

Building the Capacities of Local Governments and other stakeholders and Setting Up One-Stop Migration Resource Centers

“Social worker tayo di ba? Ano ang ginagawa natin sa financial literacy seminar na ito? (We are social workers right? What are we doing in this financial literacy seminar?), asked Dong Quezon to Fely Servanez. Fely and Dong are both Provincial Social Welfare Officers of Cavite . But when they heard the words social costs of migration and heard the stories of families left behind, problems of dependency, communication gap, family separation and break-up, tears rolled down their cheeks. They resolved to participate actively in the conduct of financial literacy and in addressing family issues that drain the resources of migrants. They have been involved in the series of migration and development fora at the regional and provincial level and the Provincial Social Welfare Department took the role of lead advocate for the setting up of a one-stop Overseas Filipino Migration Center in the province of Cavite.

We have been aware for a long time that Region 4 has the highest number of migrants in the Philippines however, migrants seem to be invisible in the eyes of the local government of region 4. This is because migrants are considered to be relatively well off compared to other sectors of our society. To a certain extent this is true. How then do we engage and involve the LGUs, regional bodies and other sectors in initiatives that will minimize the cost and maximize the gains of migration?

The EC-UN Joint Migration and Development Initiatives (EC-UN JMDI) project “ Maximizing the Gains and Minimizing the Social Cost of Migration” provided us with the opportunity of conducting series of migration and development fora in Region 4. The migration and development fora provided us with opportunity to exchange ideas and experiences on issues on migration and development with the national and local government agencies and other stakeholders.

WE were glad of the impact of the migration and development forum on the local and regional government agencies and in a way we were amazed by the receptiveness of the local government agencies in creating programs and services for the overseas Filipinos and the families left behind. Immediately after the first regional forum, the various provincial governments have committed to sponsor and organize provincial forum in Batangas, Laguna and Cavite. One of the glaring issues that was raised is the lack of data on overseas migration making it challenging for the LGUs to create programs and services. Thus the participating provinces agreed to gather information both on the social cost of migration and the development potential of migration.

Asked why the Region 4 A NEDA and the various local governments became receptive to creating programs and services for the overseas Filipinos, Mr. Donald Gawe, OIC Chief Economic Development Specialist of NEDA Region 4 A shared, “ I think the most important reason is because Region 4 has the biggest number of overseas Filipinos. It is not difficult to convince the local governments and department heads on migration issues and potential since most of them are personally confronted both by the positive and negative effect of migration. The migration and development forum also highlighted the fragmented intervention on issues of migration both at the national and local government agencies. We observed willingness on the part of the local governments to provide economic and social services for migrants and families and coordinated intervention by the different agencies and NGOs but they are hindered by their lack of capacity in implementing these services. The LGUs also want the national government agencies to take the lead in coordinating their intervention at the national level. “

Since Atikha has been operating Overseas Filipinos Migration Center in San Pablo City, Laguna in partnership with the city government , it was able to design a 4-day capacity building for LGUs in setting up One-Stop Overseas Filipinos Migration Resource Center. The training provided information on the following: Duality of Migration, Integrating Migration in Development Planning, the Nexus between Migration and Development, Economic and Social Services of a Migration Center, the Legal, Human Resource, Organizational and Other requisites in setting –up OF Migration Center. The participants were also given exposure on the on-going operation of an OFW center in San Pablo City. To deepen their understanding and establish coordination work with government agencies involved in migration, on the job training was arranged with OWWA and exposure to Commission on Filipinos Overseas , Philippine Overseas Employment Administration and the Office of the Undersecretary for Migrant Workers Affairs of the Department of Foreign Affairs was organized.

The series of migration and development fora lead to the creation of an Ad hoc committee on Migration and Development under the Regional Development Council of Region 4A. The ad hoc committee is currently being chaired by National Economic Development Agency (NEDA) Region 4A and co-chaired by Atikha. This is the first time in the Philippines that such a Migration and Development Committee, albeit Ad hoc status has been created under the Regional Development Council.

“ NEDA in Region 4 has also seen the fragmented set-up and policies on migration. NEDA sees its role as coordinator on migration and development initiatives while no government agency is willing to undertake this role. We are aware of the OFWs only when there are crisis, when they are jailed or on death row or when they are repatriated due to financial crisis or political turmoil. Intervention oftentimes remain crisis intervention. We have Local Development Councils and Regional Development Councils but never is migration and development tackled in such councils – neither the social issues nor the potential of their remittance to development.” Donald Gawe.

The civil society and local government partnership on the advocacy on migration and development in Region 4A has been forged. At the moment Atikha receives requests for assistance from 26 ciities and municipalities in 5 provinces on the setting up of One Stop – Overseas Filipinos Migration Resource Centers. This covers only Region 4 A and Region 3. There are more requests from other provinces. This underlined both the desire of the local government to assist the migrants and families and their need for capacity building.

The partnership between the local government not only with NGOs but other stakeholders including the migrant and family organizations can transform the potential nexus between migration and development into a reality.

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