step up and broaden its international migration policies beyond securing labor markets and safeguarding the rights of Filipino migrant workers to include the development dimension. At the same time, the country’s development plans at the national, regional and local levels must also include international migration issues. To date, the country’s migration policies are not linked to development and are still centered on labor migration.

This policy brief calls on policymakers and local chief executives to hoe consider international migration and development affect each other and what these links entail for policy development. It addresses policymakers in government institutions (in national, regional and local contexts) and emphasizes their role in molding policies that will harness the development potentials of international migration and strengthen the links between the country’s government institutions and migrant communities abroad.

It is important to integrate international migration in the formulation of national and local development policies, and migration policies, in turn, must also consider their potential impact on the country’s development prospects. More importantly, there is a need to recognize the contributions of migrant workers and overseas Filipinos – particularly through their associations – as potential partners of local institutions in promoting development in the Philippines. As transnational actors with ties to their host countries and to the homeland, migrants and overseas Filipinos are in a unique position as potential partners of sustainable development.

The following report proposes a framework for understanding the migration–development nexus, with a specific focus on building partnerships between Filipino migrants abroad and local institutions. In focusing on Philippine government institutions, this understanding is expected to (1) broaden policies on migration and development, and (2) promote closer coordination of government institutions to engage with various stakeholders, including overseas Filipinos.

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**BOX 1
ABOUT THE MAPID PROJECT**

The Migrants' Associations and Philippine Government Institutions for Development (MAPID) is a project that spans three years (2008 – 2010) and covers three countries (the Philippines, Italy and Spain). The project is led by the Scalabrini Migration Center, in cooperation with Fondazione ISMU (Iniziativa e Studi sulla Mutietnicita) in Italy, the University of Valencia in Spain, and the Commission on Filipinos Overseas in the Philippines.

The project focused on government institutions in the Philippines and migrants' associations in Europe, specifically Italy and Spain. Filipino migration to Europe presents a migration context which lies between temporary labor migration in Asia on the one hand, and permanent settlement in traditional settlement countries, such as the United States, Canada, Australia and New Zealand on the other.

The first year of the MAPID Project, 2008, was devoted to the conduct of research in the three countries. In the Philippines, the research focused on the policy contexts of migration and development, both at the national and local government levels. The research in the Philippines provided a nationwide picture of the migration-development nexus at the national, sub-national and local contexts. Examples of the contributions of migration through migrant giving, migrants' investments and models of cooperation were documented as part of the study. In Italy and Spain, the research probed into the migration, employment and settlement, integration, associational life, and transnational practices of Filipinos, and a study of Filipino migrants' associations.

In 2009, findings from the research guided the design and development of programs and materials for the capacity building programs in the three countries. In the Philippines, these programs were geared to representatives of government institutions while in Italy and Spain, the target groups were leaders and active members of Filipino migrants' associations.

The final year of the MAPID Project, 2010, is devoted to dissemination activities and discussions with various stakeholders on how to move forward with migration and development initiatives.

Below is a list of agencies and institutions that participated in the research and training programs in MAPID-Philippines, which was coordinated by the Scalabrini Migration Center, with the cooperation of the Commission on Filipinos Overseas.

"Migration agencies": Department of Labor and Employment, Philippine Overseas Employment Administration, Overseas Workers Welfare Administration, Department of Foreign Affairs, Commission on Filipinos Overseas, Technical Education and Skills Development Authority

"Development agencies": National Economic Development Authority, Bangko Sentral ng Pilipinas, Department of Health, Department of Science and Technology, Department of Education, Commission on Higher Education, Department of Trade and Industry, Department of Tourism, Department of Interior and Local Government.

For the research phase, the following comprised the research team:

- Nenita Villarama, Don Mariano Marcos Memorial State University-Mid La Union Campus (Region 1)
- Alicia Follosco, University of the Philippines Baguio (Cordillera Administrative Region and Region 2)
- Ildefonso Bagasao, Economic Resource Center for Overseas Filipinos (Region 3)
- Jorge Tigno, University of the Philippines (Region 3 and Region 4-A)
- Cristina Lim (Ateneo de Naga University)
- Alan Feranil, Office of Population Studies Foundation-University of San Carlos (Regions 6, 7 and 8)
- Chona Echavez, Research Institute for Mindanao Culture – Xavier University (Region 10, 11 and 12)

These key points are based on research findings and training outcomes conducted by the Migrants' Associations and Philippine Government Institutions for Development (MAPID) Project, an initiative supported by the Aeneas Programme of the European Union (MIGR/2007/130-548(11)), with financial contribution from the Scalabrini Migration Center as well. Started in 2008, the MAPID Project is a three-year, three-country endeavor that sought to advance the understanding of the migration-development nexus of two important stakeholders – migrants' associations in Italy and Spain and government institutions in the Philippines – and to promote cooperation and partnership between the two stakeholders (see Box 1)

II. MAPID Research Highlights

International migration is not new to the Philippines – millions of overseas Filipino workers (OFW) are deployed to different destination countries all over the world each year, while other Filipinos move to other countries for permanent settlement. As of December 2009, the stock estimate of the overseas Filipino population – which includes permanent, temporary and irregular migrants – has been pegged at 8.6 million (CFO, 2010).

This section presents key findings and research highlights from the MAPID Project in the Philippines and the training programs conducted in the three countries. The highlights are organized into four subheadings: (1) National

context, (2) Regional and local contexts, (3) Evidence of migrant giving, migrants' investments and migrant cooperation and partnership, and 4) outcomes of the MAPID training programs in the Philippines, Italy and Spain. Details about the MAPID Project and the three-country reports are in Baggio (2010); other MAPID materials, such as the reference materials for the training programs, are available at www.smc.org.ph/MAPID.

A. National Context

Overseas employment will continue

- Officials and key staff of migration and development agencies interviewed in MAPID-Philippines believed international labor migration was a pattern that will continue in the years to come. Key informants considered overseas employment as a solution to generating jobs and alleviating poverty. Informants suggested that the growing culture of migration in the country, wherein livelihood strategies are now geared on a global plane, is a significant factor that accounts for this continuing trend. The culture of migration has become widespread, reinforced by access and exposure to information provided by the extensive networks with Filipinos based abroad and information readily available on the Internet and in other media technologies.

The migration of professionals is not only about brain drain

- The participation of professionals in international labor migration stoked concerns over brain drain. The most easily recognizable was the outflow of nurses and other medical personnel. Others believed that health worker migration is not just brain drain but a reflection of the uneven distribution of health personnel in the country, the lack of health care facilities, and the lack of incentives are among equally important issues that must be addressed.

International migration and development: prospects and challenges

- Although the National Economic Development Authority (NEDA) sees positive growth prospects in the service sector, the business process outsourcing (BPO) industry, the construction sector, real estate and the agriculture sector. It is believed that OFW remittances will still help boost the country's economy through these sectors.
- The 2004-2010 Medium-Term Philippine Development Plan (MTPDP) states that overseas Filipinos will continue to play a critical role in the economic and social stability of the Philippines. In connection with the target to deploy a million of workers annually, the policy for OFWs is focused on the 'facilitation' of overseas work, in areas such as the processing of paperwork or in the reintegration of returning workers. The MTPDP also recognizes the protection and welfare of OFWs as a core principle in promoting markets and cultivating bilateral ties with destination countries. The MTPDP stresses the government's goal to come up with bilateral agreements that will secure the employment, security and protection of OFWs. The government will also provide consular, legal and social assistance not just to migrant workers, but also to their families and dependents. In all, the government says that as a matter of policy, it manages overseas labor according to national development objectives.

Development plans consider remittances as the primary contribution of migrants

- Development plans mainly look at OFW remittances as the primary contribution of migrants to the country's economic stability. However, there are other channels wherein migrants contribute to the country's development, such as migrant giving and investments.
- There is little attention and consistent documentation on migrants' investments and cases of migrant giving or philanthropy. As observed in key informant interviews among migration, the concept of international migration and development is mostly viewed through OFW remittances. While remittances do play a large role in the country's economic development, there are other hidden benefits of migration that should be recognized, including migrant giving, investments and skills transfer.

BOX 2
CONSIDERING THE BENEFITS AND COSTS OF MIGRATION

Remittances

While the development impact of migration is mainly measured through remittances, there are also concerns over the negative impact of remittances, such as perceptions of the onset of a culture of consumerism and dependency on remittances. Social remittances, which are ideas, practices and social capital brought into the Philippines are equally important albeit less recognized.

Investments

One of the presumed benefits of migration is the infusion of migrants' investments. The Citizenship Retention and Reacquisition Act of 2003, for instance, was motivated in part by the investment potentials of overseas Filipinos. In the absence of data, there are no indications suggesting that the dual citizenship law has indeed brought in investments from overseas Filipinos.

Social Costs

Perceived negative consequences of migration include the following: the separation of family members, fears of marital discord, the breakup of families, the adverse impacts of parental absence on children.

B. Regional and Local Contexts

International migration viewed as a "national" issue

- Key informants in the regions and local communities viewed international migration as mostly a national issue. As a result, migration-related concerns were not part of policies and programs of regional and local institutions.

Migration will continue due to economic and employment challenges

- Key informants in regional government agencies and local government units also perceived migration as a common and widespread phenomenon that will continue largely due to economic and financial reasons. Most of the key informants viewed the search for employment as the primary reason Filipinos continue to migrate, and that job generation was the primary challenge regional and local governments were confronted with.

Remittances were recognized as beneficial but concerns over social costs persist

- The development impact of migration was seen mostly in terms of remittances, but at the same time, respondents worried over the possibility of OFW families becoming increasingly dependent on remittances and the adverse effects of migration on marriages and parent-child relations.
- Informants also expressed concern on the working conditions of migrants abroad, particularly among female OFWs. Some expressed apprehension regarding female migration because of the rampant reports of abuse. They also mentioned the care crisis created in left-behind families, especially the care of children.

Regional government agencies and local government units do not have data on international migration

- Data on international migration are collected by national government agencies;¹ regional government agencies and local government units do not collect data on international migration. Even provinces which are known to have long been involved in migration do not conduct thorough documentation on international migration. The lack of data on international migration at the local level may be a contributing factor to the lack of policy attention given to international migration issues by local government units. Not surprisingly, very few local government units have offices or personnel dedicated to international migration.

¹ Data on international migration mostly come from the following national government agencies: the Commission on Filipinos Overseas, the Philippine Overseas Employment Administration and the National Statistics Office (see Asis, 2008). The Overseas Workers Welfare Administration has data on OWWA members.

- Based on interviews with representatives from the League of Provinces of the Philippines (LPP) and the League of Cities of the Philippines (LCP), migration issues are not yet given sufficient attention in these organizations. In 2007, the League of Municipalities of the Philippines launched an advocacy program calling on municipal governments to promote the protection of OFWs in their localities. There were also plans for municipal governments to be involved in reintegration programs, but this did not take off. However, all leagues expressed an interest in the MAPID Project, including the training programs.

C. Migrant Giving, Migrant's Investment and Partnerships

The MAPID research in the Philippines revealed that migrant giving, migrants' investments and partnerships between overseas Filipinos and local institutions are not uncommon, although these are not amply documented. The following are selected examples and observations highlighted from the MAPID research findings on migrant giving, investments and cooperation, which were compiled and published into a book (Asis et al., 2010).

- Based on the examination of development projects across regions, migrant giving was evident in support of humanitarian projects, disaster relief, community celebrations, medical missions, educational-related projects and equipment donation.
- Although most cases of migrants giving documented by MAPID involved US-based Filipinos, cases of OFWs supporting development projects were also recorded.
- There were fewer records documenting migrants' investments, which refer to businesses established by overseas Filipinos. Most investments were made by permanent migrants, mainly those living in the US. Most large businesses were individually spearheaded by Filipinos, such as commercial buildings, apartments, hospitals, schools, review centers, hotels and resorts.
- The MAPID Project found that there are various modalities of cooperation between overseas Filipinos and local or Philippines-based institutions. Communities and institutions in the Philippines receiving resources from overseas Filipinos also contribute to the project, either financially or in kind (see Box 3).
- In these types of partnerships, overseas Filipinos have been recognized by receiving communities or institutions. There are communities that hold "Balikbayan Night" or "Balikbayan Forum," usually held during town fiestas, to recognize the contributions of overseas Filipinos to community projects.
- The visits of overseas Filipinos to their home communities usually serve as a means to determine the needs of the communities or to monitor projects that are being implemented.

D. Outcomes of the MAPID Training Programs

Findings from the research informed the capacity building phase of MAPID. In the Philippines, the capacity building program aimed to raise the awareness of representatives of government institutions about the migration-development nexus and enhance their capacity to develop policies and programs that will activate the development potentials of international migration. In Italy and Spain, the capacity building program for leaders and active members of Filipino migrants' associations also sought to further the understanding of the links between migration and development and to build their capacity to be agents of change in relating to their host and home countries.

In the three countries, the participants had positive assessments of the training programs. Majority of the respondents said they would share the knowledge they gained with other organizations and associations and suggested for more follow-up training programs.

The training programs in the three countries had resulted in some new initiatives.

- Participants from the regional offices of the National Economic Development Authority plan to introduce migration and development issues in the upcoming meetings of their Regional Development Councils.

BOX 3
PARTNERSHIPS BETWEEN OVERSEAS FILIPINOS AND LOCAL INSTITUTIONS

Following are some of the types of cooperation that have occurred between overseas Filipinos and local communities or institutions. Below each type are examples selected from the findings of the research.

Overseas Filipinos and Local Government Units

- An example is the Ormoc City E-Learning Research Center, which was a joint project between Mr. Manuel Baylon, a US-based Filipino, and the local government in Ormoc City. The center, established in 2007, provides Internet facilities to public school students. The project was established in 2007. Mr. Baylon donated computers while the city government of Ormoc provided space, personnel and assumed responsibility for utilities. The city government passed an ordinance to ensure that the project will be sustained despite the change of officials in the future.

Overseas Filipinos and Universities/Academic Institutions

- Aside from hometown associations, overseas Filipinos also tend to form alumni associations, which provide support to their former schools as a way of giving back.

Overseas Filipinos and Media Partners

- In 2008, the Illonggo Association in Southern California (ISCA) partnered with Bombo Radyo and provided assistance to the victims of Typhoon Frank in Iloilo. The association gathered donations such as clothes, wheelchairs and walkers and sought the help of Bombo Radyo to identify the beneficiaries.

Overseas Filipinos and NGOs (including the Catholic Church)

- Locally based NGOs can help support the link between donors and receiving communities. The Soroptmist International of Albay Magayon (SIAM), the Bicol Small Business, Inc. and the US-based based Albay Services Group (ASG) established a joint project that offers livelihood assistance to women in areas severely hit Typhoon Reming. The Livelihood Training Center has been constructed at the time of data collection with funding from the ASG.

Overseas Filipinos and the Private Sector

- Ayala Foundation USA, established in 2000 and renamed as the Philippine Development Forum in 2010, organizes Filipino communities based in the US to participate in activities geared towards supporting development in the Philippines.

- Many participants were interested in developing a system for collecting data on international migration in their respective localities.
- Other participants were inspired by the good practices of some local governments and considered implementing similar programs in their areas, such as OFW centers.
- They suggested holding awareness-raising programs for local chief executives and conducting MAPID training programs to other government agencies.
- Some NGOs requested copies of MAPID training materials which they can incorporate in their own training programs.
- In Italy and Spain, the training programs provided opportunities for different organizations to interact and learn from each other.
- In Italy, the following outcomes had been noted.
 - Participants in Milan and Rome agreed to meet regularly, to update each other on their activities and to plan collaborative projects in the future.
 - Several migrants' associations have begun the process of registering their organizations after learning the importance of registration with local authorities.
 - As a specific case, three migrants' associations have collaboratively submitted a proposal to the call issued by the Municipality of Milan in November 2009.
 - The MAPID project has made available funds for post-training activities. Additional meetings, discussions and workshops were also provided upon the request of those who needed assistance in preparing project proposals.

- In Spain, the training program helped in rebuilding the relationship of the Filipino community.
 - Participants suggested working on three projects together: 1) conducting a study on the second generation migrants, 2) holding a youth conference, and 3) organizing a conference for MAPID participants in both Italy and Spain.
- Generally, the training program helped initiate the building of bridges between migrants' associations and Philippine government institutions. The exchange of information between the two helped foster a better understanding of each other's resources and constraints.
 - In Italy and Spain, the program helped resolve migrants' distrust towards the government, and this was reinforced by the participation of government representatives during the training (the Commission on Filipino Overseas, the embassy or consulate officials). Some participants were surprised about the good practices of some government agencies. They also expressed interest in supporting development projects in the Philippines.
 - Participants in the Philippines were challenged to find ways of addressing the lack of trust in government institutions.

III. Policies, Perspectives and Partnerships. What Have we Learned? What Can be Done?

The findings of the MAPID Project provide opportunities for reviewing the current international migration policy trends in the Philippines. With these research highlights, this section now attempts to suggest considerations as to how policymakers and stakeholders can respond to current migration perspectives, policy trends and practices in the Philippines, including partnerships between migrants abroad and local institutions and organizations.

A. National Context

Migration policies in the Philippines need to be more comprehensive

- The scope of migration policies could be expanded to include other dimensions of migration (e.g., development aspect, social dimensions) to become even more comprehensive and relevant.
- Development plans need to go beyond viewing OFW remittances as the primary economic contribution of migrants by exploring other channels wherein migration could contribute to the country's development, such as through migrant giving and investments or brain gain schemes. The potential contribution of social remittances should also be considered. Consideration could also be given to the development potential of efforts by return migrants and OFW communities abroad, as well as permanent migrants who want to help their country of origin.
- Migration issues should be incorporated in the policies and programs of regional and local government institutions, especially since there may be significant nuances among migration trends at national, regional and local levels. This is important because policies should be compatible with the specific conditions and trends of particular regions and localities.

B. Policies for human resources and skills transfer are called for

- Policymakers and stakeholders can shift the focus from generating overseas employment to actually developing the country's human resources and local-based job generation. They could also go beyond the common notion that labor migration leads to brain drain and consider the possibility of skills transfer. Filipino migrants abroad who have acquired specialized skills from their work experience abroad can be encouraged to teach and train local-based Filipinos. This shifts the focus from brain drain as a negative consequence of migration to the potential benefits of skills transfer, or the transmission and education of knowledge and skills from experienced Filipino professionals abroad to their countrymen at home.
- Developing policies and programs for skills transfer can contribute to or enhance the development of the country's workforce. Through skills transfer programs, migrants based abroad can share the expertise and skills they have acquired from their work experiences to local-based Filipinos.

- An example of initiatives promoting skills transfer is the Balik Scientist Program of the Department of Science and Technology. The National Reintegration Center for OFWs (NCRO) can also encourage knowledge and skills transfer of returning OFWs, but the implementation of the skills transfer component is not spelled out.
- At the same time, the performance of the country's education and labor institutions also need to be improved. As pointed out by some key informants, there is a need to improve educational and training facilities and systems in the country to be able to maintain and sustain the country's workforce.

Other dimensions of migration need policy attention

- Most research studies and policies focus on international labor migration from the Philippines. A more comprehensive, coherent and holistic migration policy should include other types of international migration, such as international migration to the Philippines.
- The scope of our common understanding of migration could also shift to focus on the transnational dimensions of Filipino society, and how this plays a role in the link between migration and development.
- Policymakers and stakeholders could give more recognition to other hidden benefits of migration, such as migrant giving, migrant investments and skills transfer. Social remittances are also less recognized but equally important and beneficial. As mentioned earlier, the MAPID Projects has documented many instances of migrant giving, investments and cooperation (see Asis et al., 2010)
- As pointed out by many key informants, the country has to find ways to strengthen reintegration programs,
- Policies attentive to the social costs of migration, as well as the possible implications of migration on socio-economic inequalities among migrant and non-migrant families, will help maximize the gains and minimize the costs of migration.
- Bilateral agreements can be expanded to include development assistance to the home country.

C. Regional and Local Contexts

Consideration of migration-related issues in the development plans, policies and programs at the sub-national level

- Migration-related concerns appear to be lacking in the plans of regional and local governments. There are some exceptional cases, but generally, there is a need for regional and local development plans, policies and programs to give sufficient attention to migration-related issues.

More awareness of the migration-development nexus in local government units

- Local governments are important links in realizing the development dimension of migration. However, these links are largely non-existent or weak as seen in the lack of migration-related issues in local development plans. This is also evident in the informal approach given to requests for assistance by OFWs and their families, or offers of assistance from Filipinos abroad.
- Programs aimed to raise awareness of the contribution of migration to development would certainly help in gaining the cooperation and support of local government institutions, which are greatly needed in implementing migration and development programs.

Improve the documentation of international migration at regional and local levels

- Policymakers need to look into data issues especially at the regional and local levels. Proper documentation can provide evidence needed to map out international migration trends in a specific area, which in turn, can help in the formulation of development plans and policies that will specifically address the locality.

Designating offices or personnel to address migration-related issues

- Offices or personnel dedicated to migration-related issues are lacking in regional and local institutions. Policymakers and stakeholders could consider creating offices designated to address migration-related concerns.
- In regional and local government units, migration-related issues are assigned under existing offices or desks, such as public service and employment offices (PESOS). Some LGUs have considered establishing an office for migration issues, but mostly to address the protection of migrant workers. Local government officials are also reluctant to set up desks specifically for migration-related agendas because of funding and staffing constraints.

There is a need to formulate policies that would help promote partnerships between migrants' associations and local government institutions

- Generally, there is a need for the national government to strengthen coordination between migration and development agencies. Ties between migrant communities abroad and local institutions must be established and reinforced with good policy.
- Policymaking should also consider how local institutions relate to Filipinos all over the world. There is also a need to improve the performance of local institutions to fulfill their role in strengthening links with migrants abroad.
- There is much evidence of the willingness of Filipino migrant communities abroad to maintain ties with the Philippines and to engage with activities and projects that would help their home country. Policymakers can step in and create the means through which Filipinos abroad can actively engage with development work in the Philippines.
- It is here that the role of policymakers in national, regional and local contexts is given emphasis. There is a need to formulate policies that would help promote partnerships between local institutions and migrant communities abroad.

Issues of trust must be addressed and resolved

- Issues of trust and transparency must also be addressed if there will be attempts to foster better partnerships between government institutions and migrant communities.
- The MAPID Project to a certain extent has initiated the efforts to build and establish ties between migrants' associations and local government institutions. Participants in the program were able to learn from each other. Some of the participants, for instance, discovered good practices by particular government agencies, some of which they were unaware of.

IV. Conclusion

This policy brief calls on policymakers and stakeholders to integrate international migration issues in the country's development plans at the national, regional and local levels, and to recognize the development dimension that should be included in the country's migration policy.

It must be realized that international migration can be a force for change and development. Policies could be drafted to tap into this potential, specifically through strategies that can promote cooperation and integration between migrants' associations abroad and government institutions. It proposes a shift in focus from viewing migration in terms of deployment and remittances to the possibility of Filipino migrants becoming agents of social change and sustainable development.

Policymakers and stakeholders have a unique role in initiating changes and reforms that would help the country construct better and more comprehensive migration policies and development plans.

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