

REINTEGRATION PROGRAM FOR MIGRANT WORKERS

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INTRODUCTION

Overseas employment is temporary. It is an accepted fact among Overseas Filipino Workers (OFWs). The stringent immigration policies prevailing in other countries, current global conditions, market-driven salaries and wages, nationalization move on the part of the host countries, and internal strife in host countries compel OFWs especially the aging ones, to come home.

For almost a decade, women workers outnumbered their male counterparts. In 2001 alone, 72 % of the total overseas deployment for new hires were women, while the men constitute only 28%. In 2001, the figures were: 69% women and 31% men. In terms of skills category, women were found highest in two categories — the professional and technical (teachers, engineers, and medical workers) and service workers (domestic helpers, caregivers, entertainers, etc). In 2001 to 2002, out of the 198,033 newly hired professional and technical OFWs, 168,673 were women (85%) and 29,360 were men (15%). On the other hand, out of the 190,358 newly hired service workers, 172,620 (90 %) were women as against 16,380 (10%) men. These statistics reflect the increasing number of women taking the lead role as family providers.

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Economic success and social mobility

In a paper written by Ms. Alcestis Mangahas of the Social Weather Station for a Group Meeting on Violence Against Women Migrant Workers, the author presented the survey findings that for many women, overseas work is a strategy for economic success and social mobility in a country of limited opportunities. Through overseas work, they are accorded the rare opportunity to attain economic goals in a short period of time.

However, women's decision to go abroad is not simply their own. Ms. Mangahas noted that their participation in economic activity is related to the needs of their families so that the choices migrant women make regarding work cannot be understood without taking into account the situation of their families and women's roles within them. The need for higher income to improve family well-being is the most significant reason for migrant women. While family pressure by close relatives is the most important predictor in decision-making, family debt provides the psychological pressure on young women to provide for their families. The paper also underscored other important but non-financial push factors for outmigration such as self-assertion in the family decision-making and search for freedom; as a form of escape from family problems like strict parents, uncaring husband, unsuccessful marriage; and the need to enhance personal growth, experience adventure and face new challenges.

In a paper written for a Philippine Overseas Employment Authority (POEA) presentation on reintegration, the author expressed alarm over "the general concern for the increased outflow of women workers ... due to their concentration in two occupations." These are those in which workers are patently unprotected, namely, domestic service and entertainment.

Household workers dominate overall outflows of women, except in Japan where female entertainers are more numerous. Household work has been classified as a “vulnerable occupation”. Its notable features include low status, low wages, isolation and, alienation of workers, and their invisibility from the law.

For purposes of today’s workshop, we take into account (1) the problems workers face when they return home; (2) the ready interventions available for them; (3) how they cope with wage differentials between their former host country and that in the Philippines; and (4) how an OFW returnee can be able to enter in some forms of self-employment or entrepreneurial activities without help from others.

Socio-economic Reintegration

Reintegration in the mainstream of the socio-economic and political life of society is but an integral part of the migration phenomenon. It is a critical phase which deserves much more attention than it has been accorded.

Economic reintegration is especially difficult for the forcibly repatriated or prematurely terminated migrants. While the returnees who have completed their contracts at the regular period would have at least repaid pre-employment debts, acquired assets, and made some savings, the disadvantaged returnees sink into further debt. They do not have the necessary financial means during the re-entry period to sustain their respective families’ basic needs.

Returnees also undergo difficult social reintegration because of the long separation from family and community. Many are unable to return to social networks which may have been weakened by the migration process, especially if it ended in failure. Continuing support in the form of counseling and therapy are therefore necessary.

In her speech during the Migrant Workers' Day Celebration in Malacañang last year, President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo recognized the importance of reintegration of returning OFWs, citing their numerous contributions to the economy, especially their role as overseas Filipino investors.

Comprehensive Reintegration Program

The need for a comprehensive reintegration program was felt as early as the late 1980s. Thus, government and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) have initiated programs and activities to address the problems and issues confronting returning OFWs to their home countries. This phenomenon has also become the subject of research studies. The Asian Migration Center, a regional NGO based in Hong Kong, pioneered reintegration programs in the Asian region. It organized the first regional consultation on reintegration in December 1988 in Manila in which more than 50 representatives from grassroots migrant reintegration savings group (RSGs) and support NGOs in Hong Kong, Japan, Korea, Taiwan, Malaysia, Indonesia, Thailand, Nepal and Philippines attended. The meeting resolved to respond to the OFW needs in the process of reintegration all over the Asian region.

The Challenges of Globalization

Amid the challenges of globalization, what are the lessons learned and opportunities that lie ahead?

Globalization resulted in borderless economies where money, goods and information flow more freely. Despite border restrictions on people's mobility, recent migration trends show increasing numbers of migrant workers moving into many countries. Globalization also means stiff economic competition,

for products and services as well as markets. It means quality products and services at the least cost. Thus, to be able to compete in the labor market, this requires more highly skilled workers. This also means work situations where they risk possible wage cuts.

OVERVIEW OF INSTITUTIONAL RESPONSE

Mindful of the magnitude of the impact of return migration, government and non-governmental organizations including the Catholic Church and church-based organizations have developed re-integration programs and services for the OFWs and their families. Some of these institutions that provide services and programs for OFWs and their families are as follows:

Overseas Workers' Welfare Administration (OWWA)

As the government's central administrative body for the provision of welfare services to OFWs, OWWA plays a significant role in the OFW reintegration program in scope and coverage.

OWWA's reintegration program addresses the economic and social concerns of returning migrant workers. The program includes services for livelihood organizing programs, placement assistance and the Re-Placement and Monitoring Center (RPMC) as provided for under Republic Act 8042. This is being pursued both at the jobsite and the local centers.

Under the economic aspects of reintegration, OWWA has a Livelihood Development Program for OFWs (LDPO) providing support services such as project financing, technical assistance in project planning, and training for those who would like to venture into income-generating projects or to expand their

present businesses. Project planning includes the processes from identification of the project itself; preparation of the feasibility studies and the completion of various documentary requirements. The training include short courses on:

- small business development
- small business planning and management
- specific skills; and
- industry specific cliniquing/mentoring.

Through its built-in monitoring component, the program also provides consultancy services on pressing problems being encountered by its clients. The LDPO is a continuing program and provides loans up to P100,000.00 under direct lending for individual returning OFW entrepreneurs.

Community organizing is another service component of the program package which consists of assistance services towards the formation of community-based associations of OFW families with viable projects. This component also includes services that would strengthen these organizations into self-reliant and independent groups such as the conduct of leadership training, organizational planning and other related training/seminars.

OWWA organized the First National Conference on OFW Reintegration held on April 12 to 13, 2002 in cooperation with a core group composed of NGOs and church-based organizations which implement programs for OFWs and their families. Some 146 delegates attended the conference representing concerned government institutions and local and inter-national civil society groups. In a resolution adopted by the body, the concept of a Comprehensive OFW Reintegration Program (CROP) was conceived. The participants committed to dedicate their time, effort and expertise and resources to help OFWs prepare and plan for their reintegration as defined in the resolution. They also called upon the government to support

the program through the provision of an enabling environment for the adoption and implementation of the CROP. The document emphasized the potentials of OFW reintegration and the potentials to transform the social costs of migration into opportunities for socio-economic development.

The agency also launched *Kabuhayan 2000: Sa Pagbabalik ng Pinoy Program* which was a multi-agency initiative implemented since 1995 in response to the multi-dimensional needs of returning OFWs. Its objectives are to:

- Facilitate the realization of sustained income generating activities for returning migrants through small enterprise formation, identifying investment opportunities and/or better wage employment. This is to be accomplished through the creation of a network of programs and services involving various agencies under the coordination of the DOLE, and offers three types of services;
- Conduct training in entrepreneurship development to provide alternative sources of income for returning OFWs, including assistance in finance and credit, entrepreneurship and technology training and consultancy services offered by concerned agencies;
- Identify viable investment options in real estate, trust funds, stocks, securities and/or bonds, and those with high growth potentials for OFWs who prefer to invest their earnings; and
- Provide skills, knowledge, and attitude training and development that meet the needs of local industries for those eyeing re-employment.

Due to limited resource commitments, this program failed. In a paper presented by Dr. Herminia R. Fajardo at the Workshop on Reintegrating OFWs Successfully as Self-Employed or Micro

Entrepreneurs she cited major flaws in the program's implementation:

- Difficulty in organizing training courses that would fit the time availability of the OFWs for training. Hence, not much can be accomplished for such a short time;
- Program activities do not necessarily follow a sequential flow but instead offers a basket of assistance made available to returning OFWs through the network of participating agencies;
- Participants of the entrepreneurial development or skills training are not automatically chosen by the assisting agencies unless they request for assistance. Investment opportunities are not directed specifically to productive business enterprises but also investments in real estate, trust funds, shares of stocks, securities and/or bonds that do not employ additional workforce. Moreover, after the entrepreneurial skills training some OFWs would opt to be re-employed.
- It is a one-shot deal with no continuity of assistance for individual OFWs. Due to lack of monitoring and evaluation of the assistance impact to beneficiaries, the OFW is left out on his own and the lessons learned from the experience does not necessarily feed into succeeding assistance undertaking.
- There is lack of value transformation agenda for the OFWs or their immediate dependents; thus, the program was unable to offer itself as an alternative option to migrant work.

Department of Labor and Employment (DOLE) and the Public Employment Services Office (PESO)

Under the Social Reform Agenda, the Department of Labor and Employment launched several flagship programs that would

respond to the needs of the growing numbers of OFWs and to protect and promote the welfare of OFWs and their families, particularly in times of distress. In particular, they are concerned with skills registration, job facilitation, linking with NGOs and other labor and employment agencies, counseling and livelihood assistance and development of projects for self-employment.

Department of Trade and Industry (DTI)

The Department of Trade and Industry offers an NGO micro-credit program with the assistance of the Asian Development Bank. The lending program was designed to answer the credit needs of aspiring and existing entrepreneurs by maximizing established NGOs as conduits for lending and technical assistance. It aims to strengthen NGOs capability in implementing micro-enterprise development and to provide credit for micro-entrepreneurs.

Technical Education and Skills Development Authority (TESDA)

TESDA began a reintegration program on site in anticipation of the displacement OFWs may experience upon contract termination. Similar projects provided training for domestic helpers in food processing, hotel and restaurant operation, as well as care giving work. Another project being readied for implementation is a training program in computer proficiency to upgrade skills and advance OFW status and options for alternative employment. In cooperation with Duty-Free, Inc. (DFI), TESDA is offering the procurement of tax-free, high quality tools and equipment at reasonable cost geared for livelihood, entrepreneurship and other livelihood enhancing activities.

Church-related and Non-Governmental Agencies **CBCP- ECMI**

Provide social services and training to migrant workers and organize migrants and their families at parish-levels.

Kapisanan ng mga Kamag-anak ng Migranteng **Manggagawang Pilipino, Inc. (KAKAMMPI)**

It is a community-based organization of relatives of overseas migrant workers and migrant returnees. It is involved in social services and welfare projects; development education and organization-building; economic development; and advocacy and lobby work.

Friends of Filipino Migrant **Workers, Inc. or Kaibigan**

Kaibigan caters to the needs of disadvantaged Filipino overseas workers primarily through research and advocacy efforts.

Development Action for Women **Network (DAWN)**

It aims to assist women OFWs seek alternative livelihoods as they reintegrate into Philippine society, and help them develop skills for active participation in building self-reliant communities. It provides immediate assistance for crisis intervention, education and rehabilitation, research and information dissemination through tri-media, alternative livelihood development through skills training, and networking and advocacy.

‘There are also several other NGOs such as **Unlad Kabayan**, **BATIS Center for Women**, **ATIKHA**, and the **Center for Overseas Workers** that continue to provide a wide range of support services for OFWs returnees.

ISSUES IN THE IMPLEMENTATION OF REINTEGRATION PROGRAMS

A study commissioned by the International Labor Organization (ILO) entitled “A Situational Analysis of Reintegration Needs and Response Programmes for Returned Overseas Filipino Workers” provides some insights on the implementation of reintegration programs as follows:

- **Lack of holistic and integrated approach**

The program needs to pursue a more holistic and integrated approach to reintegration, one that fully facilitates and develops opportunities for the returnees, preventing a haphazard and limited response to only a small number of beneficiaries. The program aims to incorporate information on re-entry concerns at every phase of the migration process to better prepare migrant workers for their eventual return.

- **Limited financial and human resources and expertise among service providers**

Government agencies mandated to implement reintegration programs need greater structural support in terms of budget, personnel, and training, in order to effectively accomplish their set goals and objectives and mandated tasks.

- **Poor coordination among reintegration service providers**

A strategic plan needs to be drawn that maximizes the points of coordination and cooperation between concerned agencies to avoid the haphazard manner of implementing livelihood programs and instead lead to more effective, responsive and gender-sensitive approach in addressing reintegration concerns.

- **Mismatch of reintegration services to clients' needs**

Because migrant returnees' expressed needs vary, the program should ensure that interventions offered are suitable and adequate. There are economic, political, legal, medical, and psycho-social dimensions involved in reintegration. Their needs could be crisis-borne requiring immediate action, short-term or long-term. Returnees have different perspectives about preparations for reintegration and some may or may not have traumatic experience.

- **Need to devolve services and strengthen LGU capability to deliver reintegration services in an integrated manner**

The poor reach of the OWWA-ELDP program despite the substantial resources invested into loan grants for micro-enterprise development demonstrates the need to bring the services closer to the communities of intended beneficiaries. With more effective coordination and training, LGUs can be made to effectively respond to returnees' varying concerns and able to monitor the progress of assisted projects for viability and sustainability.

- **Need for pro-active and comprehensive information campaigns utilizing tri-mass media.**

The low number of beneficiaries who become aware of government initiated reintegration services indicate poor information dissemination mechanisms employed by the program. Not only should these agencies creatively utilize the mass media to promote their programs; they should also inform target groups through community-based NGOs, the church and business groups.

- **Need to incorporate gender responsive policies in every program**

With the increasing number of women OFWs, they also bear the human costs of overseas work. In the event of their return from overseas work, they face possible economic marginalization as well as alienation. A gender-sensitive and responsive perspective must be incorporated in reintegration programs.

CRITICAL FACTORS IN DEVELOPMENT OF REINTEGRATION PROGRAMS AND SERVICES

The following factors need to be considered in the development of reintegration programs and services:

1. Untapped potential of migrants' remittances

Central Bank statistics show that overseas remittances have reached seven and a half billion dollars (US\$7.5 billion) in 2001 alone, despite a slowdown in overseas deployment. These remittances are funneled out to the provinces and cities, with some municipalities reported to be receiving P100 million monthly from their OFWs. Rather than being invested in developing productive enterprises the remittances are spent for OFW families' basic and other needs. Productive investments must be promoted more intensively.

Moreover, the role of families in self-employment as an option deserves particular attention. Wives proved to be the actual entrepreneurs, preparing for their spouses' return.

2. The psycho-social cost of labor migration

During the last few years, Philippine society has been feeling the negative impact of migration, such as altered family struc-

tures due to absentee parents, calling for extended family members to provide the emotional support for and bind the family together. Estranged relations between the OFW and other family members due to prolonged separations have caused irreversible damage on OFW families. OFW children's values and attitudes have also changed to some degree. While some are encourage to pursue higher education due to more availability of funds, many are not likewise motivated.

3. Growing dependency on remittances

A growing dependency on migrants' remittances was observed. Thus, very little effort is exerted by family members left behind to look for productive activities or employment. Migrants and their dependents should be continually informed of various options and opportunities that are available for them to pursue.

4. Low savings rate of migrant workers

Studies show that when an OFW decides to remain in the Philippines there is little or no savings to start with life again. Most earnings were spent on family daily needs such as food, housing, and children's education. Whatever little that could have been saved are spent on less necessary consumer goods/services. Thus, a preparation program that incorporates the values of savings, financial planning and budgeting, time management and entrepreneurial skills is needed. Self-employment is a crucial career move that involves the investment of hard-earned resources; prudence must be exercised in making the decision to pursue this option.

5. Appropriate interventions to develop migrants' business acumen

Migrants who have saved from their overseas work and are reluctant to go into business could be given investment counseling to aid them in making use of hard-earned money wisely through one-on-one advising or mentoring or by offering short-courses in wise management of investments. While OFWs are not necessarily more entrepreneurial in nature compared to others, they share the common trait of being risk takers.

6. Potentials for Enterprise Development

The Philippine reintegration program has a two-pronged approach. One is pursued on-site, while the other is undertaken in the country. The process of reintegration starts from the time the workers leave for his/her job abroad. While at post, workers are given reintegration preparedness seminar to give them wide options to pursue self-employment opportunities. The effort to pursue enterprise development on-site should be matched with appropriate mechanism/receptacle operation locally. (financial package, training, etc.)

7. Complementation with NGOs

Institutional support for entrepreneurship is a field which requires professional skills, experience, and networking which can be easily handled by the private sector or by NGOs with strong links with the business community. NGOs primarily concerned with migration issues can be useful in referring OFWs and their families to these specialized support institutions.

8. Skills Upgrading for Re-employment

Globalization has made many skills obsolete. Multi-skilling OFWs to enable them to compete in the labor market must be an option that should be offered and pursued.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE ACTIONS

Fully aware of the seriousness of these problems, it is critical to redesign and redirect reintegration programs to become more effective, accessible and sustainable. The situational analysis of needs and responses for OFW reintegration undertaken by the International Catholic Migration Commission provides valuable inputs for policy-makers and program implementors for re-thinking and reshaping existing services. Allow me to recommend measures to guide us:

For all agencies and organizations involved in servicing OFWs:

- Review and reconceptualize the framework of the reintegration program, align reintegration services with earlier phases of the migration continuum (pre-departure, on-site services) so that reintegration becomes an integral part of the migration experience and a planned process which capitalizes on value-added learnings/savings of OFWs;
- Encourage LGUs and strengthen their capabilities to increase OFW returnees' access to programs and services in their localities;
- Encourage and support NGOs to become partners/ implementors of reintegration programs for returned

OFWs to be better able to reach target clientele and tailor fit the services to their specific needs, provide strategic intervention and monitor the effects of these programs. Moreover, the community organizing approach used by many NGOs facilitates mobilization of community resources and galvanizes development initiatives;

- Incorporate gender-responsive policies/programs benefiting returned OFWs. With the feminization of migration, interventions addressing particular needs of women returnees should be empowering and supportive of their continued development.
- Maximize the utilization of mass media in disseminating information and raising consciousness about the services offered for returning OFWs;
- Strengthen linkages with financial institutions in augmenting and accessing entrepreneurial development assistance for returned migrant workers;
- Institutionalize a periodic review and evaluation system with the intention of realigning the program attuned with the demands of the times; and
- Formulate policies which will encourage returned migrant workers to pursue self-help initiatives;

For the Overseas Workers' Welfare Administration

- Take the lead role in developing a strategic integrated program of interventions which matches needs of returning migrant workers in psycho-emotional and social reintegration, in education and training, in political and legal empowerment, in health services and in economic self-reliance. It should be an integrated programmatic approach which considers immediate, short-term and long-term needs of returnees and must be institution-

alized so that appropriate services are timely, accessible and sustained; and

- Establish an accreditation system for NGO implementing partners to ensure quality performance and timely delivery.