



MIGRANTS AS DEVELOPMENT ACTORS: CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES POLICY BRIEF

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I. Introduction

According to the United Nations, there are some 214 million international migrants worldwide today. This number accounts for 3.1 percent of the world's population. While the percentage of the world's migrants has remained relatively stable over the years, the volume of remittances they send back home have increased exponentially. In 2009, about US\$414 billion remittances were sent worldwide, more than 70 percent of which went to developing countries.¹ Economists noted the resilience of remittance flows relative to other types of flows in light of the recent global financial economic crisis. As such, many infer that remittances are instrumental in covering for external financing gaps in major remittance-receiving countries and a major source of bottom-up financing for the poor.

In part, due to its institutionalized labor export program since the early 1970s, the Philippines is the fourth largest remittance receiving country in the world after India, China and Mexico. According to the Bangko Sentral ng Pilipinas, for the last ten years, remittances accounted for about 10 percent of the country's GDP on average. Because of the key role they play in the country's economy, the Philippines' 8.5 million-strong overseas population is viewed as the country's economic lifeline. While the Philippines is widely recognized as a model for migration management, it is also a cautionary tale of how labor migration policies and programs can trap developing countries into being permanent providers of migrant labor for richer economies, foregoing their own development in the process. In other words, the Philippines' success in overseas employment may have lulled the country into complacency, thereby delaying implementing needed reforms to sustain the development process.

This policy brief is intended to distill the learnings from the Migrants' Associations and Philippine Institutions for Development (MAPID) Project, a pioneering research undertaking which seeks to realize the development potentials of international migration in the Philippines beyond remittances. Aimed at civil society organizations (CSOs) and international organizations (IOs) seeking to enhance the development impact of migration through policy advocacy or development programming, this policy brief hopes to provide a nuanced picture of the disconnect between international migration realities and development policy in the Philippines and outlines recommendations on how civil society and

* This material has been produced with the financial assistance of the European Union. The contents of this document are the sole responsibility of the Scalabrini Migration Center and can under no circumstances be regarded as reflecting the position of the European Union.

¹ World Bank. Migration and Development Brief 12 (23 April 2010).



international organizations can close this gap. Drawn from the perspectives of Philippine government stakeholders and Filipino migrants' associations in Italy and Spain, the three-year MAPID Project confirms what has long been speculated by migration and development scholars: that there is little awareness or coherence between international migration realities and development policy at the national, regional and local levels. As a consequence, the contributions of international migration to development in the Philippines – apart from remittances – are not appreciated and the potential threats posed by international migration to development are not well-understood as well.

The first part of the policy brief provides an overview of the MAPID Project, including its objectives and methodology. The second and third parts flesh out the highlights of the findings of the research on the perspectives of Philippine institutions and Filipino migrants, and good practices of government and private organizations in harnessing the migration-development nexus. The policy brief concludes with recommendations for CSOs and IOs intending to replicate the examples described in this brief. Details of the findings reported here are available in Baggio (2010), Asis and Roma (2009, 2010), Villaroya (2009, 2010) and Zanfrini and Sarli (2009, 2010).

A. The MAPID Project

The Migrant Associations and Philippine Institutions for Development (MAPID) Project is a research cum capacity-building undertaking funded by the AENEAS programme of the European Union to:

- 1) advance understanding of the migration-development nexus by two important stakeholders, i.e., Philippine government institutions and Filipino migrants' associations in Italy and Spain; and
- 2) build the capacity and partnership between Philippine government institutions and migrants' associations in Italy and Spain in promoting development in the home country.

The objectives and approach of the project were informed by earlier scholarly work on transnational linkages and the contributions of international migration to development.² In the Philippines, the MAPID Project documented cases of migrant giving, although counterpart funding by the government – such as Mexico's *tres por uno* model³ – is not that well-known or evident in the Philippines. It must be underscored at this point that migrant giving or diaspora philanthropy is differentiated from remittances. The latter refers to the private transfer of financial or material resources to their intended beneficiaries (typically family members) while the former refers to transfer of financial or material resources to non-family members.

MAPID is a pioneering project in various ways. For one, it endeavored to examine the extent to which migration is mainstreamed in development planning at all levels in light of Philippine migration realities. It also sought to uncover how officials and key staff of government agencies view migration's role in the country's development process. Secondly, MAPID took into account the experiences and views of Filipino migrants in Italy and Spain – a relatively understudied subset of the Filipino diaspora. The project provided an opportunity to know more about Filipino communities in Europe. Thirdly, the project adopted a transnational approach, which considered the origin and destination countries and it also conducted parallel activities involving the two major stakeholders.

II. Perspectives on Migration and Development

A. Government Stakeholders

At the national level, the 2004–2010 Medium Term Philippine Development Plan locates overseas employment as part of the country's strategy for employment generation and poverty alleviation. Migration officials support this view, considering their role as that of facilitating job placement of those who wish to work overseas. Remittances remain to

² See Powers (2006) and Silva (2006) on hometown associations.

³ It is matching program wherein for every dollar donated by a Mexican migrants' association, the federal, state and local governments contribute a dollar each.

be the oft-cited benefit of migration which is credited for the country's current account surplus and the development of the property sector. Studies analyzing the macro-economic impact of remittances to the Philippines confirm these perceptions (see Asis and Roma, 2010).

Data from the Central Bank of the Philippines for instance show that in 2007 alone, remittances account for 9.7 percent of the GDP, twice as big as the country's debt service burden and nearly five times bigger than foreign direct investment to the country (Bayangos and Jansen, 2008). Empirical research on the household impact of remittances in the Philippines also show that a 10 percent increase in remittances reduces the poverty rate by 2.8 percent, increases school attendance of children by 1.7 percent, and raises entrepreneurial activity by 2 percent (Yang, 2006). While concerns over heightened inequality between migrant households and non-migrant households are raised, other studies also show that nearly 80 percent of households in the Philippines directly or indirectly benefit from remittances (see Pernia, 2006). As such, Central Bank policies are geared towards encouraging competition among remittance companies to reduce the cost of remitting and improve the quality of service through technology.

Despite this, government stakeholders remain concerned that migrants and their households fail to use their remittances productively, or in a manner that would generate higher economic productivity. Comparison is made with India and China where migrant investments have figured prominently in the development process of these emerging economies (Kapur, 2001). Overseas Filipinos are also perceived as risk-averse whose investments are limited to real estate. Yet, one cannot conclusively say that overseas Filipinos have not invested in the Philippines as much as their Indian and Chinese counterparts have, since there is no system in place to collect data pertaining to their investments. Without a way to monitor migrant return and investment, expected gains from policies designed to attract migrants' investments, such as the Citizenship Retention and Reacquisition Act of 2003, cannot be measured.

At the local and regional levels, findings of the MAPID Project reveal the notable absence of international migration in most regional and local development plans. In the rare instance that migration was mentioned, it was in reference to recognizing the contribution of overseas workers through their remittances. Across all regions, key informants cited job generation as a major challenge facing local governments. Respondents also envision more migration in the future, confirming that a culture of migration has indeed taken root. Most existing migrant desks are under the purview of the public employment service offices (PESO), implying that migration is mostly seen from the perspective of employment generation. Most of these migrant desks were also set-up to coordinate requests for assistance of workers in distress.

Asked whether they perceive migrants as development partners, local government respondents were divided in their views. Some believe that the prerogative rests on the migrants themselves, while others are more hopeful in tapping migrants for certain projects. All respondents concur that migrants have resources and that their expertise may be tapped to aid in development. Local governments were also aware that migrants in their localities are often tapped to assist in community undertakings such as town fiestas or fundraising events for community projects. However, most respondents were unaware of Mexico's *tres por uno* program but showed interest in learning more about the model.

B. Migrants' Perspectives

One unique contribution of the MAPID Project towards understanding migration and development linkages is its attempt to document the perspective of Filipino migrants in Italy and Spain – particularly how they feel about development initiatives back home. Criticisms about the recent interest in migration-development initiatives claim that the discourse tends to leave out migrants themselves, assuming that their participation in their countries' development projects would come automatically (Raghuram, 2009). That migrants send remittances to their families, or help their communities in times of need is obvious. But are they really willing and conscious participants of development as they are perceived to be? How do they perceive their roles in the communities they have left behind? To what extent are they willing to commit their resources beyond their family duties? What is the nature of migrants' associations and are they equipped to be development partners of their origin communities or as agents of change for Filipino communities in the destination countries? Answers to these questions are essential considerations in advocating for policy and program interventions intended to forge the links between migration and development.

*C. Filipino Migrants in Italy*⁴

The Filipino community in Italy is a heterogeneous lot consisting of first generation immigrants, a diverse second generation, and dual citizens. The Filipino population in Italy accounts for about 3.2 percent of the total population of legally residing foreigners in the country. Renowned for hard work, reliability and loyalty, Filipinos are regarded positively in Italy society and command higher wages among foreigners engaged in the same type of work. On the whole, respondents who were interviewed are generally satisfied with their earnings. Very few are involved in self-employment or entrepreneurship (about 5 percent among male respondents and none among females) and while some 38 percent expressed intentions to take on a different job over the next five years, most are unable to explain strategies to achieve occupational mobility. Of those whose children are already in Italy, 8 out of 10 are hopeful that the next generation will have better job prospects than they do.

Transnational linkages remain strong in the case of Filipino migrants in Italy with over 90 percent of the respondents claiming to have active ties or links with the Philippines. The same could be said about those who were born in Italy, more than 70 percent of whom claim to have active ties or links to the Philippines as well. Over 80 percent of the sample also visited the Philippines in as recent as the preceding year prior to the data gathering (2007). Actual or planned investments to the Philippines are a clear minority, involving only about 10 to 15 percent of the sample. However, more than one fourth of the respondents claim to be interested in business opportunities back home.

It is worth noting, that while there is widespread willingness to invest savings towards activities and projects that enhance the well-being of their origin communities, organized projects are almost absent from the experiences of the migrants' associations which took part in the study. Most initiatives are focused on relief and interventions usually undertaken in the aftermath of natural disasters. Moreover, there is considerable ambiguity among majority of the respondents concerning their role in local development and how their desire to help could be actualized.

As regards associational practice, the research also revealed some interesting insights.

- Most projects or activities undertaken by Filipino organizations are mainly of a religious nature, followed by cultural-recreational-social activities, and support services and assistance to fellow migrants. There is residual attention towards financial management and entrepreneurial promotion.
- The major reason for joining Filipino migrants' association is the possibility to meet and connect with fellow Filipinos.
- The emphasis of preserving of traditional values and institutions is a more urgent cause for the association than their integration or empowerment in the Italian society.
- Their willingness to be involved or carry out demanding projects are hindered by the limited time available. Only one out of five are involved in development projects such as livelihood assistance, calamity relief and support of infrastructure projects.

*D. Filipino Migrants in Spain*⁵

The Spanish component of the MAPID Project also covered 200 respondents, nearly all of whom are first generation immigrants with an average age of 40 years. Ninety percent of the respondents are engaged in domestic work while a little over 5 percent worked in restaurants. Compared with Filipinos in Italy, majority of the respondents in Spain claim that their migration to Spain was their first experience to work overseas. Secondly, almost all of the

⁴ Respondents consist of 200 Filipino migrants from Rome and Milan. Data reported in this section are based on the report of Zanfrini and Sarli (2009; 2010).

⁵ Respondents consist of 200 Filipino migrants from Madrid and Barcelona. The data reported here come from the Spain report (Villaroya, 2009; 2010).

respondents have been granted permanent residence in Spain, nearly half of whom hold a Spanish passport or claims to have double nationality. Out of those who still have Filipino citizenship, 80 percent stated that they are in the process of obtaining Spanish nationality. It should be emphasized that the tendency of Filipinos to obtain Spanish nationality may also be attributed to the ease in which it could be obtained.⁶ There is a general sense that the motivation to acquire Spanish nationality is for instrumental reasons (i.e., ensured mobility and greater access to social security).

With a household monthly income between EUR1,000 and EUR3,000, respondents are generally satisfied with their work and have no immediate plans to change their occupation. Just like their Italy-based counterparts, Filipinos in Spain expressed their intention to change occupations in the long term, but the respondents also believed that social and work mobility in Spain is very limited. Parents are hopeful that their children will have professional occupations but many are also worried that their children may forego opportunities for social mobility. Majority of the respondents expressed strong intentions to return to the Philippines in the future and they continue to maintain links in the Philippines by getting in touch with their families back home almost weekly. Cultural products are also commonly sought (films, music and television shows) through traditional and new media.

All respondents send money to the Philippines through bank transfer and remittance agencies to support their families, which includes financing for the education of their children or relatives and building or renovating their houses back home. Majority of the respondents are not inclined to invest in the Philippines, with only about a fifth declaring intentions to start a business prior to returning home. Only about 13 percent claim to have investments in the Philippines while only 16 percent have plans of investing in the future. Research findings also show that migrants generally stop sending remittances to the Philippines once all family members are in Spain.

Some associational attributes of Filipino organizations in Spain are identified below, some of which are similar to that of their Italian counterparts.

- Forty percent of the respondents claim to have assisted/participated in at least one Filipino community project/activity in Spain and more than forty percent intends to collaborate/cooperate in future projects. Over 63 percent also believe that associations are more effective than individual efforts in contributing to development projects in the Philippines.
- Involvement in development projects in the Philippines is relatively limited and sporadic, most of which in connection with relief efforts in natural disasters and development of local infrastructure such as churches.
- Close to two-thirds of the respondents believe that Filipino associations are capable of carrying out development projects. In general, there is greater confidence on church-related institutions and initiatives, such as Gawad Kalinga, than on government institutions.
- Despite general pessimism about the state of Philippine politics, Filipino associations regard official recognition from the Philippine Embassy as positive.

III. Forging the Nexus: Good Practices in Migration and Development

This section provides a general overview of migration–development initiatives documented by the MAPID research team in the Philippines. This section simply aims to describe efforts that have been undertaken by various entities, and where appropriate, identify considerations that are instrumental to their implementation (see Asis et al., 2010).

A. Migrant Giving or Diaspora Philanthropy

Until recently, international migration was commonly viewed as a livelihood strategy of an individual or family unit and very few studies have looked into how migrants mobilize their resources to contribute to community projects

⁶ Since the Philippines was a Spanish colony, Filipinos can qualify for naturalization after two years of living in Spain.

outside their filial obligations. From a spate of studies on hometown associations, migrant giving or diaspora philanthropy emerged as one of the more recent trumpeted benefits of migration.

One example of migrant giving is the Link for Philippine Development Program (LINKAPIL) by the Commission on Filipinos Overseas. Launched in 1989, the program was designed to facilitate the transfer of various forms of assistance from Filipino or other donors overseas to support various projects and services in underserved communities. The range of assistance covered by the LINKAPIL Program include health and welfare assistance through medical missions and donation of medicines and medical equipment; educational support through scholarships, donation of books and educational materials and building of classrooms; calamity relief; infrastructure support through the construction of public facilities; and livelihood through microfinance.

It has been observed, however, that the flow of donations to communities is largely donor-driven as opposed to needs-driven, and that donors favor programs that are one-time, high-impact contributions as opposed to more sustainable interventions.

B. Knowledge Transfers

Another channel through which migration can contribute to development is through diaspora knowledge transfers. In the past, the migration literature focused on brain drain, but more recently, brain gain, i.e., the potential of benefiting through expatriate talent – as seen in the case of India, Taiwan and South Korea – has been received scholarly and policy attention.

In the Philippines, the Department of Science and Technology's (DOST) Balik Scientist Program (BSP), a knowledge transfer program designed to attract expatriate Filipino scientists to share their expertise in key priority sectors, has been in existence since the 1970s. Although the program has been revamped recently, it needs to involve other stakeholders, such as local governments and the private sector, to expand the program and to enhance the contributions of brain gain to the country's development.

C. Savings and Investments

Non-government organizations (NGOs) such as the Unlad Kabayan Migrant Services Foundation and Atikha Family and Community Initiatives, Inc. as well as the private sector, such as the Ayala Foundation USA, are also involved in tapping migrants' resources to contribute to social entrepreneurship and local development projects.

In the case of NGOs, they had long been involved in finding sustainable alternatives to migration, especially for Filipino migrants in vulnerable occupations.

A recent development is the partnership between migrant-oriented NGOs and development NGOs in designing program interventions geared at pooling migrant savings for entrepreneurial endeavors in the countryside. While these programs also have had considerable success, migration and development NGOs claim that government must do more in supporting these initiatives not only in terms of scaling them up, but also in creating a nurturing environment for entrepreneurship to thrive and succeed. They are calling on government to offer a conducive environment for local start-ups, which are relatively disadvantaged in terms of capital.

D. Trade and Tourism Promotion

There are anecdotal accounts of overseas Filipinos engaged in trading Philippine-made products overseas. The demand for "nostalgic" goods, or home country products does not only develop entrepreneurship among migrant Filipinos, it also creates a demand for Philippine products abroad which can generate domestic employment. Export demand also promotes competitiveness by encouraging industries to upgrade their standards to comply with export regulations. However, studies also show that home country goods should not only endeavor to cater to a specific migrant population but rather to a broader customer base in order to create greater demand (Orozco, 2008).

Tourism promotion is another area where migrant Filipinos have been encouraged to participate in. At the national level, the Department of Tourism previously implemented the Tourism Volunteer 12 (V-12) program, seeking to mobilize overseas Filipinos in promoting the Philippines as a tourism destination. The program provides incentives to volunteers who are able to convince their personal acquaintances to visit the Philippines. With the change in leadership, the program was discontinued. At the local level, several municipalities have institutionalized an annual Balikbayan program, enjoining migrants to return to their hometowns once a year to participate in the annual fiestas and other community development projects.

IV. Concluding Reflections

A. Migration and Development: Lessons Learned

As can be gleaned from the examples provided above, there is a diversity of options through which migration realities can be factored in designing development interventions for origin communities. However, the findings of the MAPID Project should also feed into broader attempts to maximize the development impact of migration. There are reasons why some programs have achieved longevity while others have not. Development policy makers and practitioners may consider some interesting points below in the course of mainstreaming migration concerns in development practice.

- Migrant giving is primarily donor driven not only because migrants prefer to channel assistance to their hometowns for nostalgic reasons, but also because little has been done to build capacity for targeted programming. Put simply, migrants are not aware where their goodwill is most needed. The overwhelming support of overseas Filipinos for Gawad Kalinga projects suggest that migrant giving can be channeled to needier communities. More research needs to be done in identifying development needs at the local and regional levels.
- Diaspora knowledge transfer schemes are either rare or poorly documented and more efforts should be undertaken to encourage them. As can be seen from Taiwan's Hsinchu Park, which was modeled after the Silicon Valley development model, expatriate talent holds tremendous promise in improving the Philippines' industrial base. Past programs on diaspora knowledge transfer such as the Balik Scientist Program and the UN Transfer of Knowledge Through Expatriate Nationals (TOKTEN) must be evaluated towards enhancing current schemes or developing new ones.
- Financial management and entrepreneurial training are not sufficient to encourage investments by overseas Filipinos. Gaining investor confidence through transparent and accountable governance is the other half of the equation. Counterpart funding from government sources may also be a way to build social capital between migrants and local governments. Also, migrants may not be individual risk-takers, although MAPID research findings show increased confidence when development projects are undertaken collectively.
- Serious efforts must be made to address data gaps on international migration. Without a system in place to collect return migration statistics, it is difficult to design programs and services to effectively respond to the needs as well as resources returning migrants bring back with them. Consequently, local governments would remain unaware of opportunities to engage migrants from their hometown in partnerships that would foster local development. Most local governments are even unaware that the volume of remittances that pour into their communities often exceed the internal revenue share they receive from the national government. As findings from the MAPID Project illustrate, the integration experience of migrants in their host countries also determine the type of interventions that would work best. Filipino migrants are not monolithic, and interventions should take into account their differences in terms of their integration experience, entrepreneurial know-how, career goals and intentions, among other related factors.

B. How Civil Society and International Organizations Can Help

Civil society and international organizations are well positioned in catalyzing links between migration and development in terms of mobilizing resources, greater access to funding opportunities, and credibility within their

constituencies, among other related advantages. Given the lessons identified above, how can civil society and international organizations usher in the process of bridging this gap? Several options may be explored.

- Support the expansion of migration policies beyond migration facilitation and promote technical assistance towards building the capacity of migrants and members of their families in finding alternative sources of livelihood. Social enterprises have had some success in generating livelihood options, and in addition, it contributes to the promotion of social goals such as gender equality.
- Advocate for the creation of migrant councils in origin and destination countries to increase the representation of migrants in governance structures and policy advisory bodies – Within this framework, CSOs can foster social dialogue and partnerships by helping migrants' associations build capacity in organizing and acquiring skills as agents of change.
- Provide support in scaling up good practices on migrant partnerships with government, civil society and other stakeholders and support continuing capacity building of migrants' associations and cooperatives
- Support government initiatives to enhance data collection initiatives on migration flows, including data on return migration – The concept of reintegration should also be broadened to include not only entrepreneurship but also knowledge transfer mechanisms for different expertise and skills – scientists, highly skilled professionals, and skilled workers, and volunteers.
- Explore policy interventions in enhancing social protection measures for migrants and members of their families – Although the recent financial crisis showed that migrant households are better equipped to resist economic shocks and risks, their working and living arrangements raises the question of who should provide for their social security needs in the event of disability, unemployment and retirement.

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