

2016 GLOBAL FORUM ON MIGRATION AND DEVELOPMENT

A DIALOGUE ON THE GLOBAL MIGRATION COMPACT

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Part I. Social Cost of Migration. A Perspective From the Philippines

Thank you Gervais for another insightful introductory remarks.

Let me first express my appreciation to the organizers of this dialogue, the GFMD chair in office, Bangladesh for this space to discuss matters related to the Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration as well as the opportunity to share with some of the perspectives from the Philippines. And seeing several colleagues from Geneva, I guess also the perspective from experts from Geneva.

I agree fully with Gervais that there is a need to shine some spotlight on the issue of the social cost of migration and I would assert at the very beginning that the Global Compact on Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration should also address it.

While I am fully cognizant of the reminder of Gervais: It is not the time to frame recommendations for the Compact, much less to negotiate them, from where we stand, the social cost of migration should always be considered, Compact or no Compact, since us and for many other countries, the starting point and the center of any discourse on migration should always be the migrant and their and their families' well being.

My task this morning is two fold –to share with you in broad strokes some of our experience and some of the things we are doing to address the social cost of migration, and in the process to help stir the discussion and dialogue on this concern. Mindful of time limitation, allow me to just focus on two concerns – family relations and brain drain.

I. On family relations, it has been established that extended separation of family members affects marital and parents-children relationships and a threat to the stability of the family as a social unit. Children are alienated to

their absent parents. Those left behind have to contend with inadequate parental guidance as they grow up.

Migration of one or both parents [due to overseas work] has also been linked to problems such as juvenile delinquency, drug addiction, absenteeism and dropping out of school, teenage pregnancy and early marriage. Transnational parenting had proven to an inadequate substitute for in person guidance to children left behind even with the advent existing mobile phone and internet technology that facilitated communications parents and children.

With the feminization of overseas labor, migration of mothers is particularly regarded as concern because they are traditionally the caregivers in the family.

[Earlier studies made in the Philippines suggest left behind mothers are able tend to cope better with roles associated with the father. On the hand, left-behind fathers appear to tend to have harder time to adjust. They tend to relinquish caregiving functions to other female family members, may it within the nuclear family or with the extended family members.]

The steady flow of migrant remittances is said to have spawned in the families of migrants a culture of dependency - losing initiative to work and dependency on money received from abroad and becoming “materialistic”.

Our migrants also have the tendency to maintain a dual world, presenting a different situation to the families left behind. Many migrants deliberately do not share their real their work and living condition to their families back home. In not uncommon that on their Facebook posts and other similar communications with their families, the images they paint are always the happy one, creating a false perception that they are OK. The reason for this is that they do not want their families back home to worry about their situation.

For families back home that do not know of the real situation, they would think that making money are easy as if one just scoops it out from a ever flowing river. The reason for this is that every time their families back home ask for money outside the regular remittance schedule, migrants would normally oblige.

But how do the migrants cope up with the increasing demand? They would work double jobs, perform overtime and work on weekends, most of the time with negative impact to their health and wellbeing. But again the families back home do not know this situation.

There exist also the so-called “dual families” among migrants that ultimately weaken family stability and sometimes lead to breakdown of marital relationship. Due to the dual world that migrants create, a fellow migrant would be the best person who would be able to understand the emotional and psychological situation of another migrant. Along the way, migrants find solace and emotional support from fellow migrants, sometime leading to some kind of spousal relationship between them.

This situation becomes problematic when one or both of migrants involved in the relationship have their respective spouses and families back home.

In some countries where having a child from an unwed relationship is considered a crime, this kind of relationship becomes a serious concern, not only for the mother but also for the child.

All these social costs on family relations are exacerbated when the migrants involved are in irregular situation and when they are in precarious situations where their tools and ability to communicate with their families back home are severely curtailed.

Some possible solutions –

Effective involvement of the family in the decision to migrate of one or both parents, including securing the best available information and management of expectations, as well as the establishment of lines of **communication** at the very outset of migration. COO and COD and the private sector could facilitate these.

Making available avenues for regular reunion and/or possibility of reunification of families. Coordination and cooperation between COO and COD are essential to make this a reality. This should be part of the “shared responsibilities” of countries.

In the meantime, the members of the families left behind should have their own complementary PDOS; migrants and families left behind should increase their financial literacy, from simplest principles and methods of

saving for the future to awareness and skills training on entrepreneurship and investing.

Concretely, under the Philippine Labor and Employment Plan, explicitly stated that the Philippine government should address the social costs of migration by working closely with communities and families of OFWs to provide effective social welfare services such as counseling and pre-departure orientation seminars. Support the creation or strengthening of community-based support groups for families of OFWs

II. On brain drain, the migration of highly skilled workers means not only a loss of public resources invested in their education but also reduces the countries of origin productive capacity and worsen the business environment, especially in small economies. Brain drain could be very problematic in the education and health sectors in developing countries that face severe shortages of health and education workers

From BRAIN DRAIN to BRAIN GAIN. In the Philippines, with the large outflow of our health human resources that has affected the quality of health service offered in the country, the Philippine government established the **Human Resources for Health Network** composed of government agencies, the academe and NGOs. The Network developed policies in managing migration of health workers, including the inclusion of the principle of ethical recruitment in bilateral and/or multilateral agreements on the migration of Filipino healthcare workers, and development of Reintegration Program for returning health professionals.

We also have the **Balik Trabaho sa Pinas (Returning Worker) Program and Reintegration Program**, which is a multi-sectoral brain gain program to improve the skills and provide entrepreneurship opportunities for returning OFWs. The Program engages highly-skilled and professional former overseas Filipino workers as expert trainers in the transfer of new technologies and in the sharing of new knowledge they have learned from abroad to their fellow Filipinos who need such training to find better paying jobs or engage in business or livelihood in the country.

The **Balik-Scientist Program** is another initiative, which allows foreign-based science and technology experts who are of Filipino descent to return or reside in the Philippines, and share their expertise to the government,

academe and research institutes in order to accelerate the scientific, agro-industrial and economic development of the country.

Brain Gain Network (BGN) is a private sector initiative, which is network of talented professionals and organizations focused on people who can initiate new ventures that will help the country.

III. Conclusion. Some Take Away Policy Considerations

1st, the development of strong and robust domestic economy should be a priority as neither international migration nor international labor deployment has proven to be a major driver of economic development of the sending countries. The aim is to make migration and overseas employment progressively become a free choice with. At first blush, this seem to be just a responsibility of sending countries, the recent large scale movement of migrants provided the impetus for the rethinking that it is part of the “shared responsibilities” of countries.

2nd, Migrants acquired skills, knowledge, and experience, in addition to the steady remittances, should factored in the development plans of countries at the national, sectoral, and local levels. This should be considered the core of the mainstreaming of migration in development plans.

3rd, Fully respectful to the fact that remittance is privately earned and managed money, financial literacy programs addressing more productive uses of remittance should be scaled up – preferably with sound investment opportunities, appropriate training, and entrepreneur- friendly policies.

4th, Cognizant that migrant workers would eventually return to sending countries, reintegration programs should also focus on how to harness the skills and knowledge of returning migrants in the domestic labor market.

5th, and finally, as sending countries forge bilateral agreements with destination countries, the element of shared responsibility should be strengthened. **END**