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Engaging the Global Filipino Diaspora: Achieving Inclusive Growth

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Introduction

The Philippines' international migration history spans the period from the first batch of Filipino workers to Hawaii in 1906 to the current figure of around 10.5 million Filipinos overseas. In December 2012, 47 per cent were permanent migrants, 40 per cent were temporary migrants, and 13% were migrants in irregular situations (Commission on Filipinos Overseas, 2013). The international migration phenomenon has therefore been a defining and life-changing experience for decades for many Filipinos and the families they leave behind. It has also carved out and established migration corridors between the Philippines and countries of destination in North America, the Middle East, East and Southeast Asia, Oceania, and Europe, making Filipino presence, skills, talents, and services truly global.

The existing literature on contemporary international migration from the Philippines has identified a number of key characteristics of the phenomenon including its massive scale and broad geographical spread, inter-generational character, the diverse profile and varied migrant experiences overseas. This complexity necessitates a re-thinking and re-imagining of the Philippine government's approach to addressing the vulnerabilities of migrants and their families and maximizing migration's positive impact at the individual, family, community, sub-national and national levels. This process demands a more deliberate and systematic engagement with the Filipino diaspora.

In 2011, Philippine President Benigno S. Aquino III articulated his administration's position in a 16-point Social Contract with the Filipino People. The President was very clear about the need for a new and transformational approach to Filipino migration:

“From a government that treats its people as an export commodity and a means to earn foreign exchange, disregarding the social cost to Filipino families to a government that creates jobs at home, so that working abroad will be a choice rather than a necessity; and when its citizens do choose to become Overseas Filipino Workers, their welfare and protection will still be the government’s priority.” (National Economic Development Authority, 2011, p.398)

This major policy statement recognizes and addresses the perils that many Filipino migrants confront in the pursuit of a better quality of life for themselves and their families. At the same time, it recognizes that with inclusive and sustainable development, the decision to work and/or live overseas would become a matter of genuine choice and an exercise of the right to mobility. This requires a balance between generating as many competitive and gratifying domestic jobs as possible and managing migration to reduce its costs, maximize its benefits, and promote the rights, welfare and well-being of overseas Filipinos and their families.

The Current Economic Situation

The economic environment in the Philippines seems to be improving after decades of lagging behind its neighbours in Southeast Asia. Moody’s recently tagged the Philippines as a “rising star” after it posted a 6.6% growth rate in 2012, and forecasts growth rates of 6.5% to 7% in 2013 and 2014, possibly reaching 8% in 2016¹. This situation is primarily due a number of factors including the government’s concrete and continuing expression of political will against corruption, a growth in spending for social protection programmes and infrastructure, the increasing participation of the private sector and international investors in the country’s economic activities, and strong household consumption, fuelled to a large degree by remittances from overseas Filipino migrants.

At the end of 2013, however, a spate of natural disasters threatened to derail the Philippines’ positive growth prospects. In October 15, 2013, the provinces of Bohol and Cebu in Central Visayas were rocked by a magnitude 7.2 earthquake that claimed over 200 lives and left houses, buildings, historical churches and other infrastructure in ruins. Three weeks later, the Visayas islands were hit by Typhoon Haiyan/Yolanda, one of the strongest typhoons ever to make landfall, wiping out entire cities, towns and villages in the provinces of Samar and Leyte, and causing widespread destruction in the provinces of Cebu, Aklan, Iloilo and Palawan. The typhoon claimed more than 6,000 lives and total estimated damage and loss to

¹ <http://business.inquirer.net/118547/moodys-ph-a-rising-star>

infrastructure, agriculture, health, housing, industry and services amounting to Php566 billion (approximately US\$13 billion)² . The National Economic Development Authority (NEDA, 2013), the government's planning body, estimates that Php361 billion³ (US\$ 8.284 B at USD1=PHP43.57 as of 03 Sept 2014) will be needed for the recovery and reconstruction effort in the next four years to finance the rebuilding of villages, towns, cities and provinces devastated by the typhoon, and to help the education and health services, agriculture, industry and services and social protection sectors recover from the devastation.

Despite an impressive record of economic growth, which may be tempered by the effects of calamities and natural disasters, the Philippines, like many countries in the developing world, faces an ever-increasing challenge of achieving inclusive and sustainable growth in today's knowledge-based economy. The country's competitiveness, productivity and growth depend largely on its ability to acquire and utilize new knowledge and constantly upgrade the skills of its workforce. Arguably, within the developing world, there is no other country more strategically positioned than the Philippines to reap the potential development benefits of international migration. Ten percent of the country's population lives abroad and possesses the skills and resources that the country needs. Overseas Filipinos work and/or live in over 200 countries, one of the largest and most dispersed emigrant populations in the world.

Overseas Filipino Remittances

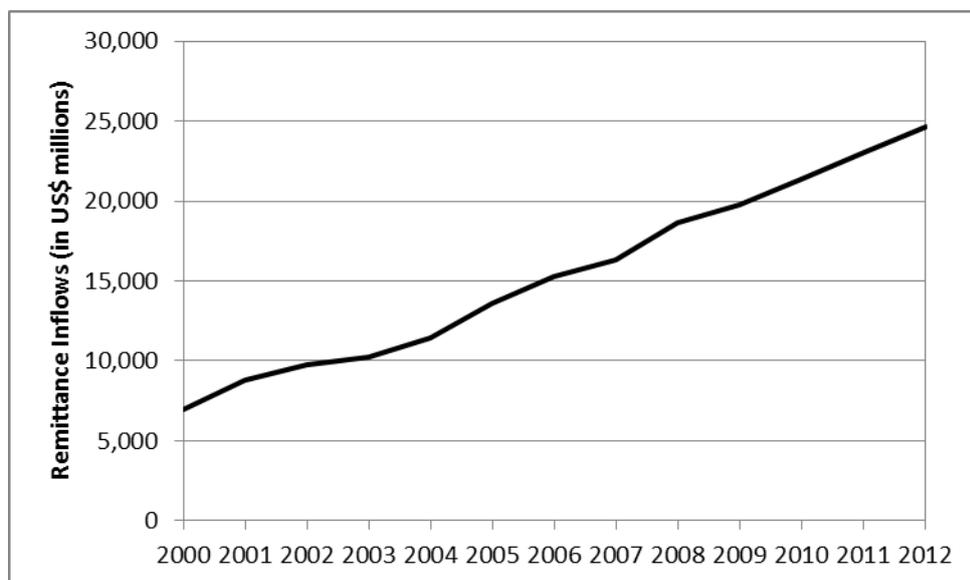
Remittances are the most visible contribution of overseas Filipinos to their families back home, their communities of origin and the national economy. Remittances of overseas Filipinos hit an all-time high of US\$24 billion in remittances in 2012 (Figure 1), making the Philippines the third most important remittance-receiving country behind India and China (World Bank, 2014).

This represents more than a three-fold increase over the US\$7 billion recorded in 2000. In 2012, this is 40.09.% per cent higher than official development assistance (ODA) and 1,500 per cent higher than foreign direct investments (FDI) to the Philippines.

² http://www.neda.gov.ph/ads/press_releases/pr.asp?ID=1511

³ Or

Figure 1: Remittances Flow to the Philippines, 2000-2012



Source: World Bank, 2014

Following a spate of natural disasters in the Philippines in 2013, remittances are expected to increase still further as Filipino migrants traditionally tend to send more money to their families back home in times of calamity. During the 1990 earthquake that struck Central and Northern Luzon and the eruption of Mt. Pinatubo in 1991, for example, donations from overseas Filipinos through the Commission on Filipinos Overseas (CFO)'s diaspora philanthropy conduit known as **LINKAPIL** (Link to Philippine Development) reached Php146,566,789 and Php116,960,448 (US\$3.364M and US\$2.684M respectively at the currency exchange of USD1=PHP43.57 as of 03 Sept 2014).

During these abovementioned disasters various other Filipino associations mobilized resources and engaged in other fund-raising activities and shared their skills, knowledge and expertise to provide a range of assistance and services to Filipinos back home.

In a recently released publication entitled '*Channeling Remittance for Development: A Study Towards Creating Model Mechanisms*', the International Organization for Migration (IOM) and Small Enterprises Research and Development Foundation (2012) cited the following ways in which remittances of Filipinos overseas contribute to development in the country: (a) overseas Filipino families and households have an improved quality of life through increased consumption, savings and investment thus helping to address poverty at the grassroots level;

(b) remittances provide the opportunity for migrants and their families to save, thus improving local capital markets; (c) Filipino migrants and their families invest remittances in houses, lands and other physical assets; (d) remittances spur the involvement of families left behind in creating micro-enterprises; (e) Filipino migrants and their families put additional resources into education and health; (f) remittances lead to increased consumer spending and demand for goods and services and (g) remittances provide funds for social, cultural and infrastructure development projects in the community.

Diaspora Contributions to National Development

An increasing number of migrant-sending countries are developing innovative strategies to tap migration's potentially positive contribution to the development agenda. These states are actively engaging their diasporas (including descendants) living and/or working abroad who have maintained strong sentimental and material links with their countries of origin.

One of the earliest signs of recognition by the Philippine government of the potential for engaging Filipinos in the diaspora came two decades ago with the establishment of the Commission on Filipinos Overseas (CFO) in June 1980. The CFO is a government agency under the Office of the President of the Philippines which is mandated to provide advice and assistance to the President, the cabinet and the Philippine Congress in the formulation of policies and measures affecting Filipinos overseas and to maintain and strengthen their links with the country.

In the late 1980s, CFO institutionalized one of the pioneer government programmes that established a conduit for development support from overseas Filipino communities, the *Lingkod sa Kapwa Pilipino* or Link for Philippine Development (LINKAPIL) programme. Types and forms of assistance offered through the LINKAPIL programme includes scholarships for micro-enterprise development, health and welfare assistance through medical and surgical missions to communities hit by calamities, feeding programmes for children in poverty-stricken communities and small-scale infrastructure support such as school buildings and water systems.

Between 1990 and 2012, total donations through the LINKAPIL programme amounted to Php2.6 billion, with nearly a third going to health related/medical missions, and the rest going

to calamity relief assistance, education and scholarship, infrastructure, skills transfer and livelihood projects (CFO, 2012).

A study of migrant donations in 2012 used data from the CFO LINKAPIL and made a number of important findings (Licuanan, Mahmoud, & Steinmayr, 2012). First, larger Filipino populations in overseas communities are the biggest donors to the programme. The overwhelming majority of donations (91 per cent) come from Filipino migrants in the US. Second, the greater the economic standing of Filipinos overseas, the higher the levels of donations that they make. The biggest donors are Filipino migrants with more or less stable employment status and higher levels of income, providing them with job security and buffer resources that allow them to give back to the country. Third, hometown affinity greatly influences the direction of Filipino migrant donations. Filipino migrants tend to direct their philanthropic initiatives to their provinces of origin. Since most migrants come from more developed provinces, this means that less developed areas are left behind in terms of development donations.

In order to channel diaspora donations to areas that may not have a significant rate of migration, CFO has established partnerships with agencies and organizations that provide data on poverty incidence such as education and literacy, health and nutrition, housing, income and employment, water and sanitation, and peace and order. The idea is to encourage and facilitate needs-based donations, especially where Filipino diaspora donation is sorely lacking but is most needed.

Diaspora contributions to the country take many forms as well. For example, Overseas Filipinos have directly filled critical resource and knowledge gaps as practitioners and professionals during permanent, temporary and/or “virtual” return visits. For over three decades, overseas Filipinos working in the science and technology sectors have been at the core of the *Balik* (Return) Scientist programme of the Department of Science and Technology which is aimed at facilitating temporary return and the sharing of expertise acquired overseas. The Department of Foreign Affairs also managed a programme called Technology Transfer through Expatriate Nationals (TOKTEN) between 1988-1994 as well as the Science and Technology Advisory Council (STAC). Many overseas Filipinos who are outstanding in their respective fields have given back to the country of their own initiative or by utilizing their personal and professional social networks.

Overseas Filipinos are a major potential source of direct investment in critical industries, and acting as “first movers” who open the way for other, more detached investors. They are also excellent intermediaries, who can facilitate the Philippines’ integration into the global economy. Characterized as “cultural interpreters” and “reputational intermediaries”, diasporas can connect the Philippines to potential foreign investors and lobby in their destination countries for more favourable trade and labour flows. In business activities that span the Philippines and destination countries, they are instrumental in developing export markets and other trade ties, supply chains and technology transfer.

In addition, the diaspora contribution extends beyond the economy and into the political and social spheres. The ideas, practices, identities and social capital that migrants remit home - so-called “social and political remittances” - could potentially alter behaviours within the Philippines and positively transform notions on critical issues such as governance, election of national officials, gender relations, and democracy. They could also positively influence political and economic relationship between the Philippines and destination countries. The human capital, networks, skills and ideas acquired abroad are potentially useful to Philippines development when migrants return. The value of Filipinos in the diaspora thus extends beyond the money they send home, a fact that is frequently overlooked in policy discussions on migration and development.

Diaspora Engagement Initiatives

The Philippine Development Plan (PDP) 2011-2016, which is the Aquino government's blueprint for development, makes mention of migration-related issues on 60 separate occasions. The Commission on Filipinos Overseas and National Economic Development Authority have made a commitment to further integrate migration and development in the 2013 mid-term review and update of the PDP with particular reference to the critical role of overseas Filipinos in the country’s development. The Mid-term Update contains 15 additional mentions in 8 out of the 10 chapters on the role of overseas Filipinos in national development.

The Philippines is also stepping up its response to the challenge of harnessing the contributions of the Filipino diaspora to achieve inclusive growth and sustainable development. The various Philippine migration and development-related government agencies, along with stakeholders from civil society, the private sector, and the academe are

developing programmes and projects, tools and mechanisms to reach out to Filipinos in the diaspora.

The CFO has provided a venue for outstanding Filipinos overseas to come together and re-engage with development initiatives in the Philippines. It laid down ten areas, in the form of a menu of engagements that overseas Filipinos could choose from depending on their varied skills, experiences, expertise, resources and inclination. This flagship programme of the CFO is called “Diaspora to Development” or D2D. The 10 areas of engagement are as follows:

- Business Advisory Circle (BAC) which is a matching and linkage programme that assists overseas Filipino set up business partnerships in the country;
- *Alay Dunong* Programme (ADB) is a programme that systematizes and strengthens skills and technology exchange/transfer between overseas Filipinos and the Philippines in fields such as science and technology, engineering, and arts and culture;
- Diaspora Philanthropy which focuses primarily on facilitating donations in cash or in kind for development projects especially through LINKAPIL
- Diaspora Investment (DI) is a programme where new financial instruments are developed and promoted for overseas Filipinos to invest in;
- *Balik-Turo* (Teach-Share)/Educational Exchange is the continuing Professional and Vocational Education Exchange programme which encourages the return of academics and professionals to teach, mentor, provide training and work with partner schools in the country.
- Tourism Initiatives (TI) focuses on supporting the drive for *balikbayan* tourism by encouraging migrant investments in small tourism enterprises, like local bed and breakfast and other tourism related services, such as medical tourism and health and wellness programmes.
- Global Legal Assistance and Advocacy Programme (GLAAD) mobilizes the support of overseas and local Filipino lawyers and legal experts to provide legal assistance and advice to overseas Filipinos in distress and promoting and supporting issues that are of global interest to Overseas Filipinos.
- Medical Mission Coordination (MMC) coordinates and facilitates the conduct of medical missions sponsored and organized by overseas Filipinos in areas requiring

these medical interventions. This is done in coordination with the Department of Health.

- Arts and Culture Exchange (ACE) promotes and facilitates the exchange of artistic and cultural workers and programmes between the Philippines and Filipino communities abroad; and
- Return and Reintegration (R&R) – focuses on providing (physical or virtual) information to returning overseas Filipinos and retirees as well as services to facilitate their successful reintegration into local life

Global Summits of Filipinos in the Diaspora

In 2011, the CFO convened the first ever Global Summit of Filipinos in the Diaspora to bring together outstanding Filipinos and community leaders worldwide and to launch the D2D programme. One of the results of the Summit was the decision of the participants to form the Global Filipino Diaspora Council (GFDC) which is the first global network of overseas Filipinos from 25 countries.

In February 2013, the CFO, the GFDC and the US Pinoys for Good Governance (USP4GG) convened the 2nd Global Summit of Filipinos in the Diaspora. The Summit was attended by 600 participants including Filipino community leaders from all over the world, representatives from the Philippine government agencies and Philippine-based civil society organizations and academe.

The 2nd Global Summit aimed to track the progress of the goals set in the 1st Summit and highlight the best practices of Filipino diaspora engagement. The event included participation in the celebration of the 27th Anniversary of the EDSA People Power Revolution, plenary sessions and workshops based on the D2D framework mentioned above.

In between these two summits, a European Conference called Diaspora to Dialogue was organized in Rome by overseas Filipino communities in Europe with the support of the Philippine Embassy in Italy and Europe-based multi-lateral organizations. The conference participants decided to organize themselves and form the European Network of Filipinos in the Diaspora (ENFID). Since then, the core group who attended the Rome Conference has

echoed the Diaspora to Dialogue theme and has now organized “networks’ in at least 10 European countries.

Following the path laid out by the global and regional summits of Filipinos in the diaspora, Filipino nurses convened the 1st Global Summit of Filipino Nurses in January 2014 in Manila with the theme “Filipino Nurses World-wide: Unite for Global Health and Nation Building”. It gathered over a hundred Philippine-based and overseas Filipino nurses' organizations and other stakeholders in a bid to forge an international network and tackle issues affecting nurses globally.

Some of the topics discussed were workforce planning of the Philippines for healthcare providers, the role of the nurses’ diaspora in nation building, the status of nursing education in the Philippines, and the program of action for higher education in the Philippines. The highlight of the summit was the signing of a Memorandum of Agreement among the convenors, the CFO and the international nursing community and professional groups, that will create a central database of nursing-related data, including statistics, and programs and projects of nursing communities.

Data from the Philippine Overseas Employment Administration (POEA) and the CFO indicate the volume of Filipino nurses who left the Philippines from 2009-2013:

Year	Temporary Nurse Migrants (POEA)	Permanent Nurse Migrants* (CFO)
2009	13,014	943
2010	12,082	1,258
2011	17,236	1,827
2012	15,655	2,486
2013	16,404	2,081

Sources: Philippine Overseas Employment Administration and Commission on Filipinos Overseas.

*Data from the CFO are composed of emigrants whose occupation prior to migration is professional nurse.

The top 5 destination countries of Filipino Nurses (who left as permanent migrants) based on data from the CFO are shown in the table below.

COUNTRY	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	TOTAL
UNITED STATES OF AMERICA	666	478	760	1,341	1,361	4,606
CANADA	212	692	965	987	539	3,395
AUSTRALIA	27	25	39	67	78	236
NEW ZEALAND	10	17	16	26	53	122
UNITED KINGDOM	6	8	10	11	13	48

Government initiatives to promote Diaspora engagement

BaLinkBayan

In an increasingly inter-connected world brought about by the latest technology, a new initiative of the CFO is to reach out to the diaspora through the *BaLinkBayan*, the Overseas' Filipinos one-stop online portal for diaspora engagement. The word is a combination of the Pilipino word "*balikbayan*" (meaning someone coming back to the Philippines) and "**link**" with its internet connotation. *BaLinkBayan* offers an integrated and unique platform for all overseas Filipinos to re-engage with the Philippines through the D2D programme.

With the support of government agencies such as the Departments of Trade and Industry, Agriculture, Agrarian Reform, Tourism, Health, Education, Environment and Natural Resources, the *BaLinkBayan* online portal is intended to showcase investments, businesses, products, philanthropic activities, volunteer work such as medical missions, and home-grown technologies recommended by the respective agencies in the towns, cities, and provinces of the country. The one-stop online portal will also facilitate Filipino diaspora investments, donations and volunteer opportunities, access to other online government services, and will pilot local level transactional services (such as online business registration and payment of real property taxes). The *BaLinkBayan* portal had a two part launch in October and December 2013, making the site available to the millions of overseas Filipinos worldwide. A Stakeholders' Meeting was also convened in November 2013 among national government agency and local government unit partners to define priorities for 2014 to maximize Filipino diaspora use of the portal. These included social marketing initiatives as well as launching

local level transactional services in the province of Ilocos Norte (historically a major province of origin overseas Filipinos in the US) and the City of Naga.

YouLeaD (Youth Leaders in the Diaspora)

The CFO is now making an effort to reach out to second and third generation overseas Filipinos through its Youth Leaders in the Diaspora (or YouLeaD) programme. This could take the form of study tours (called *Lakbay-Aral*) of the various regions of the country to re-introduce them to the culture, history and heritage of their parents and grandparents.

Financial Literacy Programmes

In line with the national development goal of financial inclusion, CFO has developed its own financial literacy module called “*Kaalalang Pinansyal Tungo Sa Kaunlaran*” (Financial Education towards Development) or “KAPIT KA!” (Hang/Hold On!) to help Overseas Filipinos and the families left behind to develop or enhance personal strategies, skills and knowledge in attaining financial freedom. A recent World Bank study shows that the most effective financial literacy trainings are those conducted with both the migrants themselves and their families left behind, even if done separately. Shorter versions of the module are incorporated into the CFO website (www.cfo.gov.ph), the Commission’s Pre-departure Orientation Seminars, its nation-wide and annual Community Education Programmes (CEP) in at least 20 provinces every year and during immersion trips in countries where there are significant overseas Filipino communities.

In October 2013, the CFO, in collaboration with the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and with the support of the Western Union Foundation, launched the Philippine Financial Freedom Campaign entitled *Peso Sense*. The aim of the campaign is to promote productive expenditure and entrepreneurship among the beneficiaries of remittances from Filipinos overseas focusing on 6 profiles: children and youth, young professionals, homemaker, entrepreneurs, and retirees.

Kiddie Katapat Savings Programme

Inspired by the movement started by Child and Youth Finance International to give 100 million children in 100 countries financial access and financial education by 2015, the CFO, together with the Land Bank of the Philippines, initiated the *Kiddie Katapat Savings Programme* (or KKiSS).. The programme is designed to equip Filipino children and youth,

both in the Philippines and abroad, with the basic knowledge and habit of saving and preparing for their future. With the approval of the Central Bank of the Philippines, dependents of overseas Filipinos who are 7 years old and above are allowed to open and maintain their own ATM Savings account for an initial deposit and minimum balance of P100 (approximately US\$2.50).

In turn, CFO and the Land Bank encourage their parents, siblings or guardians who are overseas to match the amount saved by their dependents. The KKiSS programme was launched in the 42 Philippine Schools Overseas (PSO) during a conference held in Manila in May 2013. PSOs are private educational institutions operating outside the Philippines which have adopted the Philippine curriculum

Overseas Filipinos Remittances for Development

Another innovative undertaking by the CFO is the Overseas Filipinos Remittances for Development “Building a Future Back Home” (or OF-RED) project. OF-RED partners include the UNDP, Western Union Foundation and NEDA. OF-RED seeks to develop programmes at the sub-national and local levels with the support of local government units to facilitate the use of remittances for productive and job-creating investment and the use of conduits for these remittances in cooperatives, rural banks, microfinance institutions and social enterprises.

In Ilocos Norte, one of the sites where the project was implemented, this has led to the creation of the Provincial Migration and Development Council, the passage of local ordinances supporting diaspora investment and philanthropy, and local government support for migrant-owned and managed enterprises. In 2012, a Collective Remittance Fund had been setup to finance the credit needs of new or existing migrant owned enterprises in the area. The fund came about when the Provincial government of Ilocos Norte, the Western Union Foundation and the Cooperative Bank of Ilocos Norte, which is also the depository bank, pooled in P1 million each to jumpstart the fund .

In 2013, there were 46 loan applications filed. Of this number, 14 applications were approved amounting to Php 1.28 million. Loans went to fund micro-small enterprises such as dragon fruit planting, bagnet making, rice trading, hog breeding, sari-sari (retail) stores etc. There are 14 loan applications currently under review for the year (2014).

Overseas based Ilocanos will be enjoined to participate by donating to the fund. A creative team is tapped to come up with a 2-3 minute audio visual which we will use as a fundraising campaign tool to enjoin overseas Ilocanos to contribute to the fund. In addition, a website will also be set up wherein all of the campaign materials will be uploaded. It will also contain at least 3 feature stories of borrowers to the fund. The website will be complemented by infographics.

Remittances for Development Council

A major outcome of the OF-ReD at the national level has been the creation of the multi-stakeholder Remittance for Development Council (ReDC). ReDC serves as a consultative forum for all remittance-related stakeholders including the Central Bank of the Philippines (Bangko Sentral ng Pilipinas BSP), private banks and non-banks, migration-related government agencies, migrant organizations, academe and multi-lateral institutions. The Forum is designed to discuss issues and concerns about remittances as well as being an advisory and policy-recommending body for channeling of remittances for development. Its aims include recommending measures to create an environment for more and more sustainable investments and businesses for overseas Filipinos; advocating for policies and measures to reduce remittance fees; collaborating with organizations who provide financial education/literacy for overseas Filipinos and their families left behind; and encouraging research groups to undertake remittance-related studies.

A draft Executive Order for the institutionalization of ReDC was already drafted and endorsed by the Philippine Cabinet Cluster on Human Development and Poverty Reduction as well as by Gov. Amado Tetangco of the BSP. The draft EO is pending with the Office of the President of the Philippines.

Presidential Awards for Outstanding Overseas Filipinos and Organizations

The Presidential Awards for Filipino Individuals and Organizations Overseas is a biennial awards system to give recognition to Filipinos and other individuals or organizations who contribute to Philippine development initiatives, or promote the interests of overseas Filipino communities. The awards are also given to overseas Filipinos who have exceptionally distinguished themselves in their work or profession, and have thereby brought honor to the Filipino nation. A distinct category in the awards is also reserved for foreign individuals or

organizations for their exceptional contribution to the Philippines and for advancing the cause of overseas Filipino communities.

Since inception, the awards have already been bestowed upon 367 Filipino individuals and organization overseas from 46 countries and territories. President Fidel V. Ramos conferred the first and second clusters of Presidential Awards on 22 and 45 awardees in 1993 and 1996, respectively. President Joseph E. Estrada conferred the third and fourth clusters of Presidential Awards on 30 and 59 awardees in 1998 and 2000, respectively. President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo conferred the fifth, sixth, seventh and eighth clusters of Presidential Awards on 34 (with one special citation), 45, 48, and 31 awardees, in 2002, 2004, 2006, and 2008 respectively. President Benigno S. Aquino III conferred the ninth and tenth clusters of Presidential Awards on 24 and 29 awardees, in 2010 and 2012 respectively.

Social Security System

Since 1995, the Social Security System (or SSS) has opened its membership to overseas Filipino workers under their Regular OFW (Overseas Filipino Worker) Coverage Programme. Workers are entitled to the benefits (sickness, maternity, disability, retirement, and death and funeral) and loan (salary, housing, house repair/improvement) entitlements of any regular SSS member as long as they meet specified requirements (such as number and duration of contributions made). In 2001, SSS also developed a voluntary provident fund called the Flexi-fund Programme for OFWs. A certain percentage of the OFW income from overseas can be set aside and added to this fund in order to maximize the returns on their Flexi-fund contributions.

Home Development Mutual Fund

Membership to the Home Development Mutual Fund (or Pag-IBIG Fund) has now been made mandatory for all OFWs under Republic Act 9679 or the Home Development Mutual Fund Law of 2009. Their contribution to the Pag-IBIG Fund entitles OFWs to access various loan programmes for housing, multi-purpose and calamity loans, as well as provident savings. Prior to the enactment of RA 9679, a voluntary savings scheme for Filipinos abroad was offered through the Pag-IBIG Overseas Programme (POP)

Medicare

In March 2005, the Medicare Programme for OFWs from the Overseas Workers Welfare Administration to the Philippine Health Insurance Corporation (or PhilHealth) facilitated the creation of the Overseas Workers Programme or OWP as a regular membership category. The OWP covers all legal and documented land-based overseas Filipino workers. Legal dependents of OFW members also enjoy PhilHealth coverage without additional premiums. OFW and their dependents' coverage entitles them to in-patient coverage, out-patient coverage, and special benefit packages.

Legislative Initiatives

The Philippine Congress has enacted various laws to provide an enabling mechanism for overseas Filipinos to continue to involve themselves in the affairs of the state. Below are the most notable and significant::

(a) Republic Act No. 10590 or the Overseas Voting Act of 2013

On May 27, 2013, RA 10590 was signed into law, amending the previous Overseas Absentee Voting Act of 2003 or Republic Act No. 9189. The original law intended to provide equal opportunity to all qualified citizens of the Philippines abroad in the exercise of their right to participate in the election of President, Vice-President, Senators and Party-List Representatives. RA10590 aims to increase voter turnout and participation among overseas Filipinos by lifting the previous requirement that Filipino emigrants had to return to the Philippines within three years before they were allowed to vote. Dual citizens are also allowed to vote as long as they retain their Filipino citizenship, per the Supreme Court Ruling in 2006. With the passage of the OVA, voter participation among overseas Filipinos is expected to surpass the 24% and 16% (of 975,263 registered voters) turnout for the 2010 Presidential elections and the May 2013 elections respectively.

(b) Republic Act No. 9225 or Citizenship Retention and Reacquisition Act of 2003

RA 9225 provides for the re-acquisition of their Filipino citizenship by natural-born Filipinos who have lost their Filipino citizenship through naturalization in a foreign country by taking an oath of allegiance to the Republic of the Philippines. The law also specifies the civil, political and economic rights and liabilities of dual citizenship.

(c) Republic Act No. 6768 or Balikbayan Law of 1990 (as amended by RA 9174)

Republic Act No. 6768 was enacted to attract and encourage overseas Filipinos to visit the Philippines as a “*balikbayan*” or returning migrant. The law was amended by Republic Act No. 9174 which provides additional benefits to enable *balikbayans* to become economically self-reliant members of society upon their return. Under the law, a “*balikbayan*” is defined as either as a former Filipino citizen holding a foreign passport, including spouses and children traveling with them; or Filipinos who have been continuously out of the Philippines for at least one year; or Overseas Filipino Workers. As a “*balikbayan*”, the returning migrant is entitled to the following benefits: travel tax exemption; visa-free entry to the Philippines for a period of one year for foreign passport holders; duty-free and *kabuhayan* (livelihood) shopping privileges; use of accredited transportation facilities that will ensure safe and convenient trips upon arrival, and entrepreneurial training and livelihood skills programmes and marketing assistance.

Non-Governmental Organizations’ Programmes

Civil society organizations and the private sector have recognized the potential of the Filipino diaspora in national and local economic development and have developed innovative ways to engage with and mobilize diaspora remittances and resources, especially for local economic development. The innovations of civil society organizations and micro-financial institutions working with migrants and their families on the ground include (a) financial literacy and entrepreneurship trainings for active migrants and their families back home; (b) individual and collective savings mobilization schemes targeting the migrants themselves and their families back home including their children; (c) investments in products of already established industries or programmes of micro-finance institutions; (d) twinning arrangements with hometowns in the Philippines and areas in countries of destination; (e) linking migrant capital with social enterprises and (f) business and enterprise development services for Filipino migrants.

Conclusion

International migration affects the majority of Filipino families and communities. It permeates the way most Filipinos unconsciously go about their daily lives, and it influences the choices they make for themselves and our families. While the Philippines is far ahead of many other migrant-sending countries in the development of initiatives to engage with its diaspora, a great deal more remains to be done. Even with the plethora of initiatives in the

past three decades discussed in this chapter, it is evident that programmes for diaspora engagement are running far ahead of our ability to distil our experiences, understanding and knowledge of the phenomenon and translate this into a concrete policy framework for deliberate, systematic and coherent diaspora engagement.

To systematically engage the Filipino diaspora in national and local development, greater institutionalization of these various initiatives needs to happen at all levels of government. Greater policy coherence and effective coordination especially among relevant government agencies is needed, as is the generation and harmonization of data among the agencies in relation to Filipino diaspora communities all over the world.

The Philippines also needs to go beyond the policy confines and spaces of traditional migration-related agencies and officials to involve development agencies and planners and other policy sectors and actors to expand the policy and programme options for the Filipino diaspora.

At the end of the day, we want to see a Philippine society that is benefitting fully from the gains of inclusive and sustainable development. We want to see the Filipino people exercising their right to mobility and travel across national borders not out of economic necessity but as a result of a genuine choice given similar opportunities back in their Motherland or in their countries of destination.

We want every Filipino, whether those who have stayed in the Philippines or those who find themselves living or working overseas, to become genuine partners and beneficiaries of the country's development.

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