I'm glad to be invited to represent the Commission on Filipinos Overseas, a government agency I head as Cabinet-level Secretary under the Office of the President of the Philippines and to share with you the Philippine Experience on the Impact of Migration and Remittances on health and education of children and other family members left behind.

**STOCK ESTIMATE OF FILIPINOS OVERSEAS AS OF 2012**

The Philippines has a long history of international migration. For nearly four decades, the CFO has observed the dynamic international mobility of Filipinos.

Based on the 2012 Stock Estimates of Overseas Filipinos, about 10.48 million are living and working in more than 210 countries and territories worldwide, mainly in the US and Canada, Middle East and South East Asia, Europe and Australia. The percentage of permanent migrants is 47%, that of temporary migrants is 40% and irregular migrants is 13%.

**FIGURE 1: 2012 Stock Estimate of Filipinos Overseas**
PHILIPPINE MIGRATION GOVERNANCE

With the steady outflow of Filipinos since the 1970s, the Philippines had developed a comprehensive institutional and legal framework in ensuring the protection of rights and welfare of its migrant population.

The main thrust of the Philippine migration policy was established in the 1974 Labor Code and it consisted, among others, the management of overseas deployment, and protection of Filipino migrants. This policy was further strengthened through the Migrant Workers and Overseas Filipinos Act of 1995, amended in 2010 by Republic Act 10022. The law reiterates the resolve to strengthen the protection of overseas Filipinos. More importantly, it states that “the State does not promote overseas employment as a means to sustain economic growth and achieve national development”.

In fact, President Benigno S. Aquino III thru his Social Contract with the Filipino People, has committed to ensure “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.”

Several migration-related government institutions such as the Department of Foreign Affairs (DFA), Department of Labor and Employment (DOLE) and its attached agencies - the Overseas Workers Welfare Administration (or OWWA) and the Philippine Overseas Employment Administration (POEA) and my agency, the Commission on Filipinos Overseas (or CFO), work collectively to manage and regulate labor and permanent migration and ensure the welfare and well-being of Filipino migrants.

Through the years, these government agencies have worked with many migrant and civil society groups in lobbying and advocating for policies empowering and protecting Filipino migrants. These efforts have resulted in some landmark legislations which include, among others – the Dual Citizenship Act of 2004 which enables natural-born Filipinos who have lost their Filipino citizenship to re-acquire their Filipino citizenship; Overseas Voting Act (RA 9189 of 2003 amended by RA 10590 in 2013), which empowers eligible overseas Filipinos to participate in the Philippine national elections; and the Expanded Anti-Human Trafficking Act (RA 9208 of 2003 amended by RA 10364 of 2013) which aims to eliminate human trafficking especially those most vulnerable to this so-called modern-day slavery, women and children.

Through the advocacy and efforts of the CFO, provisions on migration and development have been included in seven out of 10 chapters of the Philippine Development Plan.
(PDP) 2011-2016, the blueprint of the national government to attain inclusive growth and the full human development of our people. This is the first time that our Philippine Development Plan went beyond the topics of overseas labor deployment and remittances.

And now, for greater policy cohesion and coordination, CFO with the full support of the government’s development planning body, National Economic Development Authority (NEDA), has also pushed for the creation of the sub-committee on international migration and development under the Social Development Committee of NEDA. This move will highlight the developmental aspects of international migration especially in the policy level, both national and sub-national.

In the international arena, the Philippines adopts a human rights framework in migration governance, consistent with its positions vis-à-vis international conventions and articulated during regional and global policy dialogues.¹

The country has been among the first to ratify in 1995 the UN Convention on the Human Rights of Migrants and their Families. It has consistently ratified labor migration conventions passed by the ILO, from ILO Convention No. 97 of 1949 (Migration for Employment) to ILO C143 of 1975 (on Migrant Workers), from ILO C189 of 2011 (on Decent Work for Domestic Workers) to the ILO Maritime Labor Convention of 2006. The Philippines was also the first ASEAN country to ratify in 1981 CEDAW, the Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination and Violence Against Women, the international bill of rights for women.

REMITTANCES, THE OTHER HALF OF MIGRATION

World Bank data show that in 2013 the top recipients of officially recorded remittances are India (US$71 billion), China (US$60 billion), the Philippines (US$26 billion), Mexico (US$22 billion), Nigeria (US$21 billion), and Egypt (US$20 billion).²

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In the Philippines, the Central Bank of the Philippines’ (Bangko Sentral ng Pilipinas or BSP) latest quarterly Consumer Expectations Survey (CES) for the fourth quarter of 2013 show that 96 percent used the remittances that they received to purchase food. Nearly three-fourths (72 percent) of the Overseas Filipino households allocated part of their remittances for education, 63 percent for medical payments and 46 percent for debt payments.

The percentage of Overseas Filipino households that utilized their remittances for savings rose to 42 percent (from 34 percent in the previous year). Similarly, those that used their remittances for investment increased to 11 percent from 5 percent of the previous year, recording the highest percentage since the first quarter of 2007. Those that apportioned part of their remittances for the purchase of consumer durables, property and motor vehicles likewise went up compared to the previous quarter’s results.
EFFECTS OF MIGRATION AND REMITTANCES

Though there have been many studies and researches on Philippine international migration in general, there are relatively fewer literature on the effects of migration and remittances on the education and health of children and families left behind. There are some relevant studies touching on these two subject matters but they are not as comprehensive and definitive enough to answer with finality the questions whether or not children or families left behind by migrants have better access to education and health services than those without a migrant in their family.

Because of the sometimes contradictory and diverse findings of research and studies on these two topics, I am presenting both the positive and negative effects of migration of parents to the education and health of their children and families left behind in the Philippines.

EFFECT OF MIGRATION ON THE EDUCATION OF CHILDREN LEFT BEHIND

Positive Impact on the Schooling of Children
The Children and Family Survey conducted in the Philippines in 2003 shows that Filipino migrant’s children are mainly enrolled in private schools, and that they are generally happy at school. At least during the elementary years, children of migrants performed better at school, received higher grades as well as school awards when compared to children of non-migrants (Lam et. al., 2013).

A study by Edillon in 2008 which was based on the analysis of the Family Income and Expenditures Survey, the Labor Force Survey and the 2003 Survey of Overseas Filipinos found mixed results of parental migration on the left-behind children (ages 6-17 years old) in terms of survival, development, protection and participation in the areas of education and health. Her analysis on education highlighted that more children of Overseas Filipino Workers (compared to children of non-OFWs) participate in academic organizations and extra-curricular activities and receive academic and non-academic awards (Edillon, 2008; IOM-Philippines, 2013).

A UNDP Human Development Report in 2009 shows evidence from several countries including the Philippines, that families with migrants are more likely to send their children to school, using cash from remittances to pay fees and other educational costs (UNDP, 2009).

A study by Asis and Marave in 2013 shows parental migration has been posited as having a positive impact on household economic resources through remittances which increase household educational investment, reduce child labor, and mitigate the negative effect of parental absence. Moreover, using the Child Health and Migrant Parents in Southeast Asia (or CHAMPSEA) data for the Philippines, the results of an analysis focusing on education found children in transnational families performing better than the children of non-migrants (Asis and Marave, 2013).

Negative Impact on the Schooling of Children

Anecdotal evidence suggests that many children left behind grow up under serious emotional strain. A survey by the Scalabrini Migration Center in 2000 of 700 school-age children shows that compared to their classmates, the children of migrant workers performed poorly in school, and were more likely to express confusion, anger and apathy. Another study done by Parrenas in 2005 based on interviews of children of migrant parents supported the abovementioned findings (Cortes, 2011).

Although the Philippines is the highest ranking country from Asia in the 2012 Global Gender Gap Index of the World Economic Forum, gender roles especially at home can remain rigid with the perception that mother’s main role is to nurture and the father’s main role is to be the breadwinner. Thus migration of mothers is perceived
as a much larger disruption in a child’s life than the absence of the father. Children’s educational outcomes appear to be negatively affected by the migration of their mothers (Cortes, 2011).

- Some studies reveal that the absence of mothers in migrant families result in added responsibilities for other members of the household especially of teenage daughters, who are more likely to report housekeeping duties as the main reason for not working and teenage sons are more likely to report having worked during the past week (Cortes, 2011).

**EFFECT OF MIGRATION ON THE HEALTH OF CHILDREN AND FAMILIES LEFT BEHIND**

Just as studies linking migration and education of children left behind yield various and divergent findings, the same thing could be said on the health aspect.

**Positive Impact on the Physical and Mental Health of Family Left Behind**

- Studies by Cruz in 1987 and University of the Philippines et al., in 2002 involving adolescents did not find a significant difference between children of overseas Filipino Workers (OFWs) and non-migrant families in terms of problematic behavior. In the absence of their migrant parents, adolescent children considered themselves more independent than their counterparts from non-migrant families (IOM-Philippines, 2013).

- A 2003 nationwide survey of 1,443 children (ages 10-12 years old) of migrant and non-migrant families spearheaded by the Catholic Bishops Conference of the Philippines–Episcopal Commission for the Pastoral Care of Migrants and Itinerant People (CBCP- ECMI), Scalabroni Migration Center (SMC) and OWWA showed a favorable report on the health of children left behind. Findings of the study show that children of migrants were doing better than children of non-migrants in terms of health indicators (Asis, 2009).

- **A study by Scalabroni Migrant Center in 2004 shows** that parental migration has a positive effect on the physical health of left-behind children. Migrants’ children tend to be taller and have better general health than non-migrant children. Non-migrant children fall sick more frequently although there was also a slightly higher proportion of children, whose mothers are away, who are more susceptible to common ailments and loss of appetite. The study did not uncover any alarming impact of mother’s absence on the physical well-being of children. This can perhaps be attributed to better nutrition from the higher socio-economic status of migrant families, as well as the quality of caregivers (Lam, et. al., 2013).
• Among young children (under 12 years old), the comparative analysis of the Child Health and Migrant Parents in South East Asia (or commonly known as CHAMPSEA) data of the Asia Research Institute of the National University of Singapore conducted in Indonesia, Philippines, Thailand and Viet Nam found that Filipino children in transnational households suffer from less emotional distress and have less problems in their conduct compared to children in non-migrant households (IOM-Philippines, 2013).

• A study of Bryant in 2005 on children (ages 10-12 years old) left behind in Indonesia, Thailand and the Philippines, indicates that children who grow up with parental migration enjoy good life conditions. As shown in the Central Bank’s survey, migrated parents send remittances to their children primarily to cover their basic expenses and needs which improve their survival rates. This support likewise goes to the extended family which in turn provides care to the child (Owusu, Boabang, 2011).

**Negative Impact on the Physical and Mental Health of Family Left Behind**

• Data from the 2008 Philippine survey of the CHAMPSEA Project (mentioned earlier) show that the impact of parental absence on the well-being of the children vary depending on who migrates and the age of the left-behind children. Young and adolescent children reported missing their parents. Even if they receive love and care from other family members, they still wish for the care and attention of their parents, especially their mothers (ECMI/AOS-Manila et al., 2004; Carandang et al., 2007). If they had a choice, children would prefer their parents to be back home but they also understand the reasons why their parents had to work outside the country, which is to provide the family left behind with their basic necessities and offer the family members a better future (IOM-Philippines, 2013).

• In a study conducted by Smeelens, et. al. in 2012 among high school students, the emotional loneliness and stress due to the absence of a migrant parent were associated with poor physical health. Although many parents work abroad to improve the lot of their children, the latter suffer emotional stress and physical health detriments (Smeelens, et. al., 2012).

• The 2004 Study of the Scalabrini Migration Center on children left behind was mentioned earlier as having positive effect on the physical health of the children. However, in terms of the children’s emotional and mental health, the same study relates that among children, with mothers away, there are more accounts of their being unhappy, that they are more anxious, lonely and unloved, and that they tend to have the least number of hours to sleep (SMC, 2004).

• Likewise, as mentioned earlier, the Edillon study of 2008 found mixed results on the left-behind children in terms of health. She found high incidence of hygiene-
related problems (involving any or all of the following: skin, scalp, ears and nose) among children of Overseas Filipino Workers (Edillon, 2008).

- In a study by Yeoh and Lam in 2006 on the impact of migration on the household left behind revealed that parental migration meant disruption of personal, as well as familial relationships. It was also found out that some parents who do not remit back home to support children run the risks of their children’s malnutrition and other health problems. It was concluded that the absence of one or both parents from the home increases the health and psychological insecurity of children (Owusu, Boabang, 2011).

CFO INTERVENTIONS

Being in existence for more than 30 years, the CFO is well aware not only of the positive contributions of the Filipino diaspora, but also of the inevitable social costs and the different issues and problems brought about by international migration, specifically on the education and health aspects of family members left behind. Many advocates especially from civil society groups and the academe feel that these negative consequences on family dynamics may outweigh any positive effect on human development.

Cognizant of these challenges, we at the CFO have developed programs with the end goal of minimizing the cost and maximizing the gains of migration. Let me just name a few of these measures.

*Remittance for Development Council*

We have put together with the full support of the Central Bank of the Philippines, a multi-stakeholder Council we call Remittance for Development Council focusing on issues, concerns, recommendations and consultations related to remittances. Its specific objectives are: to lower remittance costs, to advocate for more financial literacy trainings for our migrants and their families especially those left behind, to help create an environment that would facilitate investment and business enterprises of the Filipino diaspora.

In line with this, we have put up and continue to enhance the one-stop portal for Filipino diaspora engagement specially in diaspora investment and entrepreneurship, diaspora philanthropy, skills, expertise and technology transfer and exchange. The data on this portal are hometown- and province-based (www.balinkbayan.gov.ph).

*Financial Literacy Programs*
We have developed our own **Financial Literacy Program** catering to migrants and families left behind. Our financial literacy modules are incorporated in our pre-departure orientation seminars, and in our local and international information campaigns. They include discussion on the importance of financial planning, savings and investment, debt management and budgeting.

Late last year, the CFO in partnership with the United Nations Development Programme-Philippines and Western Union Foundation, launched a nationwide financial literacy campaign called “**PESO SENSE**”. This is targeted towards Filipino beneficiaries of international remittances, namely, students, young adults, home-makers, small enterprises/business owners, white collar employees, professionals and retirees. The campaign will use extensively social media and non-traditional communication channels like texting and new SMS applications.

**RECOMMENDATIONS**

Despite our efforts to curb the negative social and health effects of migration, there is still a lot to be done, not only by the government but also by the other stakeholders of migration. The following are some of our recommendations:

1) There is a need to put in place a policy or long-term program specifically for children and families left behind, which could include among others, guidance and counseling, mentoring and values formation program, post-arrival services (for the families left behind but who are now joining their migrant parents) and creation of migrant centers in local communities.

2) The government in partnership with civil society and migrant advocacy groups should regularly hold dialogue or fora with the families left behind to be updated of their evolving issues and challenges.

3) The academe/ education and health officials should develop training programs that prepare staff to recognize traits, performance and behavior of children associated with the psycho-social and health effects of parental migration.

4) Include family members left behind in the pre-departure orientation seminars for migrants conducted by government agencies and NGOs so they will become aware of the different scenarios and negative consequences brought about by migration, and as a family they could work together to mitigate and address these problems. For your information, our Agency, the CFO offers peer counseling to our young migrants and marriage counseling for our marriage migrants during our Pre-Departure Orientation Seminars (or PDOS).
5) Host countries of migrants could also help by relaxing their immigration laws and adopting “family reunification” program to facilitate for permanent migrants and allow migrant workers to take their children abroad.

6) Conduct more comprehensive and large scale researches to determine patterns, issues and trends of left behind children and families; and to validate anecdotal problems brought about by parents' migration. These researches should be the basis for policy and program formulation targeted towards children and family left behind.

7) Develop and compile “Best Practices” in addressing the issues of children and families left behind.

Thank you for your attention.
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