

# Coming Home

Innovations and Impact of a Gender Responsive Reintegration Program on Filipino Migrant Domestic Workers and Families



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*Coming Home: Innovations and Impact of a Gender Responsive Reintegration Program on Filipino Migrant Domestic Workers and Families* deals with outcomes of the implementation of the Coming Home Project and the results of the evaluation of the said project.

The book discusses the innovations and interventions implemented by Atikha in capacitating the Coming Home Project's beneficiaries, Filipino migrant domestic workers in Hong Kong and Singapore to effectively manage their finances and families towards a successful return and reintegration to the Philippines. It discusses the effects of the interventions done by Atikha and its partners to the migrant domestic workers, their relatives and children.

*Coming Home* looks forward to the development and sustained implementation of a national, comprehensive and gender responsive reintegration program for all overseas Filipinos.



**ATIKHA**  
ATIKHA OVERSEAS WORKERS AND  
COMMUNITIES INITIATIVE INC.



FUND FOR  
GENDER EQUALITY

Estrella Dizon-Añonuevo Aileen Constantino-Peñas  
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# **Coming Home:**

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**Estrella Dizon-Añonuevo  
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# LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

|         |                                                                      |            |                                                                        |
|---------|----------------------------------------------------------------------|------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| BPI     | Bank of the Philippine Islands                                       | OWWA       | Overseas Workers Welfare Administration                                |
| CORP    | Comprehensive OFW Reintegration Program                              | PCEDO      | Provincial Cooperative and Enterprise Development Office               |
| CMD     | Committee on Migration and Development                               | PESO       | Public Employment Service Office                                       |
| DA-AMAS | Department of Agriculture-Agribusiness Marketing Assistance Services | Pinoy WISE | Pinoy Worldwide Initiative for Savings Investment and Entrepreneurship |
| DepEd   | Department of Education                                              | PMOS       | Pre-Migration Orientation Seminar                                      |
| DFA     | Department of Foreign Affairs                                        | POEA       | Philippine Overseas Employment Administration                          |
| DOLE    | Department of Labor and Employment                                   | POLO       | Philippine Overseas Labor Office                                       |
| DOST    | Department of Science and Technology                                 | TESDA      | Technical Education and Skills Development Authority                   |
| DTI     | Department of Trade and Industry                                     | UNWOMEN    | United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women |
| FIMT    | Family and Income Management Training                                |            |                                                                        |
| FGE     | Fund for Gender Equality                                             |            |                                                                        |
| GEAR UP | Go Earn Achieve Return-Uplift Philippines                            |            |                                                                        |
| LGU     | Local Government Unit                                                |            |                                                                        |
| MDW     | Migrant Domestic Worker                                              |            |                                                                        |
| MTDP    | Medium Term Development Plan                                         |            |                                                                        |
| NEDA    | National Economic Development Authority                              |            |                                                                        |
| NRCO    | National Reintegration Center for OFWs                               |            |                                                                        |
| OFWs    | Overseas Filipino Workers                                            |            |                                                                        |

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*Coming Home: Innovations and Impact of a Gender Responsive Reintegration Program on Filipino Migrant Domestic Workers and Families* captures the experiences of Atikha, Pinoy WISE and our partners in engaging migrant domestic workers and their families to prepare for their successful return to the Philippines.

While many individuals, organizations and institutions contributed to the development of this book, special acknowledgement and gratitude are due to the following:

MDWs and their families, leaders and members of Pinoy WISE in Hong Kong and Singapore) who took part in our training, implemented the step-ladder training program and shared their experiences and impact of the trainings in their lives;

The following Philippine government agencies for participating in the Coming Home Project and Go Earn Achieve Return Uplift Philippines (GEAR UP) Reintegration Program:

- The Provincial Governments of Batangas, Laguna, Quezon, Tarlac, Ifugao, Iloilo
- Department of Labor and Employment–Overseas Workers Welfare Administration–National Reintegration Center for OFWs (DOLE-OWWA-NRCO)
- National Economic Development Authority (NEDA)
- Department of Agriculture–Agribusiness and Marketing Assistance Services (DA-AMAS)
- Department of Trade and Industry (DTI)
- Technical Education and Skills Development Authority (TESDA)
- Department of Education (DepEd)
- Department of Foreign Affairs (DFA)

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**Estrella Dizon Añonuevo**  
Chair, Atikha Board of Directors

# INTRODUCTION

The book *Coming Home: Innovations and Impact of a Gender Responsive Reintegration Program on Filipino Migrant Domestic Workers and Families* is to be regarded as a sequel to the book *Coming Home: Women, Migration and Reintegration*.

*Coming Home: Women, Migration and Reintegration* was published in 2002 and highlighted the results of a research project conducted by Atikha which dealt with the situation of Filipina migrant women in Italy and Hong Kong and the effects of their separation from their families and communities. It also discussed the need for a comprehensive reintegration program for overseas Filipinos.

Eighteen years after, *Coming Home: Innovations and Impact of a Gender Responsive Reintegration Program on Filipino Migrant Domestic Workers and Families* is published. This book tackles the interventions implemented by a reintegration program spearheaded by Atikha for Filipino migrant domestic workers in Hong Kong and Singapore and their families in selected provinces in the Philippines. The book also discusses the effects of the gender responsive reintegration program to migrant domestic workers, their relatives and children.

While a reintegration program was dreamt of in the *Coming Home* of 2002 to address the plight of migrant workers and the social costs of migration, the *Coming Home* of 2020 dealt with the evaluation of the implementation of a reintegration program for migrant domestic workers. It is in this sense that this book is a sequel of the earlier book. The two books represent the continuing efforts of Atikha in addressing the social costs of migration, harnessing development potential of international migration of Filipinos and Filipinas and in working out together with multi-stakeholder partners a comprehensive reintegration program for overseas Filipinos.

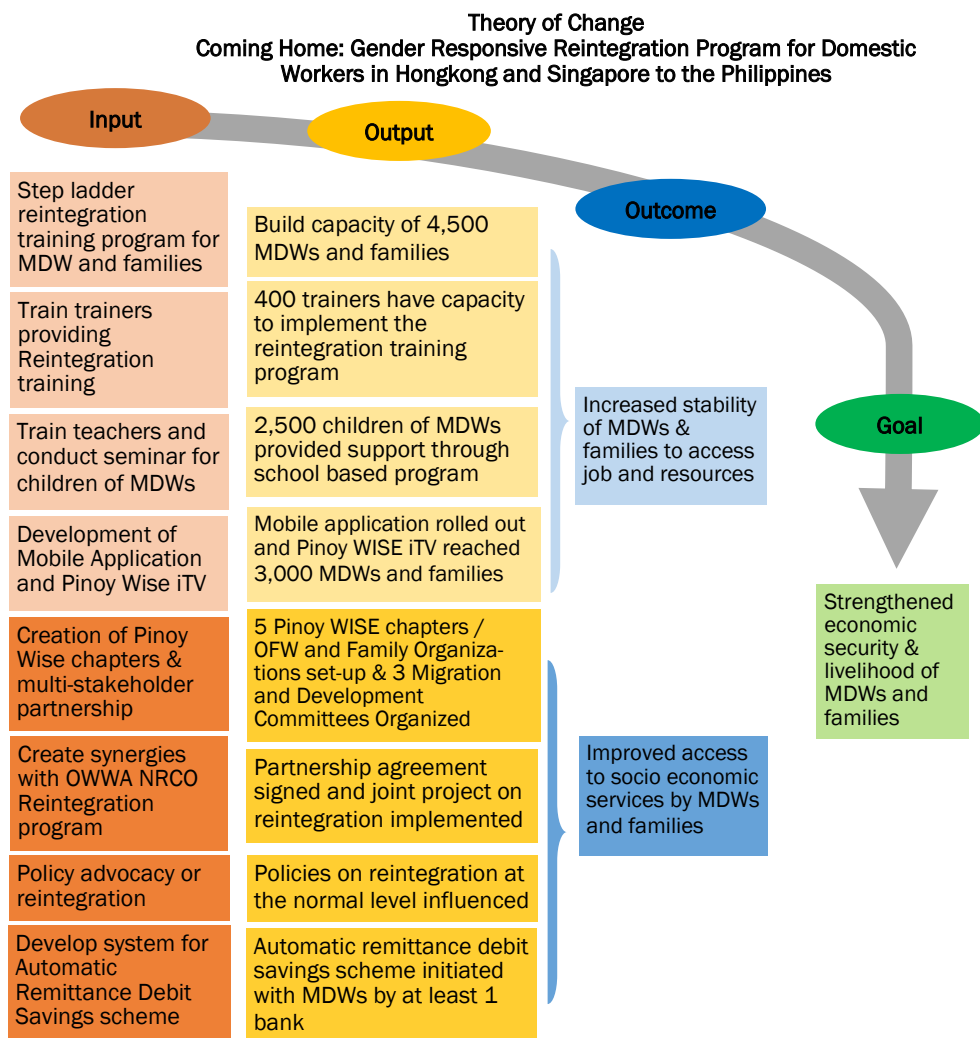
## The Coming Home Project

Atikha Overseas Workers and Communities Initiatives, Inc. implemented UN Women's Fund for Gender Equality (FGE) supported project entitled "Coming Home: Reintegration Program for Domestic Workers from Hong Kong and Singapore to the Philippines". Popularly referred to as the Coming Home Project, the program started on April 1, 2016 and ended on December 30, 2019. The project was implemented for the MDWs in Hong Kong and Singapore and their families in migrant-origin regions in the Philippines, namely Region III (Central Luzon), Region IV-A (CALABARZON), Region V (Bicol) and Region VI (Western Visayas).

Atikha implemented the project in partnership with Pinoy WISE Hong Kong and Singapore, the local governments in the four regions and government agencies like the Overseas Workers Welfare Administration (OWWA) and the National Reintegration Center for OFWs (NRCO) in the Philippines, Philippine Overseas Labor Office (POLO) and Welfare Officers of OWWA in Hong Kong and Singapore. The private sector partners of the project were the Soro-soro Ibaba Development Cooperative (SIDC), Lagawe Multi-Purpose Cooperative, Sapang Multi-Purpose Cooperative and Bank of the Philippine Islands.

The goal of the program was to strengthen the economic security and livelihoods of MDWs based in Hong Kong and Singapore and their families in the Philippines towards a successful reintegration to the Philippines. The project goal was envisioned to be achieved through the Theory of Change of the Coming Home Project as illustrated in Figure 1.

**Figure 1: Theory of Change of the Coming Home Project**



Source: Evaluation of the 'Coming Home: Reintegration Program for Domestic Workers in Hong Kong and Singapore to the Philippines' (2019), p. 20.

The project goal was to be achieved by capacitating migrant domestic workers based in Hong Kong and Singapore, and their families in the Philippines and improving their access to socio-economic services, employment, investment and business opportunities.

The Coming Home Project's relevance, effectiveness, efficiency, impact and sustainability was evaluated by reviewing the progress reports, conducting surveys, case studies and interviews among beneficiaries, implementers and partner organizations. The main findings of the evaluation are summarized as follows:

- 1 The Coming Home Project was relevant for it has implemented a step-ladder education and training program that addressed the reintegration needs of migrant domestic workers and their families. The Coming Home Project capacitated its beneficiaries and partner organizations and institutions and forged with them a common advocacy that led to a high sense of collective ownership of the project. The project has implemented various innovations that effectively reached and made substantial impact on MDWs, their families and other migration stakeholders.
- 2 The project has attained its goal of strengthening the economic security and livelihood of domestic workers in Hong Kong and Singapore and their families in the Philippines. The goal of the project was realized through the attainment of the two set outcomes, namely 1) increased ability of MDWs and their families to access jobs and resources and 2) Improved access to socio economic services by MDWs and families. The project has exceeded most of its set indicators for its outcomes and outputs.
- 3 Atikha has efficiently managed the Coming Home Project, a multi-stakeholder and multi-country project. Aside from doing the overall-steering and managing of implementing the project, Atikha spearheaded the policy advocacy for gender responsive reintegration of domestic workers with national and subnational government bodies. It empowered MDW leaders and facilitated the organizing of Pinoy WISE in Hong Kong and Singapore not only as organizations of beneficiaries but as organizational partners. The NGO has harnessed the capacities, resources and expertise of MDWs, partner organizations and institutions and other migrant stakeholders in implementing the Coming Home Project.
- 4 The Coming Home Project is sustainable because Atikha's partner organizations remain committed and capable in pursuing component activities of the reintegration preparedness program. The Pinoy WISE chapters in Hong Kong and Singapore remain as active conduit organizations in reaching out, training and mentoring MDWs. Partner organizations remain capable of providing the needed services and assistance for reintegration. Atikha aided by the trainings conducted by UN Women is capable of leading and coordinating future multi-stakeholder activities and initiatives that seek to continue what has been done by the Coming Home Project.

- 5 The project made a huge impact to MDWs, migrant families and children who participated in the reintegration program of the Coming Home project. The project has resulted in marked changes in attitudes and behaviors of MDWs, migrant relatives and migrant children who have participated in the project's education and training activities. It has enhanced the reintegration preparedness of MDWs in Hong Kong and Singapore and their families in the regions.

## Structure of the Book

The book is comprised of six articles which discuss the innovations, interventions and impact of the project, Coming Home: Reintegration Program for Domestic Workers from Hong Kong and Singapore to the Philippines.

The first article, *Innovative Interventions Towards Reintegration Preparedness of MDWs and Families*, tackles the logic, rationale and actual implementation of the interventions of the project on the main beneficiaries of the project—the MDWs and migrant families. Five innovative interventions as implemented by Atikha and its partners were discussed, namely 1) step-ladder training and reintegration mentoring program, 2) parallel work on both sides of the migration corridor, 3) migrants as trainers and mentors of fellow migrants, 4) capacity building and multi-stakeholder partnership, and 5) use of social media and ICT.

The article, *“Pamilya ang dahilan ng pag-alis, pamilya rin ang dahilan sa pagbabalik”*: Filipino Families Overcoming the Challenges of Migration tackles the challenges and problems faced by migrant families caused by the physical separation of families and the feminization of migration. The article showcases the interventions done and how they helped MDWs successfully manage their families, bridge communication gaps and foster good family relationships based on gender equality and shared family responsibility.

The third article, *“Pauuwiin na namin si Mama!”*: Adverse Effects of Migration and the School-Based Program for Migrant Children, deals with the vulnerability of children of migrants and how the school-based program for migrant children affected the attitudes and behaviors of children, and strengthened their capacity to cope with their situation as children of MDWs. It also discusses the different modes and strategies that were implemented by different educational institution partners in implementing the school-based program.

*“Masarap pa lang walang amo!”*: A Successful Reintegration of a Migrant Domestic Worker to the Philippines highlights the case of Ellen Elecanal, a former MDW in Singapore, who successfully returned and reintegrated in her hometown and province in the Philippines. The article discusses the meanings that she attached to her successful reintegration and the keys to the attainment of her successful return to the Philippines, one of which were the interventions facilitated by the Coming Home Project.

*“Napatunayan namin na kaya namin!”*: Empowerment of Filipino Migrant Domestic Workers in Hong Kong and Singapore discusses the different facets of women empowerment experienced by leaders and members of Pinoy WISE Hong Kong and Singapore. The article tackles the three facets of empowerment: economic empowerment, capacity to manage the family and relationships, and personal development and social responsibility. The article describes the attitudes, behaviors and capacities of empowered migrant women.

The last article, *“Returning home for good!”*: Facets of a Gender-Responsive Reintegration Program, tackles the component elements of a gender-responsive reintegration program: 1) migration corridor approach; 2) step-ladder social and economic interventions; 3) multi-stakeholder partnerships; 4) an enabling environment for reintegration; and 5) tailor-fit employment, business, and investment opportunities for migrants and their families. The article stresses the importance of developing a Comprehensive OFW Reintegration Program in the Philippines that draws from the experiences of Latin American countries and the Coming Home Project's implementation of a reintegration program for MDWs. Such a national program should implement an integrated framework and coordinated approach and develop reintegration pathways suited for different types of migrants.

# Innovative Interventions Towards Reintegration Preparedness of Migrant Domestic Workers and Families

*Estrella Dizon-Añonuevo*

**A**s a researcher and trainer, I have heard countless stories of struggles, challenges and sacrifices from migrant domestic workers and migrant returnees. There was Mina, a former teacher who worked as a domestic worker for more than 20 years in Hong Kong. She told me: “I don’t know if I made the right decision to work abroad. After more than 20 years, I was able to build a concrete house but my husband left me and my three children did not finish school and married young.” I could not also forget what Doris, a former MDW said: “I feel like I am a failure. When I left to work abroad I had no money. I was young and healthy and I had my family. Now that I have returned, I still do not have money, I am old and sick. My family does not care about me.” It is sad that after years of sacrifice, migrant workers have no families to return to. It is not fair that after years of hard work and separated from their families that they come home as failures. These are the reasons why my involvement in efforts towards the successful return and reintegration of Filipino migrants has become a continuing advocacy and a personal commitment.

We, in Atikha, studied the challenges and needs of MDWs, their relatives and children and developed education and training programs specifically designed for them. We developed the education and training modules from scratch because none was done before. We studied what hindered the successful reintegration of MDWs. What behaviors should be changed? What values should be strengthened? What would be the most appropriate training design and activities that could address their challenges? What were the gaps in services? We tapped sociologists, social workers, community development workers, migration and development experts, bankers, migrant returnees, and government staff personnel in designing and developing the different modules. We tested the training modules and developed them further based on feedback from OFWs, migrant families and partner organizations.

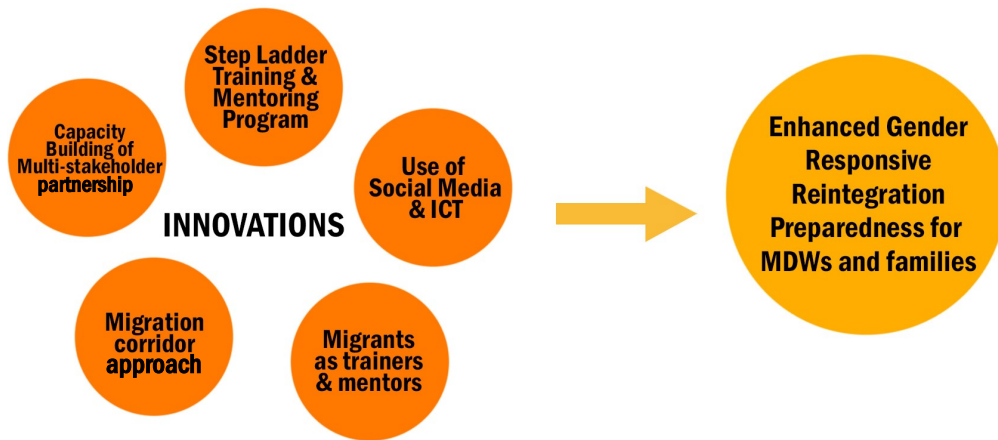
## The Coming Home Project and Its Innovative Interventions

The Coming Home Project built on Atikha’s years of work experience among OFWs, migrant returnees, migrant relatives and children. Those years of experiences enabled Atikha to create innovations and implement interventions specifically designed for migrant domestic workers and their families. The Coming Home Project addressed the reintegration needs of MDWs, capacitated Atikha’s partners, and implemented various innovative approaches that enhanced MDWs’ and their families’ reintegration preparedness.

Five innovative interventions were implemented, namely 1) step-ladder training and reintegration mentoring program, 2) parallel work on both sides of the migration corridor, 3) migrants as trainers and mentors of fellow migrants, 4) capacity building and multi-stakeholder partnership, and 5) use of social media and ICT.

These innovative implementation strategies implemented by Atikha and different migration stakeholders in the Philippines and in Hong Kong and Singapore have resulted to a wider reach of the Coming Home Project and

**Figure 2. Innovations of the Gender Responsive Reintegration Preparedness Program**



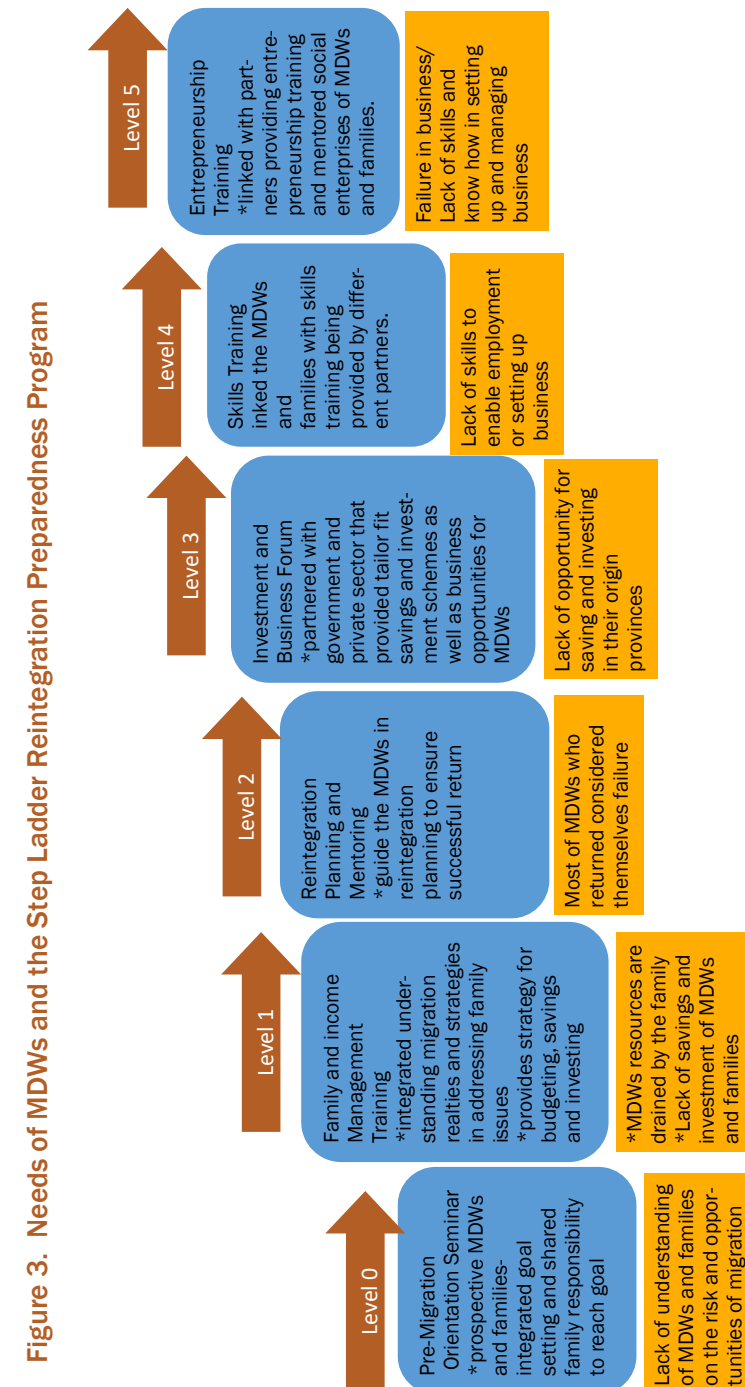
contributed to the success of developing a gender responsive reintegration preparedness program for the MDWs and their families.

## Step-Ladder Training and Reintegration Mentoring Program

Government agencies, NGOs and private organizations provide countless of trainings from financial literacy to entrepreneurship training to MDWs and their relatives. These interventions, however, remained uncoordinated. There was also no clear monitoring and mentoring system that guided the reintegration of MDWs. To address the reintegration needs of MDWs and their families and fill in the gap in services, the Coming Home Project developed the step-ladder training and reintegration mentoring program.

The step-ladder program provides a road map for MDWs and their families—from preparing prospective MDWs to work abroad, preparing the families left-behind to cope with long-term separation, capacitating MDWs to manage their earnings and family relations, saving and investing their money wisely, upgrading skills to become entrepreneurs and/or investors when they return to the Philippines. The program systematically prepares MDWs for a successful return to the Philippines by providing them and their families with the necessary knowledge, values, attitudes, information and

skills. Except for Level 0 training (Pre-Migration Orientation Seminar), all the other trainings are conducted simultaneously in destination countries to reach the MDWs and in origin provinces to reach the migrant families.



**Figure 3. Needs of MDWs and the Step Ladder Reintegration Preparedness Program**

Source: Evaluation of the 'Coming Home: Reintegration Program for Domestic Workers in Hong Kong and Singapore to the Philippines' (2019), p. 31.

The step ladder program consists of six levels of training and mentoring that addresses the various concerns and reintegration needs of MDWs and their families. The step-ladder program a) addresses the economic and psychosocial needs of migrants and families from pre-migration, on-site migration in destination countries and upon return migration to the Philippines; b) systematically prepares migrants, families and children towards reintegration by teaching them financial management and addressing family concerns and issues; and c) links migrants and families to services and savings, investment, jobs and business opportunities. The various trainings in the step-ladder program are provided by different national and local government agencies, NGOs like Atikha, migrant organizations like Pinoy WISE and those in the private sector.

#### **Level 0** **Pre-Migration Orientation Seminar (PMOS)**

There are education trainings prior to migration given to prospective migrants that are provided by different migration stakeholders. This includes the Pre-Employment Orientation Seminar by the Philippine Overseas Employment Administration (POEA) and partner service providers, Pre-Migration Orientation Training Seminars provided to prospective migrants and family by local governments and Technical Education and Skills Development Authority (TESDA)-accredited schools and the Pre-Departure Orientation Seminar given to MDWs with signed contracts by OWWA. These pre-departure orientation seminars respond to the lack of understanding of the risks and challenges of overseas migration. The project developed the Pre-Migration Orientation Seminars (PMOS) to address the gap in the training programs provided to prospective migrants and included the preparation of the families. The PMOs are conducted by local government and Technical Education and Skills Development Authority (TESDA) accredited schools. The seminars help prospective migrants and relatives to set their goals for migration. They tackle the following topics: situation in specific destination countries which includes discussions on nature of work and prevailing culture; positive and negative impact of migration, goal setting, nurturing family relations, health concerns of migrants, shared responsibility among members of the family in house work, budgeting and saving to reach migration goals.

**Gender responsive dimension.** The training emphasizes the risks and challenges of working abroad as women domestic workers and their vulnerable living and working conditions. It discusses potential family issues due to long-term separation and remittances and provides family strategies to manage these challenges. It emphasizes the need for shared decision-making, planning and goal-setting of families prior to migration.

## Level 1 **Family and Income Management Training (FIMT)**

FIMT is conducted by OWWA-NRCO, local government units, NGOs, schools, migrant organizations and those in the private sector to MDWs and families when the MDWs are already working on-site. The training addresses the lack of savings and investments as well as family issues that drain the resources of MDWs. Knowledge and skills about budgeting, saving, borrowing and investing are taught to the training participants.

A combination of lecture and discussion is used in conducting the training. A hands-on workshop is held that allows participants to estimate the amount of savings needed to reach their migration goals. A migration goal refers to the dreams and aspirations that migrants and their families want to achieve through overseas employment, such as college education for children or capital for business and others. Aside from financial issues, family concerns that prevent the migrant from saving and investing are also addressed. Participants work with a financial planner that serves as their workbook for financial planning.

**Gender responsive dimension.** The training emphasizes on the issues and challenges of MDWs and the need for shared responsibility between men and women in the family in handling money and family matters. This is in response to the issues of feminization of migration in the Philippines and the triple-burden on Filipino migrant women. Triple-burden refers to the difficulties faced by a Filipino migrant woman because of her race (discrimination for being a foreigner), class (working in difficult, dangerous and low-paying jobs) and gender (vulnerable to abuse and discrimination for being a woman). It tackles ways by which a MDW as a woman, spouse and mother manage her finances and her family. It teaches ways how migrant families could nurture relations, share responsibilities and manage family finances.

## Level 2 **Reintegration Planning and Mentoring**

The training is provided to MDWs and their family ideally as soon as MDWs set foot in the destination country. The training is conducted by leaders of migrant and family organizations, local government units, and NGOs. It addresses the specific reintegration needs of MDWs. It tackles why a big number of MDWs failed in their return to the Philippines, i.e. with no savings, business failure, lack of technical preparation, family issues that drained resources, difficulty in adjusting to way of life and others. The training provides information about reintegration preparedness and strategies in achieving the goals for migration. Migrants mentor fellow migrants on how to achieve the goals that they have set and are linked to service providers in the destination countries and in the Philippines which could help them address their needs. The mentoring program is one of the strengths of the step-ladder program because it provides the MDWs and their families with a road map and connects them to partners that would help them attain a successful return to the Philippines.

In the training, migrants are asked to visualize their migration goals. The financial, technical and psycho-social requisites to reach these goals and a successful return are discussed. Migrants' families are provided family and/or financial counseling depending on the identified challenges to achieving the family goal for migration. A Reintegration Planning Form is filled out during the discussion as a tool of the facilitators in assessing the needs and capacities of migrants and their families for successful reintegration. The tool identifies the specific problems of migrants and families that need to be referred to agencies or experts.

**Gender responsive dimension.** MDWs more than other migrants have difficulties in planning their reintegration because of the demands and dependency of their families. This training and mentoring confronts the burden of MDWs and provide strategies in

addressing these challenges. Referrals to Philippine partner agencies are done especially for migrant domestic workers with family issues that require consultations with family members. Family members are to be prepared and must contribute towards the successful reintegration of their migrant relatives.

### **Level 3** **Services Investment and Business Forum/Market Place Event**

The Market Place Events are organized by OWWA-NRCO, NGOs, migrant organizations in partnership with national and local government agencies and private sector. It addresses the need of MDWs and their relatives for services and information on investment and business opportunities. It links MDWs and their relatives to vital services, savings, investment, employment and business opportunities in their provinces in the Philippines.

Various investment and business opportunities and services offered by cooperatives, banks, agricultural entrepreneurs, national and local government agencies operating in the migrant-origin provinces are presented. Business and investment matching is done after the lecture-discussion through small group sessions with the resource speakers. Information materials and brochures about investments and business opportunities are provided to participants.

**Gender responsive dimension.** The various savings and investment schemes that are offered consider the characteristics of the MDWs, e.g. MDWs are small savers with relatively low income compared to other migrants. The private sector provides tailor-fit savings and investment products that are affordable for MDWs and families. Since MDWs are also saddled with psychosocial and family issues, the social welfare services of the different local governments are also linked to the MDWs. MDWs and families are linked with government agencies which offer grants for equipment and raw materials to augment their capital.

### **Level 4** **Skills Training**

The training responds to the lack of knowledge and skills of MDWs and their relatives with regards to the job or business that they wanted to engage in. It provides knowhow on possible alternative livelihood opportunities for them. The participants are linked to government and private agencies that could help them enhance their acquired skills and knowledge. The service providers for the skills training are TESDA, Department of Education Alternative Learning System (DepEd ALS), national government agencies such as the Department of Agriculture (DA), Department of Science and Technology (DOST), state universities, local government units involved in livelihood training programs, NGOs and private sector.

### **Level 5** **Entrepreneurship Training**

The training addresses the failed business ventures or difficulties in starting or managing businesses experienced by many MDWs, other OFWs and their families. It teaches those who desire to start their own businesses how to set up, manage and make their ventures profitable. For those with existing businesses, it links them to market, additional capital, improvement in operations, supply chain management and others. This training is provided by the Department of Trade and Industry, Department of Agriculture, state universities, local government units, NGOs and private organizations.

**Gender responsive dimension.** Since MDWs have limited knowledge in business management and have small capital, they are assisted in setting up cooperatives and social enterprises owned and managed by migrants and their relatives. Majority of the MDWs are interested in setting up coffee shops and production and processing different products so the project linked them to various consultants and were mentored in setting up and managing the House of Ekolife as a social enterprise involved in coffee, cacao, coconut based products from production to

marketing. This has led to the concept of social franchising of Eh Kape coffee bar to provide the training and mentoring needed by the MDWs in operating a coffee business enterprise.

The success of the step-ladder training program lies in the accessibility and coordination of the different service providers to ensure that the different interventions build on each other and complement the various trainings being offered to the MDWs and families. The step-ladder training and mentoring program is the core program of the Go Earn Achieve Return Uplift Philippine (GEAR UP), the reintegration pathway for the MDWs and their families jointly implemented by OWWA-NRCO, Atikha and other agencies.

To date, the step ladder program has reached a significant number of MDWs in Hong Kong and Singapore and their relatives in the Philippines. Table 1 shows the total number of participants reached by the Step-Ladder Training Program in Hong Kong, Singapore and the four regions in the Philippines.

**Table 1. Participants of the Different Trainings of the Step-Ladder Program by Region and Country**

| Region       | Level 1     | Level 2     | Level 3     | Level 4     | Level 5    | Total        | Percent-age |
|--------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|------------|--------------|-------------|
| Region III   | 789         | 215         | 363         | 555         | 247        | 2169         | 13.79%      |
| Region IV-A  | 1732        | 575         | 1412        | 369         | 240        | 4328         | 27.52%      |
| Region V     | 773         | 524         | 457         |             |            | 1754         | 11.15%      |
| Region VI    | 1488        | 437         | 560         | 298         | 256        | 3039         | 19.32%      |
| HK           | 894         | 356         | 573         | 624         | 136        | 2583         | 16.42%      |
| SG           | 603         | 432         | 359         | 419         | 41         | 1854         | 11.79%      |
| <b>Total</b> | <b>6279</b> | <b>2539</b> | <b>3724</b> | <b>2265</b> | <b>920</b> | <b>15727</b> | <b>100%</b> |

Source: Evaluation of the 'Coming Home: Reintegration Program for Domestic Workers in Hong Kong and Singapore to the Philippines' (2019), pp. 44-45.

Participating in the Step-Ladder Training and Mentoring Program have strengthened the MDWs resolve to successfully return to the Philippines and to be with their families at the soonest possible time. Some of them have happily returned to the Philippines after making enough savings and investments and after threshing out problems with their spouses and children.

## Parallel Work on Both Sides of the Migration Corridor

The effectiveness and impact of the reintegration services are oftentimes not felt by migrants because these are only accessible in the Philippines and to the families and migrant returnees. When reintegration services are provided when the migrant is already back in the Philippines, then they are already too late and ineffective. Reintegration services should be provided starting from the pre-departure phase of migration (for prospective migrants) to on-site phase (for migrants in destination countries and their families in the Philippines) to return phase of migration (for migrant returnees).

The Coming Home Project which sought reintegration preparedness was innovative because it implemented interventions for both migrants and their families from pre-departure, on-site to return phases of migration. As early as 2002, the First Conference on OFW Reintegration has already identified the need for a Comprehensive OFW Reintegration Program (CORP) that should encompass all the phases of migration (Dizon-Anonuevo and Anonuevo, 2002). There were efforts by government agencies to provide services to migrants from pre-departure, on-site and return phases but these were uncoordinated and not integrated in a single reintegration program. In addition, the migration corridor approach was not implemented.

Migration corridor refers to the migration flow and route that involves a country of origin and country of destination. Migration corridor as used by

Atikha not only refers to the country level but also at the local level (provincial level). Thus, for the Coming Home Project, a migration corridor refers to a country of destination and a province of origin of migrants. “The province of origin is the focal area of intervention because: 1) Migrants have strong affinity to their provinces of origin and are expected to return eventually, make investments and contribute towards the development of their own communities, towns, and provinces; 2) Economic, social and technical services of government agencies, civil society organizations and the private sector are more accessible to migrants and their families at the provincial level” (Dizon-Añonuevo, Añonuevo and Peñas, 2018, p. 25).

The migration corridor approach entails parallel and simultaneous actions among migrants in destination country and migrant families in the migrant-province of origin. The approach means also engaging various organizations that provide economic and social interventions and services in both the destination country and province of origin. The migration corridor approach is an important element in implementing a reintegration preparedness program because the approach does the following:

- prepares the various economic, social and technical services provided by service providers in the origin provinces where the migrants will return to and in the destination country;
- fosters cooperation between migration stakeholders in destination country and province of origin in implementing concrete programs
- links migrants and relatives to services, investment and business opportunities in their own provinces of origin
- strengthens simultaneously the resolve of both migrants and their families to save, invest and engage in business, secure employment and prepare for successful reintegration.

The migration corridor approach seeks to understand the reintegration needs of migrants and their families. What are their characteristics, needs

and interests? What are their capacities in saving, investing and engaging in business? What are to be developed among them to enable them to successfully return and reintegrate?

The following information were gathered during the environment scanning in Hong Kong and Singapore as well as in the origin provinces of MDWs:

- **Countries of destination of MDWs** (to identify the migration corridors)
- **Occupation of MDWs and relatives** (to determine their capacity to save, invest and engage in business)
- **Living and working conditions of MDWs** (to understand factors that hinder/facilitate their capacity to save, invest and engage in business)
- **Organization and social network** (to identify individuals and organizations that can be champions and advocacy partners in promoting financial education, saving, investment and entrepreneurship)
- **Borrowing, saving and investing behaviors of MDWs and families** (to identify current attitudes and practices)
- **Entrepreneurship of MDWs and families** (to learn about existing enterprises, failures and successes in business, innovations, skills and interest to engage in businesses in their provinces of origin)

Partner local governments, cooperatives and other local migration stakeholders were brought to Hong Kong and Singapore to meet the MDWs coming from the provinces. The local government units learned about the situation and needs of the MDWs and were given the opportunity to present their services, investment and business opportunities in their areas through a Market Place Event specifically organized for them. The migrant leaders were linked to the migration and development focal persons of the local government of the province where they come from.

The migration corridor approach ensures that both the migrants and their families are prepared for the eventual reintegration of MDWs in the Philippines. MDWs in Hong Kong and Singapore, migrant spouses and other relatives in the provinces were engaged to undergo the same step-ladder education and training program. The children of migrants were also reached through modular activities, summer camps and discussions of migration topics incorporated in the elementary and high school curricula. These were conducted by migration and development teacher coordinators in different schools.

The simultaneous trainings of migrants and members of their families seek to inculcate in them the necessary mind sets, values, attitudes and important knowledge and skills in saving, investing and engagement in business and in family management. The approach ensures that all members of the family are in sync in terms of the goals for migration and in preparing for a successful return migration to the Philippines. Furthermore, work in the provinces where migrants will eventually return seeks to provide opportunities and services to the returning migrants.

Ms. Lori Brunio, Chairperson of Pinoy WISE-Hong Kong explains how the Coming Home Project differs with the other programs in Hong Kong: “The difference of this program from other programs here in Hong Kong is that it has done interventions with families in the Philippines. It links us migrants and our families with government and private agencies that provide us assistance including access to financial services. The program involves migrants in Hong Kong through Pinoy WISE which trains us migrants how to handle our families and how family members should support each other. Some of my fellow domestic helpers have permanently returned to the Philippines and have practiced what they have learned from the trainings. Another good thing about the program is that Atikha is in partnership with local governments and with responsible agencies on reintegration like OWWA and NRCO.”

Ms. Virsie Tamayo, OWWA Welfare Officer in Hong Kong reiterated the importance of the corridor approach and the need to work among the families of migrants: “Hindi lang naman dapat savings, investments ang kailangan sa reintegration. Dapat pati ang mga pamilyang naiwan ay

naayos. To be successful, reintegration must have a holistic approach. Di lang naman ang OFW dapat pag-usapan dapat pati yung pamilya ay maihanda.” (Reintegration should not be all about savings and investments of OFWs. It is important that the family that OFWs will return to is also doing fine. Reintegration must have a holistic approach. We should prepare not only the OFWs but also their families.)

The Coming Home project worked also among the children of migrants. Migrant children had to be reached, their attitudes and behaviors formed and changed and be made ready for the return of their migrant mothers and/or parents.

## **Migrants as Trainers and Mentors of Fellow Migrants**

During the environment scanning for the Coming Home Project, the idea was to tap for the project NGOs and organizations based in Hong Kong and Singapore that implement various programs for the MDWs. We have interviewed migrant leaders and migration stakeholders and realized that only few organizations promoted saving, investing and entrepreneurship. Many migrant organizations are into social, cultural, skills training, religious and sports activities. In the Philippines, OWWA and some local government units are involved in organizing migrant families into OFW Family Circles. These family circles are largely composed of migrant returnees who have been in the Philippines for more than five years. Most of the activities of these family circles revolve around welfare support services that are provided by government agencies. There was an obvious need for more organizations of migrants and their families that could advocate for financial literacy, savings, investment, entrepreneurship and reintegration preparedness.

Atikha designed a training and mentoring program for MDW leaders and relatives and capacitated selected leaders to become trainers of the different trainings, and mentors of fellow MDWs and relatives. They have proven to be effective conduits of Atikha in implementing the Coming Home Project.

The active participants bonded themselves together and formed the Pinoy WISE chapters in Hong Kong and Singapore. Pinoy WISE proved to be an effective partner of Atikha. More than that, a Pinoy WISE chapter has become a self-help group, a network of friends that encourages and reinforces one another in pursuit of individual savings, investment and reintegration goals, and an advocacy group that reaches out and influences fellow MDWs.

Organizing Pinoy WISE as a network of advocates of financial literacy, savings, investments and entrepreneurship among migrants and their families is important because:

There is a need for OFWs and migrant families to form social networks that can serve as self-help groups to provide the support mechanism for the attainment of their goals for migration. After the financial literacy training, participants are eager to change their behaviors and start saving and investing. However, after three to six months, they are confronted again by problems like the financial dependency of families and other challenges that prevent the achievement of their migration goals. The Pinoy WISE serve as self-help group that encourages migrants to pursue their financial goals. Migrants also get a support network that can link them with partners who can provide the necessary economic and psychosocial assistance.

An organization of Pinoy WISE that has the capacity for training and mentoring serves as an effective delivery mechanism for training and enterprise development. Pinoy WISE leaders are the best trainers on financial literacy and the best counselors of fellow migrants and migrant relatives on family and financial management and reintegration because their knowledge and skills come from personal experiences.

Wilma Padura of Pinoy WISE-Hong Kong said: “In Pinoy WISE friendships are established. We reinforce one another. We are also motivated to share what

we have learned. We were positively affected by GEAR UP so we wanted to pay it forward; we wanted other OFWs to benefit also. Commitment must come from the heart. It became my advocacy since then.”

## Capacity Building and Multi-Stakeholder Partnership

We have observed through our long years of work in migration and reintegration that the gaps in the services were oftentimes not due to lack of policies but the inability to translate the policies into action. The program staff expected to implement the program were not provided with the proper training to enable them to implement the policies. Such is also the case for delivering reintegration preparedness services.

We realized that when we advocate for the strengthening of reintegration services, we needed to capacitate the largest number of service providers to implement a reintegration preparedness program. Hence, Atikha conducted consultations and meetings with leaders of migrant associations, Philippine Embassy officials and NGOs in Hong Kong and Singapore, and with organizations of migrant families in the different provinces, key officials of provincial and city governments, national government agencies and private institutions. In these consultations and meetings, Atikha presented the Coming Home Project and solicited support for its implementation.

Migrant organizations and associations of migrant families warmly received the project for it sought to address their needs as migrants and as migrant families. National and local government agencies and those in the private sector welcomed the project for they saw that their participation in the project would also lead to the fulfillment of their own mandate, responsibilities or advocacies. For instance, the OWWA and NRCO supported the program because part of its mandate is to prepare the migrants for their reintegration. The Department of Agriculture supported the investment fora in Hong Kong and in the provinces as well as the agri-business trainings because part of their mandate is to promote agribusiness and support those

interested to engage in agribusiness. Part of the mandate of the Public Employment Service Office (PESO) is to provide training for OFWs and their families, hence, the Iloilo Provincial PESO Head and OFW Focal Person readily welcomed the implementation of the project in the province.

The warm reception of the different organizations and institutions resulted in the different MOAs forged by Atikha with them. The MOAs contain the legal mandate of the different parties, their commitment to partner and work together and enumerated the services that they were to provide for the OFWs and their families. Atikha had a MOA with OWWA NRCO, LGUs and Department of Education with regards to the implementation of the Coming Home Project. Part of the responsibility of Atikha was to train trainers to be able to implement the gender responsive reintegration preparedness program. Atikha has conducted four trainings of trainers for: 1) Pre-Migration Orientation Seminar; 2) Family and Income Management Training; 3) Reintegration Planning and Counseling; 4) Teachers Training for School-Based Program. These trainings of trainers were conducted because they were needed to provide reintegration preparedness services to a wide number of the project's beneficiaries.

Personnel of provincial and city governments in Tarlac, Batangas, Iloilo, Bicol, and Quezon and of national agencies like OWWA-NRCO were trained. Teachers in elementary and high schools in the provinces of Batangas, Tarlac and Quezon were trained to conduct modular activities for migrant school children and/or to integrate the topic of overseas migration in the teaching of specific subjects in their schools. Migrant leaders in Hong Kong and Singapore were also trained as trainers and mentors.

The presence of multi-stakeholder partnership structures like the Committees on Migration and Development (CMD) were also critical in the implementation of reintegration preparedness initiatives. The CMD committees are regional or provincial structures composed of sub-national and local government agencies, NGOs, migrant and family organizations and private sector that implement programs and services for migrants and families. These organizational structures exist in Region IV-A, Region V and Region VI in the Philippines, regions with high concentration of migrants.

These structures are coordinated by the National Economic Development Authority (NEDA) which has the mandate to coordinate various initiatives at the national and regional levels.

Atikha actively participated in the Committees on Migration and Development and advocated for the implementation of the GEAR UP. The implementation of the school-based program of the Department of Education was facilitated by the CMD Region IV-A. The GEAR UP Award was also endorsed by the CMD Region IV-A and the local governments provided resources for the search and the awarding of domestic workers and family members who have successfully prepared for reintegration. Once a program is endorsed by the CMD, a sense of ownership of the initiative is forged and coordination of different agencies towards its implementation is facilitated.

PinoyWISE, different provincial and local governments, national government and private agencies put a stake in the program. They have poured in their time, provided their acquired skills as trainers and mentors, and offered their services and resources to the roll-out of the key trainings of the step-ladder program. They have claimed ownership of reintegration preparedness program. They have worked hard to attain the objective of preparing as many migrants to successfully return to the Philippines.

## Use of Social Media and ICT

We had to master the use of social media and information and communication technology (ICT) to be able to reach the widest number of migrants and families. Atikha used the social media and ICT to communicate, train, mentor and efficiently coordinate work in Hong Kong and Singapore and in the four regions in the Philippines. We used Pinoy WISE FB Page, Facebook Messenger and Zoom for information, meetings and mentoring. Atikha has developed the Pinoy WISE mobile and web application to deliver the Family and Income Management Training on-line. It has also initiated the Pinoy WISE Internet TV (Pinoy WISE iTV) to continuously update, inform and educate Pinoy WISE members.

### **Pinoy WISE FB Page and Facebook Messenger Chat**

Atikha assisted in the development of the Pinoy WISE FB Page to serve as the vehicle for informing migrants and relatives on the various trainings being conducted in the different regions as well as in the Hong Kong and Singapore. Each Pinoy WISE Chapter created its own Pinoy WISE Chapter Facebook Page to communicate with its members. The different training activities and chapter meetings were posted on the FB page. Pinoy WISE leaders and officers also created their own FB Messenger Chat Groups to coordinate activities, and for tasking and mentoring. Atikha participated in the FB Page and FB Messenger Chat Group for coordination and mentoring.

### **Pinoy WISE Itv**

Atikha in partnership with Pinoy WISE Singapore and Hong Kong developed a web-based TV program called Pinoy WISE internet TV or PinoyWISE iTV. Pinoy WISE iTV discussed information about savings, nurturing family relations, investment and business opportunities. It also showcased the good practices pertaining to reintegration by individual overseas Filipinos and their families including their children. Pinoy WISE iTV was shown through the Pinoy WISE Facebook Page video section and on YouTube. To engage the youth in sharing good practices via Pinoy WISE iTV, a Seminar on Vlogging was conducted. Vlogging refers to the practice of posting short videos on line. The children were taught how to develop scripts, how to take videos and how to upload them. The finished videos that showcased the change stories of children of migrants were used as information materials. The Pinoy WISE Youth became a partner of Atikha in developing materials for the Pinoy WISE iTV.

### **Pinoy WISE Mobile Application and Pinoy WISE Web-Based Training**

Atikha developed learning materials for the Family and Income Management Training (FIMT) for overseas Filipinos and their families. These were used in the Pinoy WISE mobile application and web-based training. The training program has taken all the key lessons of FIMT and developed videos, quizzes and other learning materials to ensure the effectiveness of the mobile and web-based training. It also integrated an on-line calculator to help migrants estimate the monthly savings that they need to reach their goals. The mobile and web-based trainings were designed to augment the face to face training being conducted by the different partners of Atikha. The Pinoy WISE Web-Based Training can be viewed at [www.pinoywiseinternational.org](http://www.pinoywiseinternational.org).

### **Web-Based Meetings and Investment and Business Forum**

Atikha implemented an effective and cost-efficient way for conducting meetings. It used the Zoom, an application capable of hosting more than 50 participants in a web meeting. Atikha used the Zoom Conference for meetings with Pinoy WISE officers in Hong Kong and Singapore. This technology was also used in conducting a Market Place Event. Due to the lack of funding, some local government partners were unable to visit Hong Kong and Singapore. The Zoom Conference was used in conducting the investment forum in Singapore that involved government officials from Region VI-Western Visayas. Among the speakers were Governor Esteban Contreras of Capiz, who spoke from his home and shared his program for migrants and families. The Iloilo Province PESO Officer, Mr. Francisco Heler, Jr. discussed the initiatives that can be tapped by the MDWs in Singapore and their families in the province, from his office in Iloilo City. This technology enabled local players from the LGUs, private sector and NGOs with no sufficient funds to travel to destination countries to promote their services, investment and business opportunities with migrants.

## **Innovative Interventions Make Successful Reintegration Easier**

Characteristics and situations of migrants will vary from time to time. That will be true not only for Filipino MDWs but also for all OFWs. We must always pay attention to these changing characteristics and circumstances. From such an understanding, the needs of migrants will be identified and the necessary interventions can be implemented. These are things that we need to continuously make if we are to be of effective help for the migrants' cherished dream of reuniting with their families and successfully reintegrating to their home country, the Philippines.

It will take our firm commitment and resolve to put an end to the sad migration tales and failed reintegration stories of MDWs and all other OFWs. We must continue to develop innovative programs and effective interventions towards this end. We must rally numerous partners to get involved in enhancing the reintegration preparedness of Filipino migrants. We must strengthen the human agency of OFWs by continuously capacitating and empowering them.

We should commit ourselves to sustain what the Coming Home Project has done and achieved. We are expected by Filipino migrants and their families to be nothing less than responsible and capable partners in their reintegration undertaking. We should continuously innovate and intervene. We should make it easier for them to successfully return and reintegrate to the Philippines.

## ***“Pamilya ang dahilan ng pag-alis, pamilya rin ang dahilan sa pagbabalik”: Filipino Families Overcoming the Challenges of Migration***

*Estrella Dizon-Añonuevo*

**T**he Filipino families' stability and well-being are continuously being challenged by overseas migration. Some families have coped and adjusted well with the dramatic changes set forth by migration of some family members. Other families have not fared well and suffered from the consequences. Many migrant families need to be helped.

We should make sure that the following statement will be fully realized: “Pamilya ang dahilan ng pag-alis, pamilya rin ang dahilan sa pagbalik” (People migrate for their own families' benefit and migrants will return for the sake of their families). Here lies the intent of the Coming Home Project—capacitate migrant domestic workers to effectively manage their families, economically secure themselves and their families and prepare them for their eventual permanent return to the Philippines and unification with their families.

## Confronting and Resolving Family Problems

The case of Mary Ann Pascual and her family illustrate the problems faced by a migrant family and how interventions of the Coming Home Project have helped resolve those problems.

Mary Ann Pascual, 36 years old, works as a domestic worker for nine years now in Singapore. She is married and has two children. She hailed from the province of Iloilo. Like many other OFWs, Meann as she is fondly called, went to Singapore to earn a living for her family and secure the education of her children. It was a difficult decision to work in Singapore for she had to leave her very young children.

After four years of hard work, of enduring homesickness, and abuse and insults from some of her employers, Meann came home to visit her family in Iloilo. She hoped to see the 'initial fruits of her own labor' in the furniture and appliances that her husband supposedly bought and the extra money that she had sent him to save. She was distraught to find out that there were no appliances and furniture, and her husband had not saved a single centavo from what she sent. Her husband had squandered all that he had sent!

Extremely disappointed and mindless of what to do to turn things around for her family, Me Ann came back to work in Singapore. After some hesitations to take part, she finally attended the Pinoy WISE's Family and Income Management Training. It was a worthwhile decision that changed her life and that of her family. Meann said: "What I learned from the training was how to value the money that I earned and how to teach my own family how to save. I learned in the training that we should involve our family and share our real situation and communicate our feelings so that they will appreciate the hard work and value the money that we send them".

The training has emboldened Mary Ann to confront her husband about his capricious ways and to take actions to effectively manage the family's finances. She narrated: "At first it was difficult to discuss financial matters with my husband. Of course, he is a man and it hurts his ego to discuss about money matters. I told him how difficult my life was in Singapore. I cried and poured out my emotions and shared with him the difficulties that I had with my employer. I told him that there was not a day that passed without me crying because my employer was very strict and hard on me. I impressed upon him that I endured all the hardships and insults just to provide a better future for our family."

Meann pleaded to her husband for him to change his ways. She also took actions. She sent only the amount of money that her husband and children needed. She made them live with the budget that she set. She also monitored the expenses incurred by her husband. It took some time but Meann's persistent pleas to her husband and actions paid off. PJ, her husband shared: "Before I was fond of going out and drinking alcohol with my friends. I also did not have a regular job. Now, I work and stay at home with my children. I do not go out anymore. I changed because I realized the difficult situation of my wife abroad and learned to value her sacrifices." JP now works in their farm, manages the convenience store and drives his tricycle as service vehicle for students. He said he now maintains a healthy communication with his wife. He also now shares in the responsibility of taking care of their children.

The training also taught Me Ann not only about managing finances but also the importance of family relations. She narrated: "My children were not that close to me because when I left, the youngest was one-year old and the elder one was four years of age, so they did not really know me. There was still no Skype then and my children could not communicate with me. They did not want to approach me when I came home. I mended my relationships with my children. I realized what they wanted me to do. They wanted me to play with them. They wanted to be child again. When we talk via Skype, we play and joke at each other." Me Ann's children now

appreciates her as their mother and the hard work and life that she had to endure in Singapore. Pia, Me Ann's 10-year-old daughter said: "I study very hard so that I can repay the sacrifices of my mother who is working abroad." Pia is an honor student in her school.

Meann plans to come home for good in the next three years. Her husband and children are eagerly waiting for her to be with them and lead a good life in Iloilo.

The sad experiences of Meann and her family are shared by many other migrant families. But the changes and actions that she took for her family aided by the things that she had learned from the trainings and the changes that her husband and children have made were exceptional. Other migrant families continue to face challenges and problems caused by overseas migration.

## Challenges of Filipino Migrant Families

Two characteristics of a Filipino migrant family differentiates it from a non-migrant family, prolonged separation of its members and reliance on remittances of the family members left behind. When not managed well, separation of families and reliance on remittances can have a negative impact on migrant families.

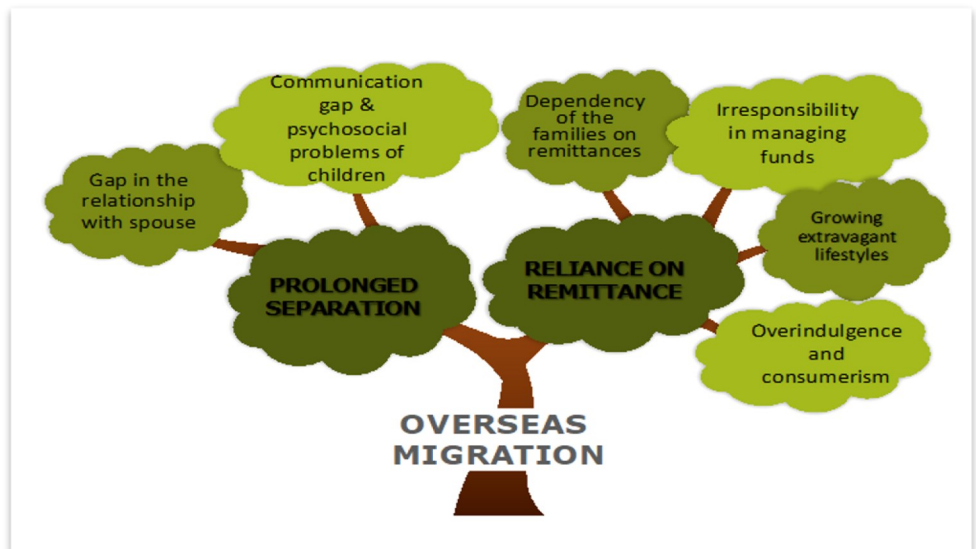
In addition, the feminization of migration has also posed a challenge on migrant families. It has caused role shift between men and women and posed some difficulties especially on men accustomed to performing the masculine, leading, decision-maker and main bread winner roles in the family. On the other hand, women migrants continuously suffer psychologically from being unable to perform their motherly role and seeks to appease themselves by pampering their children.

### Problems caused by separation and reliance on remittances

Prolonged physical separation of families and reliance on migrant remittances could have adverse effects on migrant Filipino families. Figure 3 illustrates the problems that could emanate from these two distinct characteristics of migrant families.

The prolonged separation when not managed properly could lead to communication gap between migrant parents and children and to other psychosocial problems of children caused by the absence of their parents. Prolonged separation could lead to a relationship gap between spouses. These gaps in communication and relationships could further lead to estrangement of relationships or worse, to marital and family break-up.

Figure 4. Challenges of Filipino Migrant Families



Reliance on remittances of families could lead to over-dependency of families on the money sent to them so much so that many relatives stopped working and contributing to the family income. Some families have not managed the remittances well and succumbed to extravagant lifestyle.

### **Feminization of migration and difficulties in handling the role shift**

The feminization of migration has altered traditional Filipino family arrangements. The situation in which the woman works abroad and earns substantially for the family and her physical absence as wife and mother have resulted to role shifts in the family.

In the Philippines, the women are traditionally expected to assume the nurturing role while men are expected to be the main breadwinner for the family. From the traditional role of taking care of the family, the migrant women have become the main breadwinner of their families (Añonuevo in Dizon-Añonuevo & Añonuevo, 2002).

Who assumes the role of taking care of the family? Oftentimes, husbands left behind are unwilling and unprepared to take care of the family. Caretakers, usually female family members such as grandmothers, aunts or eldest daughters, take charge of the children and manage the family finances and the household.

The shift of the breadwinner role from husbands to wives has diminished the role of husbands in decision-making especially in matters involving money. One would expect that they would compensate for the 'diminished role' by assuming the nurturing responsibilities but many of them did not. Many of the husbands left-behind refused to take on the nurturing role because they were not socialized to perform the role and for many, taking on such 'feminine task' diminishes their self-image of being "tunay na lalaki" (real man) (Añonuevo & Estopace in Dizon-Añonuevo & Añonuevo, 2002).

Most migrant women also fail to communicate their changing expectations to their husbands. That further worsens the situation and would not help in changing the ways and attitudes of their husbands. Gap in communication and unexpressed expectations among couples, difficulties in dealing with role shifts brought about by migration pose a toll in relationships and could lead to marital problems and worst, break-ups. In Hong Kong, Pinoy WISE leaders noted that more than 50% of the Filipino domestic workers are already separated from their spouses.

### **Migrant women's guilt feelings and dependency of families**

Migrant women feel guilty for being unable to perform their role as wife and mother. They try to assuage this negative feeling by showering their husbands and children with gifts and succumbing to their wishes. They find it difficult to say "No" to their relatives' wishes even to the most capricious ones. Many of them take on additional jobs on their days off and sacrifice their own needs and health conditions.

The strong sense of guilt of migrant women in relation to other family members could be understood on how women in Filipino society are socialized. Arellano-Carandang wrote: "In the Filipino family, the female members are taught to be "tagasalo" (a person who takes over) early in life. They are expected to take care of household matters while the boys are allowed to play outside the house, so as not to get in the way. Starting from physical and concrete tasks, the female "tagasalo" moves on to take care of family members and parents emotionally. Somewhere in the development of her self-concept, the "tagasalo" is made to feel responsible for other people's feelings as well. A large part of her self-concept becomes dependent on her ability to please others in the family network. Her feeling of self-worth is tied up with the ability to make others happy. Because this begins at the early stages of development and is also at the level of the developing self, "pananalo" eventually becomes second nature and goes deeply in the unconscious vein. Since it is further reinforced strongly by society, the role fits very smoothly and unquestioningly, for the inner need happens to be congruent with external expectations" (Añonuevo & Estopace in Dizon-Añonuevo & Añonuevo, 2002, p. 92).

Migrant women's readily giving in to the wishes and demands of the family left behind could have dire consequences. Many members of MDW families pin their hopes for a better life on the family member who works abroad. Unfortunately, these family members who were used to migrant women's giving in, have equated material things as the expressions of the migrant women's love and affection for them. That would explain their unceasing

demands for “pasalubong” (gifts from abroad) and for more remittances. Gradually, the families expect migrant women to heed all their demands and have become totally dependent on what they could send them. Making matters worse, migrant women hide from their families the difficulties that they face as migrant workers. That creates the wrong impression among families that money is easily earned and work is not that difficult abroad. Knowing less of the hard work and difficulties of their migrant relatives, families mindlessly and unwisely spend what were sent to them and have become totally dependent on migrant earnings.

## Impact of Gender-Responsive Interventions on MDW Families

From the experiences of successful Filipino migrant returnees, Añonuevo (2019) derived various meanings attached by returnees to successful return. The successful Filipino migrant returnees defined successful return (among the seven derived definitions) as self-fulfillment and satisfaction derived from their accomplishments upon return to the Philippines. These accomplishments that they “referred to which many other migrants have not attained upon return are 1) intact family and responsible children (i.e. good marriage and/or unproblematic children) even after long years of separation with them and 2) secured sources of income that provide at the minimum, a decent life for the family.

For women migrants, what was dominant was the conception that successful return is not essentially material nor financial success. (Some of the domestic workers went home to the Philippines without much savings and investments because all their earnings were spent for their children’s college education.) Successful return to them meant having a good, happy, worry-free and comfortable life (not necessarily affluent) with their children or family. Success is also pride in having raised responsible, and

accomplished children despite years of physical separation with them. They spoke of ‘success ng mga anak ko ang aking success’ (the success of my children is what constitute my own success)” (Añonuevo, 2019, p. 167).

The same study of Añonuevo also identified responsible and supportive family members as one of the keys to the successful return of Filipino migrant workers. Without responsible and supportive wife/husband and children, successful return is unimaginable. These findings also resonate with Atikha’s experiences with migrant families. Clearly an intact family, whose members share family responsibilities and contribute to family’s well-being, is the key to successful migrant reintegration.

The well-being of the whole family as the main reason for migration and at the same time, the notion of a responsible and supportive family as the key to successful reintegration are incorporated in the training modules of Atikha especially in the Pre-Migration Orientation Seminar and the Family and Income Management Training. They are also integrated in the following training modules for migrant youths and children: Understanding Migration Realities, Savings Consciousness and Gender Sensitivity. To reach all members of the migrant families, the Coming Home Project conducted parallel trainings among MDWs in Hong Kong and Singapore and their relatives including their children in selected regions in the Philippines.

## Effects of Trainings on Communication and Family Relations

Despite the use of information and communication technology, communication gaps within migrant families remain. It is not how easy and how frequent one communicates but the quality of communication that matters. When MDWs refuse to share their work and life experiences in Hong Kong and Singapore and their spouses and children hide what they face in the Philippines, real communication does not exist between them and communication gaps will persist in migrant families.

Atikha's Family and Income Management Training (FIMT) discusses the need for quality communication and an understanding of the real situation of the migrant as well as of the family back home. The module entitled Understanding Migration Realities discusses the difficult working and living conditions of MDWs. The experiences of many MDWs of having to endure long working hours, victimized by verbal, physical and at times even sexual abuse of employers, publicly degraded as foreign domestic workers are tackled among migrant relative and children participants. On the other hand, the situation and problems of families left behind are discussed among MDW participants. The trainings underscored that the root cause of communication gap that persists among families is the lack of understanding of the situation of migrants as well as that of the husbands and children left behind.

The module on Positive and Negative Impact of Migration discusses both the positive and adverse consequences of migration. It talks of positive effects like the ability of the family to send children to school, have a new house and provide for its basic needs. But it also talks of possible social costs accruing from separation like problems in communication gap, estranged relationships in families and others. It talks of the need to minimize the social costs of migration and maximize the positive gains of migration to the families.

The FIMT balances the overwhelming positive view of the relatives on migration and provides them with realistic view of the situation of the

migrants abroad. For MDWs, the training underlines the need for them to take extra effort in communicating their situation and their feelings with their families. It also explains the psychosocial impact of long-term separation on children, spouse and other members of the family. The training provides them strategies and ways, culled from the experiences of other OFWs, in communicating and relating with family members.

## Understanding of migrant and family's situation and better communication

Changes on the views of migrant relatives and children about the situation of MDWs were noticeable after the trainings. They had a better understanding of the situation of their family members abroad. Changes in the appreciation of relatives especially among husbands and children of the MDWs' life and work conditions were evident in some of interviews with family members.

Jerry, husband of a MDW shared his realization after attending the trainings: "Kaya ang karanasan ng OFW talagang mahirap... Kasi dati pag sinabing OFW, pagkita ng mga tao sa iyo akala nila mayaman kayo, mali sila. Maling- mali." (OFWs experience a lot of difficulties. People think that OFWs are rich but they are mistaken. They are totally wrong.) Jose, another husband of an MDW in Singapore said: "Natutunan ko kung paano magbudget at maingatan ang pinaghirapang padala ng misis ko." (I learned how to value and budget the hard-earned remittances that I received from my wife.)

The children also shared their realization about the work of their parents abroad. Mary, a daughter of an MDW stated: "Huwag balewalain ang pagsasakripisyo ng magulang sa ibang bansa" (We should not take for granted the sacrifices of our parents abroad.) Jay, son of a migrant working in Singapore similarly uttered: "Hindi madali ang pagsasakripisyong ginagawa ng mga magulang namin" (The sacrifices made by our parents abroad are not easy to do.)

The MDWs in Hong Kong and Singapore also realized that they lack understanding of the situation of their relatives and children in the Philippines. They appreciated the communication strategies provided by the training.

Andi Mendoza, a MDW in Hong Kong confessed that she usually had bad temper when talking with her daughter. The quality of communication before between them was poor. Earlier, she compensated her absence by sending her daughter material things or money. Her daughter then saw her as a mere ‘remittance provider’ and not a mother she could talk to. That damaged their relationship. After the trainings, Andi slowly reached out to her and talked to her more often. She slowly mended her relationship with her daughter. She said she owe a lot from the Pinoy WISE/ GEAR UP trainings.

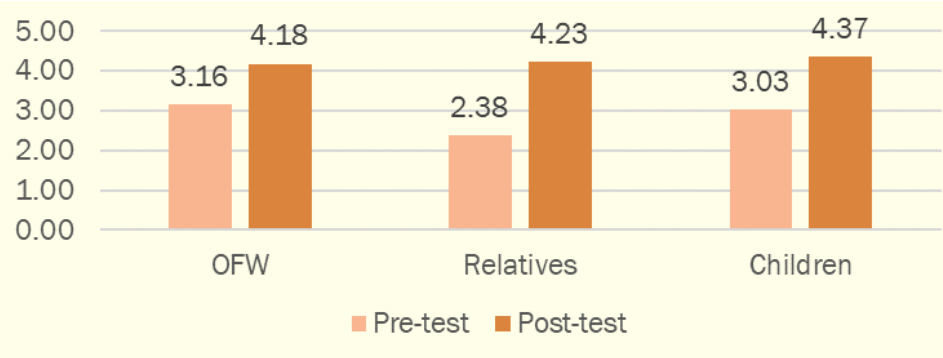
Yolanda Bermas, a Pinoy WISE coordinator and trainer successfully transformed her relationship with her teen-aged daughter, Jonna Mae from being an estranged relationship to a relationship akin to being ‘as close as best friends’. Jonna Mae was still young when Yolanda left her. The separation also led to a gap in communication between them. Through the trainings, Yolanda learned how to deal well with her daughter. She brought her daughter to attend one of the trainings in Singapore. At first, Jonna Mae thought that her presence in the training was just to help her mother facilitate by her providing technical assistance. After the training, the two of them ‘were on the same page’, as manner of saying. Jonna Mae now appreciates the value of her mother’s work and sacrifices. Yolanda learned how to communicate with her teenage daughter. They now plan together what to do upon Yolanda’s return to the Philippines. Moreover, Jonna Mae was inspired by the volunteerism of her mother that she also intends to be actively involved as a youth advocate for migration and development.

MDWs learned to understand why their children are having difficulties in relating with them. Now, they consciously and regularly communicate with their children and their spouses. Understanding of the situation of the migrants and the family and open communication within migrant families significantly improved migrant-spouse, migrant-children, migrant-relatives’ relationships.

Improved family relationships

The self-evaluation survey and interviews with MDWs and families showed how the program changed and transformed migrant family relationships. MDWs, relatives and children who participated in the survey conducted in Hong Kong and Singapore and in the provinces in the Philippines indicated that relations within their families have improved significantly after the trainings that they have attended.

Figure 5. Family Relationships Before and After the Trainings



Source: Evaluation of the ‘Coming Home: Reintegration Program for Domestic Workers in Hong Kong and Singapore to the Philippines’ (2019), p. 80.

With the six-point-scale used to measure family relationships, the mean scores of MDWs, relatives and children (almost at the midpoint of the scale) suggest that they did not have bad family relationships prior to the training. But all the mean scores increased after the trainings and indicate that family relationships across the three groups further improved after the trainings. This is proof that the trainings have helped the participants to better relate with their other family members.

After the training, migrant children survey respondents stated that they valued their parents more. They also attributed the improved communication with their parents to the trainings that they have attended. Interviewed migrants shared that after the training, they ‘opened up’ and shared with their families their life and work conditions. Because of this, their spouses and children have appreciated the hard work and sacrifices that they have made.

## Addressing Dependency and Promoting Gender Equality and Shared Responsibility

Addressing the family's remittance dependency and promoting gender equality and shared responsibility is critical in attaining the successful return and reintegration of MDWs to the Philippines. Atikha developed training modules that addressed dependency and mainstreamed gender equality and need for shared responsibility in nurturing family relations and managing finances. The trainings are infused with transformative lessons to help change the gender dynamics of the families of MDWs. The training highlighted the need for shared responsibility in housework and goal setting, budgeting, saving, investing and borrowing. Each member of the family is responsible in ensuring that the family goals for migration and reintegration are achieved.

The trainings challenged gender stereotypes with the aim of develop gender-sensitive beneficiaries, who value the contribution of both men and women, boys and girls. It highlighted the equal importance of nurturing and breadwinner roles which could be performed by both men and women. It shared lessons on how to appreciate the financial and other contributions of the family in the Philippines no matter how small they are. The training highlighted the need for MDWs to share their burden with the other members of the family to enable them to set aside something for themselves.

### Ending total dependency of families of MDWs

Dealing with the problem of family dependency is a challenge and an emotional issue for the migrant domestic workers. Finances are emotion-laden concern among Filipinos. A simple question on how the remittances are spent can be misconstrued as an expression of lack of trust of the MDW on her husband, mother or sister. Migrants shared utterances of their relatives: "You ask how I spent the remittances? Don't you trust me? Do not send any more money." "Stop remitting money. You always ask why I have not saved anything."

Lisa Mayor, a MDW and leader of Pinoy WISE said: "You are the enemy of your family if you ask them to work." Indeed, many migrant families have become dependent on their migrant relatives' earnings. Overdependence on migrant remittances is one of the main reasons why most MDWs lack savings and investments.

FIMT addresses the topic of dependency of families. It explains to migrants that they are partly to blame for their families' over-dependency—that they desire to be the "tagasalo" of the family and provide for everything for the family. They pampered their families to a fault.

The training emphasized that dependency of families is a problem that had to end, otherwise, their dream of a successful return to the Philippines will be unattainable. They were taught ways of communicating to their relatives that they have done enough for their families and that their spouses and relatives had to contribute to the family income and share with the expenses. After the trainings, many of the migrants found courage to discuss and resolve problems like unwise use of remittances, joblessness and dependency with the other members of the family.

The training teaches MDWs "When to Say No" and "How to Say No" to their spouses, relatives and children. MDW participants appreciated the strategy of saying "No" to unreasonable demands of their families. Jovy from Hong Kong said: "The training taught me to be true to myself and to others. You should tell the truth and the reality but in a nice way. Before it was difficult

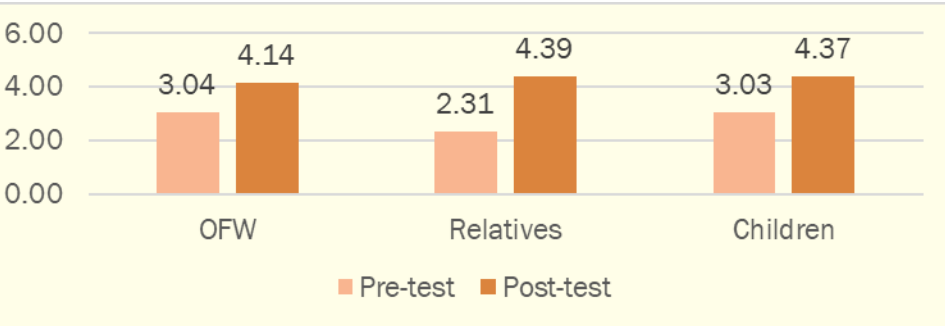
for me to say “No” to relatives’ demands and to those who borrow money from me. I learned that you can say “No” by not giving the whole amount that was being asked. Just give what you can afford and nothing more. Learning how to say “No” was very helpful for me.”

Migrant relative participants and children were taught the value of appreciating the hard work of their migrant relatives and the value of each dollar sent to them. The training managed their expectations on the migrant and made them understand that their continued dependency would have detrimental effect not only on the migrant but also on them individually and as a family.

**Gender Equality and Shared Responsibility in Managing the Family and Its Finances**

Results of the self-evaluation survey among MDWs in Hong Kong and Singapore and migrant relatives and children in the provinces in the Philippines as illustrated in Figure 6 show improved degrees of participation after the training among the three groups of respondents. Around 36% change in participation in matters regarding family matters were recorded for MDWs, 90% for relatives, and 44% for children. These figures indicate that the training had positive effects in changing the views of the participants of the training with regards active participation of all family members in managing family matters.

**Figure 6. Improved Participation Among Family Members Regarding Family Matters**



Source: Evaluation of the ‘Coming Home: Reintegration Program for Domestic Workers in Hong Kong and Singapore to the Philippines’ (2019), p. 84.

Interviews of migrants and relatives revealed that after the training, many of them discussed family budget, monitored the family income and expenses and worked within the set budget of the family. Some husbands who have been unemployed before, consciously have taken jobs or engaged in business to contribute to the family finances. A migrant husband narrated: “Yun nga lang sa pagsave, nalaman ko yung mga wants saka needs. Before hindi ko po alam. Waldas talaga, pagdating ng pera. Ngayon alam ko na, kaya nacocontrol ko... Kaya dapat sa pagbabalik, meron siyang makikita na negosyo sa akin. Yun talagang makikita niya na pag nagnegosyo ako di na siya babalik sa abroad.” (In the training, I have learned the difference between wants and needs. Before, I did not know these things. I spend the money as soon as I received them. Now I know and I can control myself... When she comes home, I will have my own business to show her. When that happens and she sees me having my own business, she will probably not work abroad anymore.”

Many of the migrants shared that they now plan with their families about goal setting and budgeting including the businesses that they wanted to set up and the investments that they wanted to make. Andes Caspe from Hong Kong shared: “Before I used to plan alone, just me, about everything in our family. Now I realized, through the program that I also need to empower my husband and my family. We need to help each other. The responsibility should be shared by the OFW with the whole family. Now we decide together.”

Mylet from Singapore in her interview said: “I used to carry all the burden and responsibility by myself. I did not involve the family in terms of decision-making, budgeting, goal setting and others. I now understand that being responsible does not mean carrying the entire burden. My family also recognized now the importance of open communication between family members and the need for us to develop team work.”

The Coming Home/GEAR UP program was effective in changing mindset of the MDWs and relatives about the value of family shared responsibility not only on finances but also in nurturing the family. Both parents, both men and women are to provide for and nurture the family.

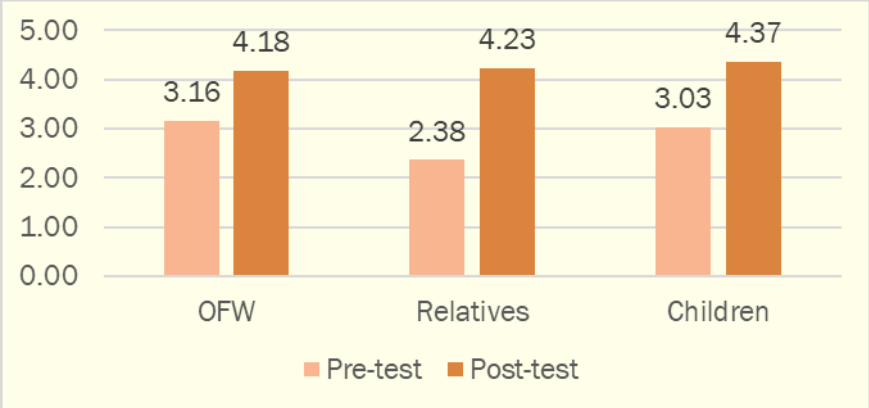
From the interviews, some of the husbands took upon themselves to take care of the children, helped in the household chores and manage the family finances. Leo, a husband of a MDW shared that he accepted the responsibility, realized that he needed to step up and be the ‘mom and dad’ to his children while his wife is working abroad. At first, the children could not cope up with the situation but later were able to adjust. The children consciously helped in the household chores. Leo currently helps other relatives of migrants to cope and accept their responsibilities as a spouse of a MDW and a parent to their children.

**Text Box 1** Improvement of Views on Gender Equality and Participation in Managing Family Finances

Improvement of Views on Gender Equality

A module in the FIMT addresses the question of gender equality. The aim is to develop gender sensitive beneficiaries, who understand the value of the contribution of both men and women. The module challenges gender stereotypes. The program made an impact on the lives of MDWs and families not only in capacitating them to be economically empowered but to develop in them the value of treating men and women as equals.

*Comparison of Views on Gender Equality*



Pretest mean scores were relatively high, with range from 2.38 to 3.18. That could indicate that even prior to the trainings, the women migrants had a positive sense of gender equality. The trainings

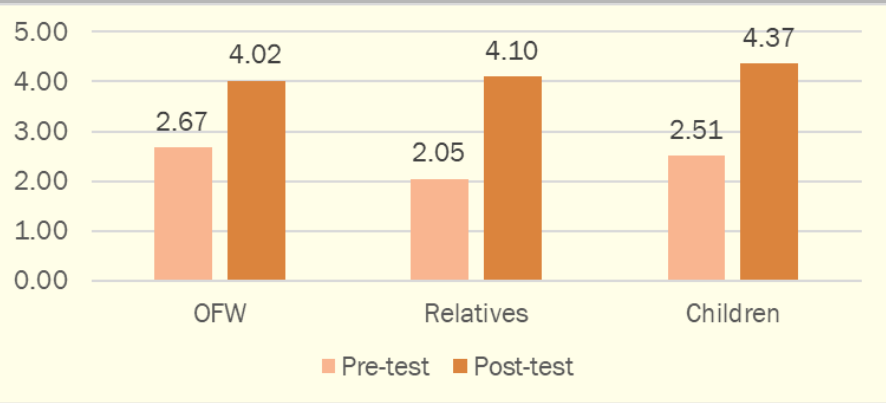
further imbued in them the notion of gender equality with increases in post test scores in all the groups, MDWs, relatives and children alike. Significant positive changes were recorded among them, MDWs with 32%, relatives with 77% and children with 44% positive change with regards gender equality.

Interview of migrants tell stories of migrant women feeling empowered because of the training, and husbands appreciating the abilities and capacities of their MDW wives. Many of the husbands have realized that they could perform the nurturing role in the family by taking good care of children and even doing the household chores.

Improved Participation in Managing Family Finances

When family members share responsibilities in managing family finances, then it would be easy for MDWs to save and plan her return to the Philippines.

*Degrees of Sharing Responsibility Among Family Members Regarding Financial Matters*



The figure shows marked improvement in the perception of respondents, MDWs, relatives and children alike, on their families’ sharing of responsibilities with regards financial concerns of the

family. The three groups of respondents recorded changes before and after the trainings as indicated in the differences of their pretest and post-test mean scores. In fact, the post-test mean scores of all the three groups are high. All recorded a mean score of 4 or higher in a scale where the highest score is 5. These suggest that the trainings effectively promoted the value of shared responsibility in managing family finances among its participants.

Source: Evaluation of the 'Coming Home: Reintegration Program for Domestic Workers in Hong Kong and Singapore to the Philippines' (2019), pp. 83, 86-87.

## Necessity of Individual and Family Interventions for Successful Migration Return

Individual migrants had to be assisted in attaining their migration and reintegration goals. They had to be empowered to take matters on their own hand by capacitating them to manage their own families and their finances. Their own empowerment is important in attaining what they have set for themselves and their families.

But migrant families must also be ready to support their migrant relatives' efforts. Otherwise, all the hard work and sacrifices of MDWs will be in vain. Family interventions are necessary to resolve concerns that make it difficult for migrants to make the most of her migration and prepare for her eventual reintegration in the Philippines. The key to a successful reintegration is enhanced reintegration preparedness of both MDWs and her relatives and children in the Philippines. When family members share responsibilities in managing family and finances, then it would be easy for MDWs to save and plan her return to the Philippines. Successful reintegration can only materialize when the whole family works hand in hand.

Migrants migrate to other countries for their families. They must be able to return home successfully to their families.

## ***“Pauwiin na namin si Mama!”: Adverse Effects of Migration and the School-Based Program for Migrant Children***

*Aileen Constantino Peñas*

I have been with Atikha for more than 17 years. In my nearly two decades of work among migrants and their families, working among and for the children of migrant workers is the closest to my heart. I am proud of the activities and training modules that we in Atikha have developed for them. The children's situation and their everyday challenges and difficulties as children of migrants are too personal to me—for those were all mine too!

I was a migrant child. My mother was a domestic worker in Rome, Italy for 11 years. She left when I was in Grade 6 and that was two months before my elementary graduation. Mom told me that she would work abroad so that she could secure mine and my sisters' education. Her primary migration goal was simple and concrete. All she hoped for was to send the three of us in school and for us to finish our studies.

I am the eldest of three girls and we were left to our good father. Our mom was an irregular migrant. It took her six years to secure her

work documents and to come home and visit us. She worked as a migrant domestic worker for 11 years in Italy. She finally came home in 2000. Shortly after her return, she died at the age of 47 in 2001.

Mom's migration journey was heartbreaking. Our education was her priority. Yet, she was unable to attend a single graduation rite of her daughters. She was not allowed by her employers to be with us during those days.

The physical separation due to my mother's migration was a challenge to our family especially to me and to my sisters. It was 11 long years without a mother attending to our daily needs; 11 long years that we depended on long distance calls and snail mails for communication; 11 long years that I stood up as girl child and co-managed the household. The everyday struggles of an OFW child remain vivid to me. The pain of a migrant child was in my heart and remains still in my heart. My mother succumbed to heart ailment, caused most probably by the long hours of hard work and stress as a domestic worker. The early death of our mother, the loss of my mother who strived to provide us a good life was the saddest and toughest experience that I had to bear as a child.

Our experiences as OFW children were difficult and challenging but we did not let our mother's dream die with her. As she wished for, we finished college and presently work in our chosen fields. But our stories of struggles and triumphs are not shared by many other migrant children. Not all migrant children are resilient and coped well with separation with their migrant parents like we were. Not all migrant children are fortunate to have a responsible father like we have. I believe that our experiences are worth sharing. I find it necessary to help other migrant children to cope well with the migration of their parents.

Colleagues in developmental work find me as wounded healer. The experiences and narratives of OFW children have special spot in my heart. Implementing Atikha's school-based program for migrant children is not a job, it is a commitment and yearning that the lives and experiences of other migrant children would not be as difficult as mine and that of my sisters. I want them to understand their own realities as migrant children, face the

challenges, cope well with circumstances, study well and succeed in life. I want them to succeed and say with confidence: "Pauuwiin na namin si Mama." (We will ask Mama (our mother) to come home for good). She needed not work abroad anymore. She had sacrificed a lot. This time we would take care of her and our family." I am confident that with our interventions that day will come.

## **Vulnerability of Children of Migrants to Adverse Effects of Migration**

Migration has affected families of migrant workers. Without a doubt, migration has enhanced the capacity of migrant families to provide for their sustenance and other needs. But migration with its consequent physical separation of families could adversely affect the members of the family. Studies point to migrant children as the most vulnerable to the negative effects of prolonged separation of families.

A study entitled *Valuing the Social Costs of Migration: An Explanatory Study* cited ambivalent feelings of children towards migration of their parents. It found that although children acknowledged the importance of overseas migration in sustaining their needs including their education, they were also apprehensive on their long-term separation with their parent/s (De Dios, 2013). Parreñas (2002), Battistella and Conaco (1996), and Dizon-Añonuevo & Añonuevo (2002) reported a high sense and feeling of abandonment among children of migrant mothers. Battistella and Conaco (1996) stated: "The sense of abandonment, of not being taken cared of is more explicit when both parents are absent or when the mother is absent" (p. 26). Parreñas (2002) added and explained: "In mother-away families, children rarely spoke of the existence of a gap but more frequently complained about feelings of abandonment, even when they are showered with love by their kin and even if the migrant mother adequately provides

for their needs. This is due to children's perspective that mothers must maintain the most intimate involvement in their lives and must make more concerted efforts to demonstrate their love to their children".

Studies have contradictory findings in terms of the effects of children's separation from their migrant parents on their school performance. Cruz's (1987) study found no significant difference between children of migrant and non-migrant workers on academic performance. Battistella and Conaco's study (1996), however, found out that left-behind children of overseas migrants exhibited low academic performance and were less socially adjusted when compared with those children whose parents are non-migrants.

Studies of ECMI/AOS-Manila, SMC and OWWA in 2004 and Edillon in 2008 had different results. The studies revealed that children of migrants excelled in their academics as well as in extra-curricular/non-academic activities more than children of non-OFW families.

Despite differences in their above-cited findings, the studies of Battistella and Conaco, Dizon-Añonuevo and Añonuevo, and ECMI/AOS-Manila, SMC and OWWA in 2004 similarly claimed that children of migrant mothers fared worst academically when compared with children of migrant fathers and non-migrant parents. Thus, it can be said that the absence of the (migrant) mother spells a significant difference in the school performance of children.

Dizon-Añonuevo and Añonuevo (2002) observed materialism, conspicuous consumption, lavish lifestyle, and dependency among children and other members of families of migrants. Anecdotal data also point to extremely adverse effects on some migrant children like drug addiction, early marriages, premarital sex, teenage pregnancy, dropping out of school, and other juvenile acts.

Dizon-Añonuevo and Añonuevo, and Parnas acknowledged that there were children who became resilient and were able to cope well with the

difficulties that they faced because of separation. Both studies cited aggravating and mitigating factors that could either make it worse for the children or would help them get over the hardships as migrant children.

Parreñas spoke of aggravating and easing factors in the communication gap between migrant fathers and their children. Aggravating the communication gap is "the clinging to the traditional gender script that the father should exercise authoritarian authority, implements order and discipline and does not communicate with his children". Easing the communication gap are: 1) "recognition of migration as a decision made for the collective good of the family and the father's role in it"; 2) "mutual efforts among fathers and children at constant communication"; 3) "efforts of mothers to broker the communication between children and their fathers"; 4) "expansion of gender boundaries of fathering to include maternal acts of care" and 5) "the intimacy gained by extensive amounts of quality family time spent". Parnas added that for children of migrant mothers to attain emotional security, the following can be done: 1) "intensive mothering of migrant mothers to assure children of mother's love and to weaken feelings of abandonment"; and 2) "cooperation of community and kin while contesting gender boundaries".

Dizon-Añonuevo and Añonuevo (2002) cited the following as factors that contribute to resiliency of migrant children: 1) presence of warm and positive relationship with an adult especially with their mothers; 2) knowledge of the real situation of their migrant mothers abroad; 3) maintenance of communication with parents abroad; 4) presence of able and responsible caretakers; 5) good children's peer group, school, and community support.

# The School-Based Program for Migrant Children

Armed with its own experiences of work among migrant families and children and cognizant of the findings of different studies on the effects of migration on children, Atikha designed a school-based program for migrant children. The school is one of the most effective vehicles in providing information and education on migration-related issues and concerns. The school officials and teachers also witness the growing problems of OFWs and their families and understand the need for interventions for their own students who are migrant children themselves. Thus, Atikha partnered with Department of Education (DepEd) in implementing a migration and development school-based program for children of OFWs.

The school-based program is designed and implemented for children of migrants of ages 10 years and above. It intends to reach migrant children from Grade 4 to college. The main activities of the school-based program are values formation workshops, capacity building activities and savings campaign.

The different activities employ different methodologies like lecture-discussion, workshops, games, drawing session, role playing, self-reflection, and sharing of experiences. The program is comprised of fun-filled individual and group activities.

The values formation known as Migration Realities Workshop consists of six (6) modules, namely, Module 1: Life and Work Conditions of Migrants; Module 2: Positive and Negative Effects of Migration; Module 3: Instilling Savings Consciousness, Disavowing Materialism and Consumerism; Module 4: Bridging the Gap, Fostering Good Communication and Relations; Module 5: Importance of Education and Goal Setting and Module 6: Gender Sensitivity and Feminization of Migration. Each module is designed in three parts. The first part introduces the topic, the second part discusses it and the last, deals with resolving the discussed topic/concern/issue.

The capacity building activities include the Trainings on Leadership, Facilitation and Team Building, Peer Counseling and Young Entrepreneurship. Recently, a module on Vlog Making was also developed to harness the interest and hone the skills of children in the use of social media. They are taught to make use of social media and vlogging to disseminate relevant migration-related information.

The savings campaign component of the program organizes the children into Youth Savers Club. The Youth Savers Club is an organization of those who have attended the migration realities seminar and workshop. The members of the club consciously apply the learnings that they had especially on saving and wise use of money.

In addition to the activities for migrant children, some schools also conduct the Family and Income Management Training for the guardians of migrant children. Discussions and workshops about saving, budgeting, investing, borrowing, nurturing family relations and goal setting are held in the training.

For high school and college students, some schools and universities modified or combined the Migration Realities Workshop and Training on Family and Income Management Training to make the activities more interesting and more appropriate to young adults.

## Implementation of the school-based program

Teachers of different schools and universities were equipped to implement the migration and development program for both children and families left behind through the conduct of the training of teachers. The three-day Training of Trainers (TOT) on School-Based Program for Children and Families of OFWs in CALABARZON, Bicol and Iloilo for the last three years were conducted as part of the Coming Home Project.

In CALABARZON and Bicol, it was a regional-level TOT that convened provincial and city division teachers. In Iloilo, it was a provincial level TOT that capacitated city division implementers. The Training of Trainers were participated largely by guidance counselors and Values Education and

Araling Panlipunan (Social Studies) teachers. The trainings were organized by Department of Education-School Governance and Operations Division (DepEd- SGOD) and Atikha.

After the Training of Trainers, the attendees conducted a division-level echo seminar and engaged more teacher-trainers and implementers from the districts who could carry out the activities at the school-level.

In the echo seminar, the District and School Migration and Development (M&D) Coordinators are identified and assigned. For most schools, they are teachers who are relatives of OFWs. They are spouses, children or siblings of migrants who can certainly relate with migration issues and concerns. Atikha observed that for many M&D coordinators, the migration school-based program became a personal advocacy.

Part of the concluding activity of the echo seminar was designing a work plan for their respective schools. The attendees presented a roll-out plan of the workshops and the strategies to implement the school-based program.

To ensure the implementation of the program at the DepEd district level, Ms. Ofelia del Mundo, Principal of Sta. Mesa Elementary School and M&D Coordinator of Mabini District organizes regular meetings of coordinators from 17 elementary schools and three high schools. Updates on the implementation of the training modules, concerns and plans are discussed in the meetings.

The district monitoring of program implementation runs parallel with the DepEd Division Office's monitoring. Dr. Marian Lontok-Arias, Education Program Supervisor I and M&D Focal Person in DepEd Division of Batangas said: "Reports are required from school M&D Coordinators and teacher-implementers. The District M&D Focal Persons consolidate those reports and submit them to the Division M&D Coordinator. Aside from this, the Division Office also ensures that the meeting of focal persons is regularly called once a year".

## Strategies/Modes of school-based program implementation

The school-based program for children of migrant workers are implemented in various modes or ways, namely, 1) integrating the topic of migration in the curriculum, 2) conducting monthly workshops, 3) holding a summer camp, 4) conducting an overnight camp, and 5) holding a forum workshop.

### 1 Integrating in the curriculum: A common strategy in implementation

In the past, most of the teachers integrate the values and learnings from the training in the respective subjects that they handle in schools. According to Dr. Arias, it was done by integrating the content of Migration Realities modules in specific subjects such as Geography in Grade IV, History in Grade V, Civics in Grade IV and Araling Panlipunan (Social Studies) in High School. For example, in tackling the lesson on migration in Araling Panlipunan, the teacher imparts the appropriate concept for lecture-discussion and conducts in class an activity in the module, Life and Work Conditions of Migrants.

This strategy of integrating the modules to the lesson plan of teachers does not entail extra time or a separate gathering of OFW children in school. The module is tackled in class with all the students, migrant children and non- migrant children alike. The content of modules is selected, communicated in parts and implemented in staggered manner.

While integration of the modules in the curriculum is the common strategy, other teacher-implementers found creative ways of implementing the school-based program for migrant children.

### 2 Monthly workshop: An activity to look forward to

Mr. Gilbert Alva, Senior Education Program Specialist of DepEd Quezon Division who was also tasked as M&D Focal Person works on another approach in implementing the school-based program. He

explained: “Dito sa Division of Quezon, nag-pilot kami sa Alabat Island. Ang ginagawa namin, every month may schedule ng module roll-out. Binibigyan namin ng oras para magkasama-sama ang anak ng OFWs at magkaroon ng workshop. Monthly ito para hindi makaabala sa klase at para may enough time sa bawat module. Kaya naman natapos ang buong module sa loob ng school year.” (Here in Division of Quezon, we had a pilot run in Alabat Island. We implemented a monthly module roll-out. We provided time to gather children of OFWs for a workshop. We do it every month and all the modules are carried out in a school year). Alabat is an Island with significant number of OFW children in the Quezon province.

Mr. Alva reported: “Maganda ang result ng training. Sama-sama ang anak ng OFWs from different year level. Very active po ang kanilang participation. Kahit po kami na trainers ay maraming natutunan sa sharing ng mga bata. Nagtatawanan, nag-iiyakan kami. Marami pong realization.” (The result of the training was very good. Children of OFWs from different year levels came together for the workshop. They actively participated. Even we, trainers learned so many things from their sharing. We laughed and cried. There were so many realizations.)

The M&D monthly workshop provides regular activity exclusively for OFW children in school. They are gathered once a month for almost half-day. This mode of implementation requires approval from school officials. To avoid disruption of classes, the monthly workshop is scheduled after the examinations of children or whenever there are no other school activities.

### **3 Migration realities summer camp: Enjoyable and interesting to young children**

Ms. Ofelia Del Mundo, M&D Focal Person of DepEd Mabini District finds the Summer Camp more effective. Summer Camp is a special gathering of OFW children after the closing of the school year or during the summer vacation. It is a stay-out, whole-day activity for

three consecutive days that starts from 8 in the morning and finishes at 4 in the afternoon.

In April 2019, Ms. Del Mundo together with M&D school coordinators convened more than 100 OFW children from 14 schools in the district for the Migration Realities Workshop. Since it was a big crowd, they used the school hall for plenary sessions and prepared several classrooms for group sessions. More than 10 teachers were involved in the conduct of training. Since it was a district-level activity, the groupings were composed of participants from different schools and that added excitement to the attendees.

After the two and a half-day workshop, the camp was concluded with Savers Club enrolment and a graduation program. An established bank in Mabini, Batangas was the partner depository bank that accommodated the savings of children. The bank manager oriented the children on their savings program and the bank employees facilitated the opening of accounts.

Ms. Del Mundo, one of the pioneer partners in the implementation of the school-based program, shared: “Sa action research ko, nakita ko na mas maganda na gawin ang activities kapag nakabakasyon ang mga bata para mas ma-enjoy nila ang workshops at mas maka-focus sila” (In my action research, I found out that it is more appropriate to hold the activities during class vacation so that children can enjoy and focus more on the workshop.)

Arvin, a 13-year-old first year student in a public high school in Mabini, Batangas participated in the Migration Realities Summer Camp. He found the three-day activity very enjoyable. He liked the workshop entitled ‘Hagdan-hagdang Pangarap: “May activity po kami. Tapos masaya po. Yun pong Hagdan-Hagdang Pangarap kasi po dun ko po naisulat ang aking pangarap na maging chef.” (We had an activity where I really had fun. It was the ‘Hagdan- Hagdang Pangarap’ (Staircase of Dreams) because in that activity, I got the chance to express my dream to be a chef.) Arvin also said that he

learned to save money from the Summer Camp. He shared that prior to the Camp, he spent his allowance buying things that he wanted. Now, he is conscious in saving a portion of his allowance. More than that, he encourages his younger siblings to save their money, too. He made coin banks for himself and his brother where they can keep their money. He narrated: “Dati po kasi di ako masyadong nag iipon. Mas naliwanagan po ako nung pag-attend ko, tinuruan ko rin pong mag iipon yung kapatid ko. Nag iipon na rin po sya ngayon, may alkansya na nga po sya.” (Before, I did not save money. I understood the importance of saving when I attended the activity. I even taught my brother to save. Now, he saves and has his own coin bank.)

The implementation of the Mabini District was replicated in Cuenca, Batangas and it was supported by the municipal government. AC was one of the more than 50 youngsters that joined and graduated from the Summer Camp in Cuenca. AC pointed out the best part of the workshop for her: “Ang pinakagusto ko po sa ginawa namin ay noong pinabasa sa amin yung buhay ng OFW sa ibang bansa. Domestic helper sya. Tapos yung time management po ng mga OFW sa ibang bansa. Kasi po dun ko po na-realize na ganon po pala kakonti yung oras nila, wala na po sila halos oras makapaglibang.” (I liked the most when we were asked to read about the life of an OFW abroad. It was a story of a domestic helper. There, I found out how OFWs manage their time. I realized that they have not much time for themselves and they do not have free time to enjoy).

She learned about the real situation of her OFW father and understood the struggles of being away from home. The Camp became an eye opener to her: “Ngayon, naiintindihan ko na po kung may times na hindi nya nase-seen yung mga messages ko palagi. Sinasabi ko na lang po sa sarili ko na baka busy ang magulang ko, na wala na syang time para sa sarili niya. Mas nauunawaan ko na ang kalagayan ng OFW. Natulungan po ako ng workshops na ayusin ko yung relationship ko sa magulang ko” (Now, I understand why there were times that he has not read my messages. Maybe he was busy at work and I can imagine that he did not have enough time for himself. I

understand the OFW situation more. The workshops helped me work out my relationship with my father).

The module on Life and Work Conditions of Migrants describes the life abroad. The workshop on 24 Hours in a Life of an OFW describes the hourly tasks of a migrant from early morning to almost midnight of an OFW. The activity draws insights of children on the life situation and the work conditions of their family members overseas.

Aside from understanding the situation of OFWs and nurturing family relations, the seminar-workshops also influenced AC to save money. She is now more conscious on the value of money and started saving. She appreciates more her savings account where she puts in money weekly: “Mula po nung naka-attend ako ng training eh nakaipon na po ako ng pera. Tapos yung savings account po, meron na po pala ako nung bata ako. Tapos ayon po, naintindihan ko na po kung ano ba yung savings account at kung bakit mahalaga ito.” (After the training, I started saving money. I learned that I have a savings account since I was a kid. I understand now what savings account is and why it is important).

Summer Camp provides special avenue for children of OFWs to enjoy the workshop while they are on school vacation. However, the three-day activity demands extra time from M&D Focal Persons who are supposedly free from work and could have enjoyed the break. The conduct of Summer Camp also requires parents’ consent and approval from school district officials.

## 4

### **Migration realities overnight camp: Exciting and adventurous**

Ms. Flor de Luna of Talipan National High School shared how they implemented the program by holding an overnight camp: “Ginagawa namin ang workshops sa pamamagitan ng OFW children camp. Sa magkasunod na taon, Biyernes ng tanghali hanggang Sabado ng tanghali namin tinipon ang mga anak ng OFW para sa workshop.” (We

conducted the workshops through the OFW Children Camp. We had it from Friday afternoon till Saturday lunch. We conducted it overnight in school.)

Ms. De Luna has been implementing M&D school-based program for years. Before, she tried integrating the modules to her school lessons. Dr. Nolasco, the school's Guidance Counselor, proposed to make the workshop an overnight camp: "Overnight ang mga bata sa school. Nakikita ko na mas effective ito dahil mas focus sila sa mga activity, tuloy-tuloy ang flow at mas masaya rin para sa mga kabataan" (I find it more effective when children stay overnight as they can focus more on the activities. The flow is continuous and this is more enjoyable to the youngsters).

The DepEd Legazpi City Division also implements an overnight activity named Migration and Development Youth Camp. Ms. Aida Revelo, Schools Division Supervisor and Legazpi City M&D Focal Person shared: "Napakaganda at very successful ang naging youth camp. Masaya ang mga bata pero marami silang realization. Heart-warming ang kanilang sharing, maraming tawanan sa mga activities pero marami ring iyakan. Kahit kaming mga teachers at mga bisita ay nag-enjoy. Si Mayor Noel Rosal ay nag-observe din at natuwa. Bukod sa migration realities workshops, nagkaroon pa kami ng bonfire noong gabi at zumba noong umaga." (The youth camp was very successful. The children were very happy but they also had so much realization. Their sharing was heart-warming, they laughed a lot but they also cried hard, too. Even we, facilitators and other guests, enjoyed the overnight activity as well. Mayor Noel Rosal observed the conduct of the activity and he was pleased. Aside from the migration realities workshops, we also had a bonfire in the evening and zumba in the morning.)

The bonfire was remarkable experience to the children. It was done in a very a quiet place and established a serene ambiance. The children were inspired to think of their parents and reminisce the time they had with them. They silently uttered prayers for their parents' health

and safety with special petitions that they will soon be home for good—safe and sound. The highlight of the bonfire activity was when the children loudly expressed that they will take good care of themselves to show their appreciation of the sacrifices of their migrant parents.

Jeremie Faith, one of the participants of the Legazpi City Camp said: "This is a joyful activity and it made me realize so many things. I learned that my parents are away to provide me a brighter future. Despite the distance, they help us in every way. Thanks to Migration and Development Youth Camp."

The overnight camp strictly seeks approval from both school officials and guardians. Waiver or parents' consent is secured from every participant. M&D Focal Persons closely supervises the entire event.

## 5

### Migration realities forum-workshop: Appropriate for college students

Claire Alexis was one of the students who joined the Migration Realities Seminar in Batangas State University- Lemery Campus. The Extension Service Office of the University gathered the children and relatives of OFWs for a forum-workshop. In that activity, she met schoolmates who are also OFW children. The modules were designed for group activities and she found them very appropriate: "Naging kumportable ako sa sharing ng experiences kasi bilang anak ng OFW, magkakatulad ang aming sitwasyon." (I was comfortable with the sharing of experiences because we are all OFW children and hence, share the same situation). She added: "Mas mapalawak yung pag iisip ko, mas naging matured ako at marami akong nalaman sa pagkakaiba dito sa Pilipinas at ibang bansa. Yung sa oras, mas naging aware ako na hindi katulad dito na kapag free ka ay free din yung magulang mo sa ibang bansa. Doon ay busy sila kaya dapat maintindihan sila na hindi sa lahat ng pagkakataon eh makakausap sila." (I learned to understand the situation more. I became more matured and I learned a lot about the situation in the Philippines and

abroad. I realized that here we have a lot of time to spare but our parents do not have the same. They are busy abroad and it is understandable that not all of the time can we talk to them). The workshop, 24 Hours in a Life of OFWs, provided Claire a clearer picture on realities of migration. It helped her cope with the situation, to embrace the reality and made herself stronger and more responsible for her family.

Also, Claire learned proper budgeting after the seminar. She is in charge of managing the remittances of her OFW mother. She said: “Siguro mas naging matipid ako after the training. Kapag may pera ako isusulat ko yung mga kailangang expenses. Tapos inihihiwalay ko yung mga kailangan ko sa gusto ko lang bilhin.” (I can say that I became more conscious in spending the remittances after the training. Whenever I have cash, I budget everything. I write my expenses and sort the things I really need to buy from those that I just want to have). The budgeting workshop is an activity of Family and Income Management Training. It teaches the participants to list down all the cash coming in as well as the money coming out in the household. For a young home manager, the activity made Claire more responsible in managing the family finances. She also puts into practice the concept of needs and wants which encourages to spend only on necessary things.

Migration Realities Forum-Workshop is designed for college students. This is a whole-day gathering of OFW children in campus that combines Forum on Gender, Migration and Development, Migration Realities Workshop, and Family and Income Management Training. The activities aim to provide them information about international migration from the Philippines, instill fundamental values in OFW families and provide basic skills on household income management. The conduct of the forum-workshop is organized by Extension Service Office. Excuse slips for their classes are issued to participating students.

## Impact of School-Based Program Implementation

A total of 3,252 migrant children participated in the school based program as implemented by the Coming Home Project. That is about 130% attainment rate based on the target of 2,500 migrant children participants. The distribution of the participants of the various trainings and activities for migrant children is presented in Table 2.

**Table 2. Distribution of Migrant Children and Youth Training Participants**

| Children of Migrants            | Male   | Female | Total |
|---------------------------------|--------|--------|-------|
| Children (Elementary)           | 581    | 1034   | 1615  |
| Youth (High School and College) | 654    | 983    | 1637  |
| Total                           | 1235   | 2017   | 3252  |
| Percentage                      | 37.98% | 62.02% | 100%  |

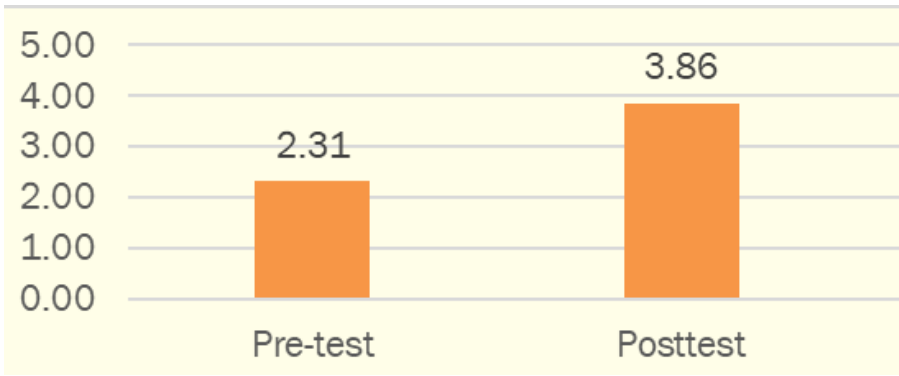
A total of 191 schools participated in the program and that far exceeded the target of 75 schools. The implementation of the school-based program was a success because the Department of Education and some state universities adopted it as part of their extension service program. That also explains why from a target of 160 teachers, 444 teachers from the Department of Education and 107 teachers from three state universities were trained to implement the school-based program. That means that all in all, a total of 551 teachers implemented the program for migrant children.

A survey was carried out among 1693 children and youth who participated in the school-based program for migrant children. The survey sought,

among others, the changes in attitudes and behaviors among the migrant children after the trainings that they participated in. From the self-evaluation survey, significant changes in savings behavior, understanding of life and work conditions of MDWs, relationship of children with parents, attitude towards studying, and views of gender equality and participation in household chores were noted.

**1 Change in Savings Behavior**

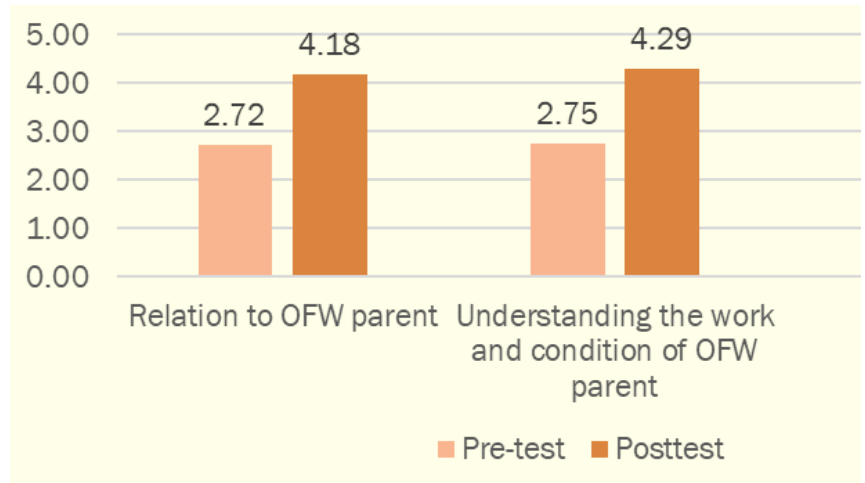
**Figure 7. Change in Savings Behavior Before and After the Trainings**



Source: Evaluation of the 'Coming Home: Reintegration Program for Domestic Workers in Hong Kong and Singapore to the Philippines' (2019), p. 74.

Figure 7 describes the change in savings behavior of migrant children training participants. Prior to the trainings, the children recorded a mean score of 2.31. The mean score in savings increased to 3.86 after the training. The difference between the pre-test and posttest (i.e. prior to the training and after the training) means indicates the change in savings behavior brought by the trainings. With a difference in their pre-and post-training scores of 1.55, migrant children have recorded a 67% change in savings behavior ( $3.86-2.31=1.55$ ;  $1.55/2.31=.67 \times 100=67\%$ ). This percentage increase accounted for the impact of the trainings in the savings in behavior of migrant children.

**Figure 8. Understanding Life and Work Conditions of OFW Parents and Relationship of Children With OFW Parent**



Source: Evaluation of the 'Coming Home: Reintegration Program for Domestic Workers in Hong Kong and Singapore to the Philippines' (2019), p. 77, p. 82.

Figure 8 shows that children have positively changed their understanding of the life and work conditions of MDWs after the training. Migrant children exhibited a significant change in viewing the situation of their parents with a difference mean score of 1.54. That consists of a 56% change in views. The result indicated how the trainings effectively made the children understand and appreciate better the work and situation of their MDW relatives.

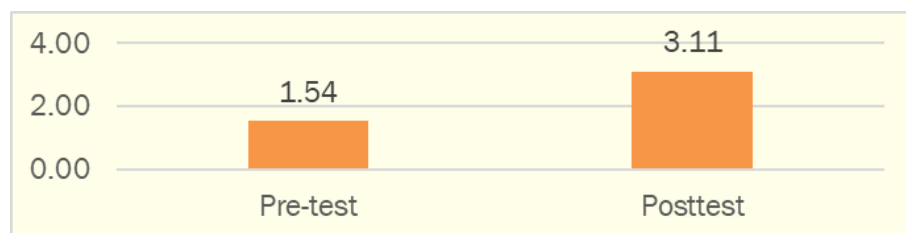
The figure also indicated that the children-respondents perceived a better relationship and improved communication with their parents after the training with a mean score of 2.72 before the training and mean score of 4.18 after the training. That consists of about 54% positive change in relationship of children with their migrant parents.

A better understanding of the life and work conditions of their parents could also have contributed to a better relationship of children with their migrant mothers/parents.

### 3 Change in Attitude Towards Studying

Some studies pointed out that the absence of mothers in migrant families result to difficulties among children. Many migrant children were reported to have problems in school. These are among the problems confronted by migrant children that the school-based program and the project sought to address. From the self-evaluation of migrant children across the four regions, there is an affirmation that the program could change the views of children in studying and in instilling the importance of education.

**Figure 9. Attitudes of Migrant Children on Studying Before and After the Trainings**

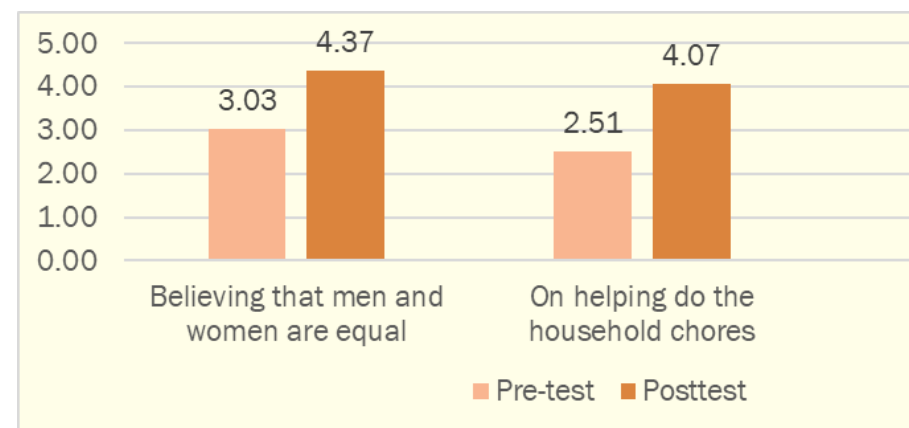


Source: Evaluation of the 'Coming Home: Reintegration Program for Domestic Workers in Hong Kong and Singapore to the Philippines' (2019), p. 82.

Figure 9 shows a marked improvement in the attitude of migrant children towards studying, from a pretest mean score of 1.54 to a post test score of 3.11. That indicates a 100% change in attitude towards studying. Many children said studying well is their way of showing their appreciation for the hard work of their OFW parents. Some also said that by finishing their studies, their parents will be able to finally come home and be with them.

### 4 Change in Views Regarding Gender Equality and Participation in Household Chores

**Figure 10. Views of Children Regarding Gender Equality and Participation in Household Chores Before and After the Trainings**



Source: Evaluation of the 'Coming Home: Reintegration Program for Domestic Workers in Hong Kong and Singapore to the Philippines' (2019), p. 86.

The pretest mean score on gender equality of 3.03 was relatively high. That could indicate that even prior to the trainings, the migrant children had a positive sense of gender equality. The trainings further imbued in them the notion of gender equality with increased post test score of 4.37 which means a 44% positive change in attitude.

The figure indicates also an increase in participation of children, boys and girls alike in household chores, before and after the trainings. The pretest score of 2.51 increased to a post test score of 4.07. That indicates a 62% positive change.

The positive change in participation of children, boys and girls alike resonated well with the positive change in views regarding gender equality.

## **Institutionalization and Sustainability of the Program for Migrant Children**

The mainstreaming of the school-based program for migrant children remains an important advocacy of Atikha. It continues to pursue this advocacy with the Department of Education in some regions in the Philippines. In Region IV-A for instance, the program was mainstreamed through DepEd Region IV-A, a member of the Committee on Migration and Development of NEDA Region IV-A). It issued a Memorandum Circular that acknowledged the need for assistance of children of migrants and the necessity to work with Atikha in the training of children of migrants. That resulted to the warm reception accorded to Atikha and school-based program in the different schools in the region.

Dr. Arias of Batangas DepEd explained: “The NEDA Region IV-A Regional Council adopted the school-based program for CALABARZON. The Regional DepEd is an active member of the Council. Then, memoranda were issued by the DepEd Regional Head and Division Heads that directed the conduct of training of trainers, roll out of training activities, and implementation of the school-based program in all 30 schools in the province of Batangas. We also have in place, migration coordinators per school and district coordinators which meet at least once a year. There are separate meetings among elementary and high school coordinators. Regular monitoring of the program implementation is done by the Focal Person on Migration and Development in the SGOD Social Mobilization and Networking (SOCMOB) and the district and division supervisors.”

The school-based program for children of migrants has been institutionalized in the DepEd Division of Batangas. Much credit had to be

given to Dr. Marian Arias, the current Migration and Development Focal Person. Dr. Arias is confident that the school-based program for migrant children will be sustained as part of a reintegration program for MDWs and other OFWs. She was confident of the program being sustained because of the following: 1) Migration and development is officially listed as one of the programs to be implemented in the Division of Batangas; 2) The modular activities both outside and inside the classrooms catering to migrant children are in place; and 3) Monitoring and supervision mechanisms are instituted with district and school focal persons, coordinators and teacher-implementers conducting regular meetings and submitting progress reports.

Parallel to DepEd Batangas Division’s appreciation of the school-based program is the support from the provincial government. The provincial government of Batangas recently awarded an outstanding migrant child for his numerous achievements in school, active participation in the community and distinct involvement in the family. The DepEd Batangas Division plans to develop a training program for guidance counselors in all elementary and high schools in the province to capacitate them in handling psychosocial cases involving migrant children. This is a much welcome initiative.

Much, however, had to be done with the other provinces in the Philippines. The efforts and initiatives of DepEd Batangas Division must be replicated in the other provinces. The school-based program has been proven as an effective intervention for the children of MDWs and other OFWs. Hence, all efforts must be exerted towards its mainstreaming and institutionalization.

## Text Box 2 How the School-Based Program Changed a Child of a Migrant Domestic Worker

In one of our school visits, I met Ivan, one of the participants of the school-based Migration Realities Workshop. Mark Ken Ivan A. Regio is a 16-year-old Grade 10 student of Taysan National High School. He hails from Galamay Amo, San Jose, Batangas. His father died when he was 10 years old. They are six children in the family. That prompted his mother to work as domestic worker in Qatar for the last two and half years.

Ivan shared his and his siblings' everyday struggles as children of OFW: "Napakahirap po ng walang magulang. Kailangan namin ng parental guidance dahil iba po ang may gabay ng sariling magulang. Iba sa pakiramdam na malayo si Mama pero natuto kaming tumayo at maging malakas para sa isa't-isa. Nagkaroon kami ng higit na pagkakaisa bilang magkakapatid, mas naging responsible at independent. (It is very challenging to live without parents. We need parental guidance. We found it difficult to live without Mama but we learned to stand on our own and to be strong for each other. We are now closer as siblings; we became more responsible and independent.)

He vividly recalled the first part of Migration Realities workshop: "May workshop kami on Positive and Negative Effects of Migration, mas naging aware ako bilang anak ng OFW na may mga positibo at negatibong epekto ang pag-aabroad. Mas naging mulat ang aking kaisipan na iwasan ang mga negatibong dulot ng pagkakawalay sa magulang na nangingibang bansa. Sana, katulad ko ay malaman pa ito ng mga kapamilya ng OFW para mas maunawaan nila ang sitwasyon at makatulong sila." (We had a workshop on Positive and Negative Effects of Migration. I became more aware as an OFW child on the negative effects of being separated with migrant parents. I hope that other family members will be able to attend this seminar so that they will understand the situation and be able to help).

Taysan National High School, one of the schools in Batangas implements school-based program for children of OFWs since 2016.

The school adopted the Family and Income Management Seminar for their high school students and conducts the seminar every month from August to November. The modules include topics like goal setting and budgeting. Some activities of the seminar were made as assignments and became a family activity.

Ivan comes from a big family. They are six children in the family and he is the third child. Her aunt co-manages their household. The aunt lives with her own family next to their house. As it is an everyday struggle for the children to be away with their mother, it is also difficult for them to budget the PhP 15,000 monthly remittance from their mother. Ivan narrated; "Dati nung may pera ako, gastos lang ng gastos. Pero sa workshop po namin sa budgeting, natutunan ko po ang tamang pag-bubudget ng padala. Sabi po sa training, kailangan munang tanggalin ang savings bago gumastos. Ginagawa ko po iyon. May baon po akong 50 pesos. Dahil 6 am to 12 noon lang naman ang klase ko, kumakain na po ako bago umalis ng bahay, hindi ko na po kailangang magrecess pa. After school naman, sa bahay na rin po ako nagtatanghalian" (Before when I have money, I just spend them. In the budgeting workshop, I learned how to budget the remittance properly. In the training, we were encouraged to save first before we spend. Now, I practice that. I have an allowance of 50 pesos. Since my classes are from 6 in the morning to 12 in the afternoon, I eat breakfast at home. I do not need to eat during breaks. After school, I go home for lunch.)

With his modest allowance, he manages to save 50% while the other half is allotted for his fare to and from school. He said: "Dahil mahirap po talagang mapagkasya ang pera namin, nag-iipon po ako para sa mga bayarin sa school. Para hindi ko na po ito hinihingi pa kay Tita." (It is difficult to make do with a minimal household budget. That is why I save for extra expenses in school. I need not ask for more money from Tita (aunt)). He also suggested to his mother that their school allowance be given monthly so that they will learn how to budget on their own. He shared: "As a family, sa padala ng Mama, nagtatago po kami agad ng Php 1,000. Ito po sana ay para sa pangarap naming bahay. Pero dahil

din po sa sitwasyon, ang savings namin ay naging emergency fund na rin ng pamilya” (As a family, from our mother’s monthly remittance, we automatically save PhP 1,000 for our dream house. But because of our situation, our supposed savings became an emergency fund of the family.)

Ivan’s teachers attest that he is a good example of an OFW child. He is in the honor list of students and is active both in academic and non-academic activities. He is the President of Math Club, a copy reader of the campus paper, member of the Intellect Warriors Club and Science Club, active Boy Scout and Junior Fire Marshall. Ivan is also into bible studies and he is a young preacher.

With the learnings acquired from the school-based migration program, he and his siblings are now very keen on the permanent return of their mother. In their young hearts, they look forward to the time when they as a family will live together. Ivan revealed their plan: “Sabi ng Mama, uuwi siya kapag nakatapos na kaming magkakapatid, pero kaming magkakapatid, may plano kami na kahit dalawa o tatlo lang ang magkatrabaho sa amin, pauwiin na namin si Mama.” (Mama said that she will return home when all of us have finished college. But my siblings and I plan that when two or three of us have finished college and landed jobs, we will ask her to come home).

Mark Ken Ivan A. Regio is the first migrant child-awardee of the Batangas GEAR UP (Go, Earn, Achieve, Return-Uplift Philippines) Awards. GEAR UP Awards recognizes outstanding OFWs and children. The search was organized by the Batangas Province Migrants Coordinating Council in celebration of the International Migrants Day in 2019. Ivan’s story of struggles and resiliency serve as an inspiration to other migrant children.

## ***“Masarap pa lang walang amo!”: A Successful Reintegration of a Migrant Domestic Worker to the Philippines***

*Augustus T. Añonuevo and  
Aileen Constantino-Peñas*

**T**he Coming Home Project sought to prepare the MDWs in Hong Kong and Singapore for their eventual reintegration to the Philippines. Towards that objective, it capacitated them to efficiently manage their own finances and families. But reintegration preparedness though a requisite for a successful return is not equivalent to a successful reintegration. The end goal of any reintegration program designed for MDWs is for them to successfully return and reintegrate in the Philippines.

The case of Ellen Elecanal illustrates a successful return migration of a MDW aided by interventions facilitated by the Coming Home Project. Ellen returned to Iloilo, her home province, in 2016 and leads a good and meaningful life as a businesswoman and a migration and development advocate. With her own words, “Masarap pala ang feeling na wala ka ng amo at ikaw na ang boss.”

It feels good to be your own boss and not having to serve anybody!), Ellen succinctly describes a good life after years of being a MDW serving an employer. Ellen's migration and return migration's experiences show how MDWs can take full control of their lives and that of their families as women, migrant workers and migrant returnees.

Ellen's successful story is an inspiration to many MDWs and OFWs who continuously dream of coming home to the Philippines and together with their families lead a happy, decent and comfortable life in the Philippines. Her success story makes migrants and their families realize that there are opportunities in the Philippines and that there is life after migration.

## Worked for years as DH for her family

For 25 ½ years, Ellen worked abroad as a domestic helper. She endured the hard work overseas with different employers in different countries. She was in India, England, Hong Kong and for 19 years stayed and worked in Singapore.

Many years of her work as MDW was devoted to sending all her siblings to school and college. With the affectionate care that she expressed to two children who practically grew up with her, Ellen endeared herself to the British family which she lived with and served for 23 years. Hence, it was difficult for her employers as well as for Ellen when she decided to finally come back to the Philippines.

Ellen felt that the more she stayed abroad, the more she got comfortable and used to the life abroad, especially in Singapore. She also felt that it was time to enjoy her life in Singapore for she had already sent her siblings to college. It was time to get involved in other activities. But it was not all

fun, so to speak, for she got involved with the Church and their work with migrant workers in Singapore. She became a befriender for distressed migrants of all nationalities for 15 years. She helped fellow migrants and practically handled all types of problems that they were confronted with.

## Engagement with Atikha and Pinoy WISE: A Turning Point in Life

Her life took a turn when she met the people from Atikha, an NGO from the Philippines which conducted financial literacy seminars and investment fora for OFWs in Singapore.

Ellen as one of the representatives of a church organization participated in the Training of Trainers (TOT) that Atikha conducted in Singapore. It was the first time after more than two decades that she attended a training seminar on financial education. She has learned a lot from the training. The seminar taught her how to save, budget, and invest her money and address her family's dependency.

The seminar and the successive trainings of the step-ladder program helped Ellen plan for her reintegration to the Philippines. She said: "Mas nalinawan din ang aking mga plano sa pagbabalik sa Pilipinas sa mga iba pang training katulad ng Reintegration Planning and Market Place Event. In Singapore, I attended all the Market Place Events where I met key people from cooperatives and social enterprises." (My plan for reintegration became clearer to me after attending other trainings like Reintegration Planning and Market Place Event. In Singapore, I attended all the Market Place Events where I met key people from cooperatives and social enterprises.)

From the time that she got in contact with Atikha and participated in the step-ladder program, Ellen shifted her focus to getting involved with Pinoy WISE (Pinoy Worldwide Initiative for Savings, Investment and

Entrepreneurship) and to planning her eventual return to the Philippines. She realized that she had to plan well her return to the Philippines.

Her engagement led her to become one of the active leaders and organizers of Pinoy WISE-Singapore. Ellen also became a trainer of Pinoy WISE. She was eventually elected as the chairperson of Pinoy WISE-Singapore Chapter. The organization encourages fellow MDWs to participate in the various financial education trainings of the step-ladder program in Singapore.

## Overcame fears, planned and prepared to return home

Ellen realized that she was not getting any younger. She did not want to live in Singapore forever but she also did not want to come back to the Philippines with nothing. She explained her decision to finally come home: "...iniisip ko talaga na ayokong magiging forever doon sa abroad. Saka... nasilbihan ko na ang pamilya ko nasilbihan ko na yung community, I need to do something for myself." (I do not want to live abroad forever. I have served my family and the community (in Singapore). I need to do something for myself). It finally dawned on Ellen that she had to do something for herself. And she wanted to do that in the Philippines.

But planning a permanent return to the Philippines after being away for so many years was not that easy. Ellen feared the difficulty in adjusting to the life in the Philippines after getting used to a life in Singapore. Ellen also feared of coming back, knowing well the failed experiences of her sister, close friends other MDWs who returned to work again in Singapore after getting bored and after finding no work and opportunities in the Philippines.

But those fears did not weaken her resolve to come home. She felt that she had learned a lot from the trainings. She just had to prepare her return well. She said: "Hindi na ako natakot kasi ang iniisip ko, kung nabuhay ako noon na wala akong alam, bakit ngayon pa ako matatakot na medyo marami na akong alam. (I feared no longer because I survived then when I knew so little. Why would I fear now when I have learned a lot?).

Ellen's reintegration plan became clearer and complete. She wanted to set up her own bakery in the Philippines. Even before she attended the Pinoy WISE training, she was already interested in baking. She read books about baking, taught herself how to bake and practiced by baking bread for her employer and his family in Singapore. She narrated: "Kung anong maisip ko, magbabasa akong libro and during the night and then i-experiment ko the next day. Inaalam ko, alamin lang ang function ng bawat ingredients na ilalagay...nag self-taught nga ako. Tapos while doon ako sa amo ko, for the past 10 years hindi kami bumibili ng bread. Gawa ko lahat yon." (I read books at night and experimented in the day. I learned about the ingredients that I needed. I taught myself to bake. For 10 years, we did not buy bread, I bake the bread for my employer and his family.)

She studied and prepared for her bakery business. She discussed her business plan with her 'alaga' (child that she took care of who at that time was in college already) and prepared the requisites of setting up a bakery. She loaned some money from her seaman-brother as additional capital for the business. She set up the bakery and let her sister manage it while she was still in Singapore.

Her coming home was delayed for some time. It was caused by her employers' pleas for her to postpone her return trip to the Philippines. She eventually got firm on her decision and finally bid goodbye to the family that was so kind to her. With her business in the Philippines not being managed well and her strong desire to manage it on her own, she flew back to the Philippines.

## Her own employer and manager in the Philippines

Ellen returned home for good in October 2016. She was happy that she decided to come home. She is the hands-on manager of her own bakery, employing two bakers and two delivery men, and supplying bread and other baked products to communities and schools. She has set up a profitable business.

It was to her credit that she had set up profitable businesses: bakery, a grocery store and a food house. She learned not only how to bake, cook other food, but also learned to operate the businesses that she established. She never gave up despite negative feedbacks and apprehensions of family and friends.

To date, Ellen's Bakeshop and her other businesses are doing good. The bakeshop earns a minimum of PhP 6,000 a day. The bakery has expanded. Before the bakery did not deliver its products, now because of the demand, it has its own tricycle and van to deliver products to cope with the growing demand. Ellen earns about PhP 50,000 a month from her bakery, grocery store and food house in Igbaras, Iloilo. For barely three years in the Philippines, she is now financially secured and earns more than what she expected.

## Hard work plus a lot of help from service providers

Ellen continues to face challenges in the day to day operation of her businesses, the greatest of which is finding the right workers. Ellen learned to cope and faced the challenges. She confessed: "Minsan, ako ang baker

or nasa delivery. Minsan naman nasa kaha. Kung saan ako kailangan, doon ako." (At times, when needed, I became the baker or the delivery man. At times, I was the cashier. Whatever is needed to be done, I act on it).

Ellen shared that she has thriving businesses because of her hard work and ingenuity and the assistance that she got from partners. She said: "Kapag masipag ka lang at maparaan, mapapantayan o mahihigitan pa ang kita mo sa ibang bansa. Nasa ganito na akong sitwasyon ngayon kasi I was assisted by the government and migration and development (M&D) partners. It is really a partnership, they are willing to help me whenever I need them." (When you work hard and you put your mind into the businesses, you can equally earn or even earn more than what you earn abroad. I am doing well because I was assisted by the government and migration and development (M&D) partners. It is really a partnership, they are willing to help me whenever I need them.)

Ellen was introduced by Atikha to the people in the Public Employment Service Office (PESO) who act as the secretariat of Iloilo Committee on Migration and Development (CMD). The CMD was organized to integrate migration into the provincial development plan and implement migration and development programs. It is composed of representatives of national and provincial government agencies, migrant associations, NGOs and those in the private sector in the province.

Ellen learned the key players in migration and development in the province of Iloilo. She learned the programs and services of different agencies. Ellen sought for assistance of PESO in improving her bakery. PESO referred her to Department of Trade and Industry (DTI), a CMD member-agency.

Ellen visited Department of Trade and Industry (DTI)'s Go Negosyo Center, a one-stop hub for all business needs. The Center promotes ease of doing business and facilitates access to services for Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs). It also provides business opportunity seminars, business mentoring and linkages to market and capital and runs shared service facilities that can be tapped by migrants and families.

The Center encouraged Ellen to register her business with DTI, work on other compliances such as business and BIR permits. Ellen's Bakeshop was registered as legal business entity and availed of the free Training on Entrepreneurship. From the four-day training, Ellen learned how to efficiently manage her businesses—handling the daily operations, human resource management and financial management.

DTI, in turn, linked Ellen to the Department of Science and Technology (DOST). The DOST assists in product development and packaging. It promotes new technologies to overseas Filipinos and families that can be used in their enterprises.

DOST assists businessmen who are into bread and pastries. Ellen's baked products were further developed through the assistance of a DOST food technologist that was assigned to help her. After the product development stage, Ellen's bread and pastries looked good, tasted even better and found to be competitive in the market.

Aside from product development, DOST also assisted Ellen in labelling and packaging her products. Ellen's baked products became more attractive and ready to penetrate a wider market.

Aside from DTI and DOST, Ellen was also encouraged by the Provincial Government of Iloilo to take part in several trade fairs and in the Dinagyang Festival, a popular festivity in the province, where Ellen's Bakeshop products can be displayed and sold.

## **Advocate for migration, development and successful reintegration**

Ellen continues to do her advocacies with Atikha with almost the same conviction and passion that she devotes to her businesses. Ellen organizes migrants and their families, helps conduct Pinoy WISE financial literacy seminars and business and investment training seminars and fora in the province of Iloilo. She remains passionate to her advocacies such as successful reintegration of overseas Filipinos especially those who worked as MDW, addressing the social costs of migration to families and children and curbing the dependency of families of migrants. She continuously shares her experiences as a MDW who reached her goals, as a sister who set limitation of support to her family in order not to foster dependency, and as migrant returnee who deliberately and successfully planned her return to the Philippines.

Ellen wants to pay back by helping MDWs and their families. She explains her dedication and passion in helping fellow migrants: “Nakita ko, halimbawa nandoon sa Singapore for how many years, pagbalik dito wala pa rin. Parang walang saysay ang paga-abroad nila ganon. And then, I need to let them realize na hindi sila magtatagal sa abroad, na ang amo mamaya baka uuwi yun or paalisin sila. Kung magkasakit sila, anong mangyayari sa kanila? Hindi lang sila ang magsa-suffer kundi pati ang family nila magsa-suffer. Tapos parang gusto kong tanggalin ang dependency. Hindi lang ikaw ang magta-trabaho para sa inyo o magbibigay para sa kanila. Kasi otherwise dependency na yon, hindi na tulong yon.” (I learned while I was in Singapore that many MDWs returned as failures. It is as if they have not gained anything from working abroad. I must make migrants realize that they will not stay permanently abroad, that their employers could return to their home countries or their employment could be terminated. When they get sick, what will happen to them? They will not only suffer but their families also will suffer the consequences. I also want to end families’

dependency. Migrants should not shoulder all the burden of earning for the family. When migrants continue to support dependent families, and foster total dependency, they are not really helping their families.) Ellen does not want her fellow migrants to waste money and lose opportunities. She does not want families to break because of migration and so she actively involves herself in projects that will help migrants to successfully return to the Philippines.

## A successful return

Ellen considered her return to the Philippines as a successful return: She explained: “Naging successful naman. Kung ano aim ko mag abroad is nagawa ko naman. Ini-aim ko yung mga kapatid ko makatapos. Tapos magkaroon ng bahay at magkaroon ako ng business. So nagawa ko naman lahat yon. Ang pagtingin ko kung bakit ako successful, kasi sa ngayon, nakuha ko na ang gusto ko sa buhay.” (I was successful. I attained what I have set to achieve, all my siblings finished college. I have my own house and business. I have done all that. I have achieved what I aspired for in life.)

Ellen has successfully returned for she has reached her migration’s aims: college education for her siblings, built a house and a bakery and currently manages profitable businesses.

To her success also means being free to do what she wants and likes to do, totally opposite of what she experienced when she was a MDW. She found happiness and contentment in being free to do what she wanted upon return. She said: “...pero sa totoo lang masarap pala yung walang amo. You’re free, yung time mo, yung desisyon mo, wala kang kino-consider na may amo ka.” (To tell you the truth, it feels nice to no longer serve an employer. You are free. You own your time. You can decide what to do with-

out considering what your employers and others would think.) That to her is another aspect of her success as a returnee and one could easily understand her for she spent more than 25 years as a MDW serving employers abroad.

Success also means to Ellen as contentment in what she does for others—for her fellow migrants and their families—so that they would enjoy the fruits of their hard work abroad and not return to the country with nothing. She said: “Kuntento na ako sa ginagawa ko ngayon. Tsaka sa mga advocacies ko, hindi na ito sa sarili ko, kundi giving back na. Iniisip ko na naging successful naman ako sa kung anong gusto kong gawin. Bakit hindi ko ipamahagi yung mga na- experience ko?” (I feel contented with my advocacies. These are not for myself. This is my way of giving back. I was successful in what I wanted to have. Why should I not share what I experienced and what I did to others?).

Furthermore, successful return to Ellen is her fulfillment in giving back to her fellow migrants, inspiring and helping them to return successfully just like what she did. She said: “...ngayon ipapakita sa kanila na may buhay after pagiging OFW. Hindi lang sa abroad magkaroon ka ng pera, dito you just need to use your resources.” (I wanted to show them that there is life after being an OFW. You can also earn your upkeep here (not only abroad), you just have to use your resources.)

Finally, Ellen’s return was a successful reintegration for she transformed herself from being a domestic helper who was at the mercy of her employer to a confident, free, and fearless woman. It was a transformation from being a lowly regarded MDW in Singapore to a business owner and a respected individual who had given back to her fellow MDWs and the community.

## Keys to her successful reintegration

Ellen pitied those who have not successfully returned—those who lost their sight of their goals and were swayed by temptations while abroad; those who have not planned well their return; those who easily gave up when faced with challenges; those who faced problems by creating another set of problems and not finding solutions.

She returned successfully because she set a timeline for her work abroad and eventual return, pursued her goals despite apprehensions of her own family, did not give up and found solutions to problems that come in the way of her plans. She said it also helped that she was firm in her stand that no matter what happened upon her return to the Philippines, she would never consider going abroad to work again. She said as an advice to other migrant returnees: “...huwag mong isipin na, alternative always, kung mag fail ang plano ay bumalik sila sa abroad... Kasi ...otherwise kung may alternative sya, hindi buo ang loob nya.” (Do not ever give up. If you fail, do not entertain going back abroad. Otherwise, you will not persist and persevere.)

Ellen made her successful return happen. She was the ultimate key to her success. Her attitudes and actuations before and during migration, and upon her return to the Philippines were critical to her successful reintegration.

Like other successful MDWs, Ellen has exhibited and done the following which spelled her success: Before migration, Ellen was moved by a strong sense of obligation to fulfill her and her loved ones' dreams and had a strong regard for learning and education. During migration, she endured hardships and remained focused on her set goals. She disavowed the negative ways of other OFWs and was frugal and disciplined in saving money. She discouraged the dependency of her family members. She

learned new things and developed herself. She planned what to do upon return and prepared well. Upon return to the Philippines, Ellen faced the challenges and overcame them. She passionately pursued her plans. She exhibited a strong sense of giving back and a strong sense of achievement. She continued to work hard and strived to be successful in her endeavors (Añonuevo, 2019).

Her successful reintegration to the Philippines, without doubt, was also aided by an NGO (Atikha) and a reintegration program (the Coming Home Project) that helped her to take control of her finances and manage her family in the Philippines. The step-ladder program systematically prepared her for a successful return to the Philippines. Upon return to the Philippines, she was ably assisted by partner agencies that provided her the know-how and skills in managing her own business enterprises.

Her own actions plus the interventions from a reintegration program spelled Ellen's successful reintegration the Philippines.

# ***‘Napatunayan namin na kaya namin!’:*** **Empowerment of Filipino Migrant Domestic Workers**

*Augustus T. Añonuevo*

**N**apatunayan namin na kaya namin!” (We have proven that we can do it!) The statement expresses the triumph of MDWs in changing their ways, in redirecting their own lives and that of their families’ lives for the better. The statement also expresses confidence of Pinoy WISE leaders and members to return to one’s home country in not so distant future after systematically preparing themselves and their families for their eventual reintegration. The statement also expresses their pride in transforming themselves from ‘belittled MDWs’ to becoming trainers and mentors of their fellow MDWs.

In 2001, the book *Coming Home: Women, Migration and Reintegration* noted that no other social change in the Philippines “has affected the family and raised the issue of role reversals between men and women more than the feminization of migration. This change has also helped in redefining Filipino masculinity and femininity” (p. 94). It added: “A number of women in Italy and Hong

Kong cherish their freedom and independence from their husbands. They are also proud of their capacity to earn their own money and decide what to do with it. Some have expressed relief that they have been freed from the daily grind that they had to face before—taking care of the house, children and their own husbands. These women exude self-confidence and seem to be in total control of their own lives. Migrant women are slowly realizing that they have changed. Not only have become the main providers, they have also become the main decision-makers in their families. they have become more than what society expects them to be” (p.94).

These changes among many women migrants noted in the book *Coming Home* in 2001 remain true today. These changes are evident among those reached by the Coming Home Project and who became leaders and members of Pinoy WISE in Hong Kong and Singapore. Their experiences as women and as migrant workers in a foreign country and separated from their husbands and families have changed them. But these MDWs in Hong Kong and Singapore have not only changed, they have been empowered by the interventions of the Coming Home Project and their association with Pinoy WISE. Circumstances and experiences as MDWs have changed them but Interventions made by the project and their own migrant organization have empowered them.

## **The Coming Home Project, Pinoy WISE and the Empowerment of MDWs**

The Coming Home Project sought to strengthen the economic security and livelihood of domestic workers in Hong Kong and Singapore and their families in the Philippines. This project goal was realized through the attainment of the two set outcomes, namely 1) increased ability of MDWs and their families to access jobs and resources and 2) Improved access to socio-economic services by MDWs and families. Clearly from its attained

goal and main outcomes, the project has envisioned the economic empowerment of women MDWs. But more than economically empowering women migrants, the project has also resulted to other forms of empowerment. It has also empowered them to effectively manage their families and relationships and it has empowered them to develop their individual capacities and take on the social responsibility of leading their fellow migrant workers. The project has led to a three-dimensional empowerment of women MDWs in Hong Kong and Singapore.

Women's empowerment refers to “women's ability to make strategic life choices where that ability had been previously denied them” (Malhotra et al., 2009). Empowerment entails boosting the status and capacity of women by providing them the necessary education and training and raising their awareness (Alvarez and Lopez, 2013). For Page and Czuba (1999), empowerment is a “multi-dimensional social process that helps people gain control over their own lives. It is a process that fosters power in people, for use in their own lives, their communities, and in their society, by acting on issues that they define as important”. The three-dimensional women empowerment of MDWs (economic empowerment, capable management of family and relationships and personal development and social responsibility) resonates well with the cited notions of women empowerment. The Coming Home Project and Pinoy WISE provided them the much needed education and training which capacitated them to take full control of their lives and make strategic life choices. They are in control of their own lives—their own finances, families and perform social responsibilities as women and leaders of fellow domestic workers. Among the strategic decisions that they had made was the firm resolve to make the most out of their migration, to be with their families and to successfully reintegrate to the Philippines.

The step-ladder economic and social Interventions of the Coming Home Project and Pinoy WISE were keys in the transformation and empowerment of MDWs in Hong Kong and Singapore. The step-ladder program of education and training has enhanced the capacity of MDWs to save and invest their money and to engage in business. The program has also provided MDWs information on employment and business opportunities and

access to services and assistance from different government and private institutions in the Philippines. The program has led many of MDWs to save and invest more and actively make use of economic opportunities and available services in their provinces of origin. Without a doubt, the step ladder program of interventions has economically empowered those reached by the Coming Home Project.

More than that, the step-ladder program capacitated the MDWs to manage their own families. They have faced and resolved issues like remittance-dependency, lavish spending, communication gap, relationship problems within their families. Infused with the concepts of gender equality and shared family responsibility, the training program have emboldened the MDWs to become more assertive as women, wives and mothers and made them effective and resolute in making decisions for the betterment of their families.

The Coming Home Project as conceived and implemented, considered the MDWs in Hong Kong and Singapore not only as its main beneficiaries but also as its partners in implementing the step-ladder program in the two migrant destination countries. Atikha has capacitated selected MDWs to become trainers of the different trainings, and mentors of fellow MDWs. They were usually tapped to provide technical assistance or assist in inviting participants. The decision made by Atikha was proven correct for the MDWs were effective conduits of Atikha in implementing the Coming Home Project.

The active participants of the step-ladder program bonded themselves together and formed their own Pinoy WISE chapters in Hong Kong and Singapore. A Pinoy WISE chapter has become a self-help group, a network of friends that encourages and reinforces one another in pursuit of individual savings, investment and reintegration goals. It is an advocacy group that reaches out and influences fellow MDWs to take part in the Coming Home Project. Pinoy WISE has ‘individually and socially’ empowered its leaders and members. It boosted their confidence and capacity to become good speakers, facilitators, organizers, leaders and mentors. It imbued in them the social responsibility of sharing what they

have learned and practiced so that others could also benefit from the step-ladder program. The Pinoy WISE leaders and members gladly took on the responsibility of helping their fellow MDWs who like them earlier were clueless or unmindful how to effectively realize their migration and reintegration plans and goals.

The step-ladder program of the Coming Home Project started it. Pinoy WISE, in turn, have reinforced what have been learned in the trainings and strengthened the confidence and resolve among MDWs to realize a successful reintegration to their home country.

## Facets of Empowerment of MDWs in Hong Kong and Singapore

The migrant domestic worker participants of the step-ladder education and training program, leaders and members of Pinoy WISE chapters in Hong Kong and Singapore were capacitated, changed and empowered by the interventions of the gender responsive reintegration program specifically designed for them. Their three-dimensional empowerment means that they are women migrant workers who do the following:

1. Take full responsibility and capability in managing one’s own finances in preparation for permanent return and reintegration to the Philippines (economic empowerment)
2. Assert important role in managing the family, promote gender equality and shared responsibility and confront and resolve family problems in communication and relationships (capable management of the family and relationships)
3. Develop themselves and assume responsibilities as leaders, organizers, trainers and mentors of fellow MDWs (personal development and social responsibility)

What do these three dimensions of empowerment mean as practiced and lived by these Filipino migrant women?

### Capable management of own and family finances towards Reintegration

From the case studies and interviews of MDWs in Singapore and Hong Kong who are Pinoy WISE leaders and members and who have undergone the step-ladder training, economic empowerment meant 1) prudent management of finances, 2) heightened savings, Investments and business engagements, and 3) clear goals and plans for eventual reintegration to the Philippines.

Table 3 summarizes the changes in mind set, attitudes and behaviors of MDWs before and after the trainings with regards the MDWs’ capacity to manage their earnings and finances.

Table 3. Mindset, Attitudes and Behavioral Changes Before and After Interventions Regarding Economic Empowerment

| ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT:<br>Prudent Management of Finances, Heightened Savings, Investments and Business Engagements; Clear Goals and Plans for Eventual Reintegration |                                                                                                                                           |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Mindset, Attitudes and Behavioral Changes                                                                                                                           |                                                                                                                                           |
| Before Step-Ladder Interventions                                                                                                                                    | After Step-Ladder Interventions                                                                                                           |
| Succumbed to relatives’ whims and desires; tolerates family dependency on remittances                                                                               | Set the family budget around which relatives should live by; ended family dependency                                                      |
| Lavish spending of earnings                                                                                                                                         | Wise and prudent use of money                                                                                                             |
| Saved some money; saved but not systematically and without clear goals                                                                                              | Systematically saved money earmarked for clear goals                                                                                      |
| Some investments, largely on house and lot and real estate                                                                                                          | Diversified investments including investments in cooperatives and financial instruments                                                   |
| No engagement or small business engagements                                                                                                                         | Business ‘projects’ intended to be stable sources of family income upon return                                                            |
| Unclear time frame for return to the Philippines; no confidence in returning home                                                                                   | Clear and foreseeable time frame of return; exudes confidence because of substantial savings and investments and set up sources of income |

**Prudent management of resources.** MDWs gained the capacity to prudently manage their finances. While their fellow migrant domestic workers unwisely spend their money (e.g. splurged on their earnings and pampered their families by acceding to all their whims and desires), these MDWs saved and invested their money and put a stop to the financial dependency of their families on their remittances.

Many of the MDWs interviewed admitted that they found it difficult not to give in to the demands of their husbands, children and other relatives. To assuage their guilt feelings of ‘being not there for them’, they succumb to their wishes, whether financial or material. After the trainings, they realized that they could not make substantial savings nor make investments when they would readily succumb to the whims and desires of their loved ones. Mariz Pascual of Singapore said: “Natuto akong mgasabi ng ‘Hindi!’” (I learned to say No!). She learned to say No to capricious financial demands of her family. Andes Caspe who has worked as MDW for 12 years echoed Mariz’s stance and narrated: “Nag-depend ang pamilya ko sa remittance ko. I cannot say No to them. Since the training, n-open ko sarili ko sa family ko at ang gusto kong marating. Simula ng training, naging bato na rin ako, pinaintindi ko ng gusto na ring magpahinga at gusto ko ng umuwi. Kayat simula noon, kapag sinabi ko na ganito ang budget ay sinusunod nila!” (My family was dependent on my remittances. I cannot say No to them. After the training, I opened myself to them and made them understand what I wanted to attain in life. After the training, I stood firm in not giving in to their wishes. I told them that I also wanted to stop working and go home to the Philippines. Since then, I only send what is needed and my family lives on the budget that I have set!)

Lori Brunio, leader of Pinoy WISE Hong Kong observed the changes in behavior of MDWs who participated in the FIMT: “Kung sa dati, wala silang pakialam sa pinapadala nila at paano ito ginagastos ng pamilya nila, ngayon naka-record at kina countercheck ang gastos ng kanilang pamilya. At di na rin masyado sa bili-bili. Noon, basta may bargain, punta kaagad sa malls. Ngayon, nagiisip kung ok bang bilhin, needs or wants pina-practice na!” (Before, they really did not mind the remittances that

they sent and how their families spend them. Now, they demand from their families that all expenses are accounted for. Before, when there were bargain sales, they hurriedly went to the malls. Now, they think whether it is wise to spend money on things, whether bargained or not. They practice what they learned about spending only on needs and not on wants!”

**Heightened savings, investments and business engagements.**

Interviewed MDWs from Hong Kong and Singapore said that they learned from the trainings how to systematically save what they earned. They proudly shared that they applied the savings strategy of  $\text{Income} - \text{Savings} = \text{Expenses}$ .

MDWs said that they had savings before the trainings. But they learned to systematically save during the trainings. In Text Box 3, see the differences in pre-training and post training savings behavior of the participants. Clearly, the trainings have resulted in marked increase in savings among the participants.

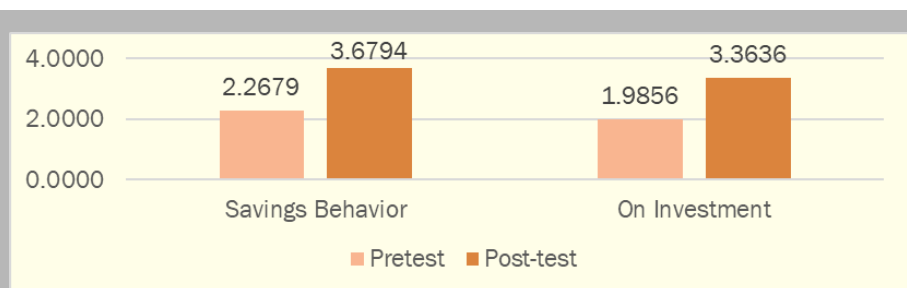
MDWs state significant changes that the FIMT have done to them. For instance, Marites Iglesia-Dimaano, a MDW in Hong Kong said: “Ang laking tulong talaga ng Pinoy WISE sa akin, nag grow ako ng todo pagdating sa paghawak ng pera, dati na akong nag aatend ng ibang training pero nag-iipon lang ako.

Sa PinoyWISE, mas nagkaroon ng direksyon ang paghawak ko ng finances.” (The Pinoy WISE training was a big help. I learned how to handle money. I have attended other trainings but I just save some money afterwards. After the Pinoy WISE (FIMT), I was given direction in handling my finances.)

Many of the participants stated that they also set aside money as emergency fund. Mariz Pascual who worked for 11 years in Singapore and recently returned to the Philippines was one of them. She came home months earlier than planned because her husband met an accident and had to undergo head surgery. She narrated how grateful she was that she learned to set aside some emergency money: “Malaki

ang tulong ang fin lit. Kung wala akong naipon, wala kaming pambayad sa doctor at ospital, kalahating milyon ang gastos namin. Nakapagtabi ng emergency fund at yun ang pinambayad sa bills ng asawa ko. Sabi ng doctor sa akin, “Pasalamat kayo na me pera kayo at naagapan agad ang asawa mo.” (The financial literacy training was a big help. Had I not saved, we could not have paid the doctor and the hospital; the total hospitalization costed us half a million pesos. It was a good thing that I had set aside an emergency fund for I used it to pay the hospital bills. The doctor said to me: “You were fortunate that you had the money and your husband was treated immediately). Her husband is now well and recuperating from the head surgery.

### Text Box 3. Saving and Investment Behaviors of MDWs in Hong Kong and Singapore



As shown in the bar graphs above, the mean scores in savings of MDWs displayed significant increases after the training. The difference between the pre-test and posttest means (i.e. prior to the training and after the training) indicates the change in savings behavior brought by the trainings. That the difference of 1.41 between the pretest and posttest means of MDWs indicated an improvement in savings behavior among them. That is about 62% change in savings behavior (i.e.  $3.68 - 2.27 = 1.41$ ;  $1.41 / 2.27 = .62 \times 100 = 62\%$ ).

The bar graphs also show marked changes in investing behavior of migrants before and after the trainings. The mean difference score of 1.37 of MDWs was computed by getting the difference between the post test score of 3.36 and pretest score of 1.99. This means a 69% change in investing behavior among MDWs (1.37 divided by 1.99 equals 0.69;  $0.69 \times 100$  equals 69%).

Source: Evaluation of the ‘Coming Home: Reintegration Program for Domestic Workers in Hong Kong and Singapore to the Philippines’ (2019), p. 74, p. 76.

The step-ladder program has addressed the lack of knowledge and information on investment options among MDWs and their relatives. Concepts of investing such as diversifying investment, understanding the relationship between risks, yield and liquidity and impact, computing the amount they need for investing in migration goals were discussed as early as the Level 1 training of the step-ladder program.

Interviewed migrants and relatives learned from the trainings that it is not enough for them to save money but they should know where to invest them. They learned about passive and active investments and the different investments vehicles that are available for them in the Philippines and in their home provinces. They learned how to diversify their investments to be able to safeguard their investments. A growing number of MDWs are reported to be actively investing in life and health insurance, time deposits and Unit Investment Trust Funds of banks, shares in cooperatives, and other investment vehicles in preparation for their eventual return to the Philippines.

Yolanda Bermas, a MDW in Singapore shared that the training provided her information on how to channel her savings to investments. She proudly revealed that she had applied what she learned. She is now engaged into diverse investments like cooperative shares, mutual fund and unit investment trust fund (UITF). Wilma Padura, a MDW in Hong Kong shared how she learned the value of saving money for investment. It is important to have an investment goal as part one’s reintegration plan. As part of her plans in coming home, she started to engage in cacao farming. Many MDWs like Yolanda and Wilma view their investments as part and parcel of their eventual reintegration to the Philippines.

**Clear goals and plans for eventual reintegration.** Meann Pascual has been working as MDW in Singapore since 2011. She confidently stated that she will be ready to return to the Philippines in six years: “OK na ako, kahit umuwi na di na ako babalik na zero. Mayroon na akong titirhan at may business na rin. Sabi ko nga, anytime na kailangan kung umuwi, pwede na. Meron nang pagsisimulan. Marami pa akong naiisip na business.” (I am OK and will not return with nothing. We have a house to live in and a business. Anytime, if forced to return, I am ready. I have some (money and

investments) to start with in the Philippines. I have in mind, some other businesses that I can engage in.) Similarly, Marites Dimaano exuded confidence in her return and said: “Nakahanda na akong umuwi for good at gusto kong masorpresa ang mga anak ko na isang araw, malalaman na lang nila na kasama na nila ako” (I am ready to go home for good. I want to surprise my children, they would be surprised that I am already with them.)

Like Meann and Marites, many MDWs have expressed confidence to return to the Philippines in a foreseeable timeframe that were absent in their immediate plans before. Such confidence was a result of the reintegration preparedness that they gained from actively participating in the Coming Home Project. The enhanced reintegration confidence/preparedness among MDWs in Hong Kong and Singapore is indicated in Text Box 4. Other data showed an increase in savings and in investments of MDWs in Hong Kong and Singapore. MDW participants of the trainings were conscious that an integral part of their reintegration preparedness was to make substantial savings, engage in investments or in businesses.

Andes, a MDW from Hong Kong shared that from having too much debt, she learned to pay off her debts and learned to prepare for her eventual return to the Philippines. Now she has investments and businesses. She said her whole family is involved in her plans for her reintegration. She learned a lot from the step-ladder training program. MDWs like Andes cited the Market Place Events/Investment and Business Forum as helpful in guiding them on possible investments/business ventures that they could engage upon their return to the Philippines. In these gatherings, they were provided information on business and investment opportunities and services that are available in their provinces/municipalities of origin in the Philippines.

Lori of Hong Kong expressed how valuable was the step-ladder program to the MDWs: “Wala nang iba pang magandang programa maliban sa Pinoy WISE. Kapag umuwi ka sigurado na stable ka economically. Di ka na magpapaulit-ulit sa pag-aabroad. Stable ka dahil sa iyong mga natutunan.” (There is no other better program than the Pinoy WISE (step-ladder program). You return home when you are stable economically. You will not again migrate to earn your keep. You are also stable because you have learned a lot!).

#### Text Box 4. Reintegration Preparedness of MDWs and Relatives

The Coming Home Project enhanced the reintegration preparedness of both MDWs and relatives. The table below shows the change before and after the various activities of the project.

##### Reintegration Preparedness of MDWs and Relatives Before and After the Trainings

| Paired Samples Statistics                                                                    |               |           |        |       |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------|-----------|--------|-------|
| Item                                                                                         | Beneficiaries |           | Mean   | Sig.  |
| Paghahanda sa pagbabalik ng OFW sa Pilipinas (Preparation to reintegrate to the Philippines) | MDWs          | Post-test | 3.9522 | .000* |
|                                                                                              |               | Pre-test  | 2.6794 |       |
|                                                                                              | Relatives     | Post-test | 4.1483 | .000* |
|                                                                                              |               | Pre-test  | 2.0000 |       |

\*The p-value of <.01 indicates that there is significant difference between the pre-test and post- test mean scores.

The table above shows that the posttest means of the both MDWs and relatives are larger than their pre-test means. This would indicate that the trainings have resulted to an enhanced preparedness among them. Prior to the trainings, the mean for OFW is 2.68; after the trainings, it increased to 3.95. This suggests that there is a 47% increase in score which means a higher sense of reintegration preparedness. Likewise, the mean score of relatives increased from the pretest score of 2.0 to post test score of 4.14, or 100% increase which indicates a very high sense of reintegration preparedness after the training.

The data further suggest that the trainings has imbued in them confidence to return and had equipped them to return to the Philippines. This was backed up by personal testimonies of MDWs and their families regarding their plans that were brought about by the training. The beneficiaries cited the Level 3. Market Place Events/Investment and Business Forum as helpful in guiding them on possible investments/business ventures that they could engage upon their return to the Philippines. Some while still abroad managed to put up businesses like cacao farming, piggery, apartment rentals, grocery stores among others.

Source: Evaluation of the 'Coming Home: Reintegration Program for Domestic Workers in Hong Kong and Singapore to the Philippines' (2019), pp. 87-88.

## Capable management of family and relationships

The second facet of the empowerment of the MDWs is their capable management of their families and relationships. For Pinoy WISE leaders and members and those who have undergone the step-ladder training, this facet of empowerment meant 1) assertive assumption of responsible role in the family and practice of gender equality and shared family responsibility, 2) nurturing relationships and fostering open communication and 3) confronting and resolving family conflicts and problems.

Table 4 summarizes the changes in mind set, attitudes and behaviors of MDWs before and after the trainings that reflect how they have changed in managing and sharing responsibility in their families.

**Table 4. Mindset, Attitudes and Behavioral Changes Before and After Interventions Regarding Capable Management of Family and Relationships**

| CAPABLE MANAGEMENT OF FAMILY AND RELATIONSHIPS:<br>Assertive Assumption of Responsible Role in the Family and Practice of Gender Equality and Shared Family Responsibility; Nurturing Relationships and Fostering Open Communication; Confronting and Resolving Family Conflicts and Problems |                                                                                                                                                                                              |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Mindset, Attitudes and Behavioral Changes                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     |                                                                                                                                                                                              |
| Before Step-Ladder Interventions                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              | After Step-Ladder Interventions                                                                                                                                                              |
| Meek and obedient wife                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        | Assertive wife but consults husband regarding decisions on financial and family matters                                                                                                      |
| Hid work and life situation abroad from husband and children                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  | Shared one's situation as a woman and migrant including difficulties and hardships                                                                                                           |
| Communicated and expressed affection to children through money and material things or ignored children's feelings and needs                                                                                                                                                                   | Constantly communicated with children about their studies and other experiences through cell phone and social media painstakingly understood their needs and feelings as children of migrant |
| Tolerated being jobless, dependency and/or extravagant ways of husband and other relatives                                                                                                                                                                                                    | Demanded that husband and relatives contribute to the family income and live with the budget that she set                                                                                    |
| Keeping to oneself her dreams and plans for the self and family                                                                                                                                                                                                                               | Shares with the family one's dreams and plans, initiates actions to realize the goals set                                                                                                    |

## Assertive role in the family and practice of gender equality and shared family responsibility.

In the Philippines, women are expected to perform the traditional role in the family, to take care of the children and do the household chores. Men are the breadwinners of the family. These traditional roles of men and women dramatically changed in migrant families with migrant women becoming the main breadwinners. Despite this clear role shift, many of the MDWs clung to the traditional expectation of wives to be meek, obedient and submissive to their husbands.

The Coming Home Project infused transformative lessons in the trainings to help change the gender dynamics of the families of MDWs. Gender sensitivity, gender equality and the need for shared family responsibility were integrated in the trainings. MDW participants realized that men and women are to be treated equally and possess equal abilities and qualities. The notion of gender equality should be upheld and hence, shared responsibility is to be practiced within their families. The MDWs have become women who are able to manage their families. They also have become gender champions who gained self-respect and became assertive of their rights.

Interviews of MDWs tell stories of migrant women empowered to assert themselves within their families because of the training. From being meek, obedient and submissive, they learned to voice out their ideas, express what they feel, and assert what they want. Some husbands noticed these changes with their wives and eventually appreciated the abilities and capacities of their MDW wives. They also saw nothing wrong with them taking good care of their children and even doing the household chores.

Meann narrated how she asserted herself and changed her husband. She said: "Ang asawa ko, di maganda ang ginawa sa pinadala ko. Bukod sa allowance nila, me pera pa para sa savings namin. Nagulat ako nang pag-uwi ko, wala yung mga gamit na dapat bilhin, at ubos din ang savings." (My husband spent all what I have sent. Beside their allowance,

I also sent some money to be saved. When I went home, I was shocked to learn that the things that should be bought were not bought and all the money that were to be our savings were also spent by my husband.) Disappointed and frustrated, Meann told her husband: “Lahat na ng mura tinanggap ko para maibigay ang magadang kinabukasan na ating pamilya. Di dapat ganyan. Gusto mo bang ganyan na lang ang buhay natin?” (I accepted all the insults from my employers just to provide for you and the children a good life. You should not have done what you did. Do you want our lives not to be better?) She pleaded her husband to change his ways and become more responsible.

Other than crying a lot and endless pleas to her husband, Meann took actions. She said she applied what she learned from FIMT to her husband. She sets the family budget and sent only what her husband and her children needed. She let her husband manage their store but monitors the expenses daily. She also sent to her husband the FIMT modules so that the he could also learn how to save, invest and operate a business.

Her efforts paid off. She said: “Ngayon ginawa niyang pang-service sa school ang tricycle, matapos niyang maihatid ang mga anak namin sa school. Natuto na rin siya kasi hinigpitan ko na rin. Ok na siya sa mga bata. Puro babae yun kaya dapat magbago na siya. Lahat ng modules pinadala ko sa kanya para basahin at pag-aralan niya. Sabi niya maganda pala ito. Sabi ko sa kanya, basahi mo para di ka makalimot.” (He drives the tricycle to bring other children to school after bringing our own children to school. He learned because I became strict. He also takes good care of our children. He should really change especially because our children are girls that should be paid attention to. I sent to him all the training modules for him to read. He said he found them good learning materials. I told him to read them again so that he will never forget.) Her husband confirmed that he had changed: “Malaki pagbabago, dati gala ng gala, ngayon lagi na lang ako sa bahay. Kung iinom sa bahay na lang, di na dumadayo. Laging nasa bahay lang at nag-aalga sa mga bata. Bahay at trabaho na lang. Nagbago ako kasi naintindihan ko na ang paghihirap at pagsasakripisyo ng asawa ko.” (I

changed a lot. Before I am usually with friends, now, often I am at home and taking care of my children. I drink at home and not anywhere else. Work and home, that is my daily routine. I changed because I realized the hardships and sacrifices of my wife.) He added; “Si Meann nagging relihiyosa at mahigpit sa pera. Bina-budget lahat ng perang pinapadala. Wala naman problema doon. Ngayon nagtatanim ako ng gulay para di na bibili pa. Baging, kamote, malunggay, katuray at iba pa tinatanim ko.” (Meann became religious and stricter when it comes to money. She budgets all the money that she sends us. I do not have no problem with that, I understand. Now, I also plant vegetables (baging, kamote, malunngay, katuray and others) so that we will spend less.)

MDWs also learned to cut the dependency of their families on their earnings and remittances. Mariana Gomeceria who works in Hong Kong said: “Dati kapag me humingi ng tulong bigay kaagad dahil sabi sa sarili pera lang yan.” (Before, when a relative asks for financial help, I readily give him/her some money. I told myself, it was just money. I could still earn more.) After the trainings, Mariana learned to say No to all the financial requests and demands of her family and other relatives. Her cutting their dependency paid off. She has now investments in real estate, a boarding house for lease and secured herself with a paid life insurance.

It is also noteworthy that the MDWs in Hong Kong and Singapore encourage their parents, spouses and children to take part on the same trainings that they had, especially the Family and Income Management Training. Such efforts have resulted in the change of attitudes and behaviors of their family members especially those of their husbands and children.

MDWs in Hong Kong and Singapore shared that they noticed that their husbands have started sharing in providing for the financial needs of the family by either seeking employment or engaging in business. Some MDWs also gladly observed that their husbands have been more active in managing the household and in taking care of their children.

After the Financial and Income Management Training that both the MDWs and their husbands and other relatives have attended, many discussed and set the family budget, jointly monitored the income and expenses and made sure that all in the family worked within the set family budget.

Some migrants also shared that they now plan with their husbands and children the investments and businesses that they wanted to engage in. Some MDWs in Hong Kong and Singapore and their spouses or relatives jointly manage family businesses in the Philippines. MDWs said that they closely monitor the operations of their businesses while they are still in Hong Kong and Singapore, hoping to make them profitable before they permanently return to the Philippines.

Migrants saw the importance that they and their relatives ‘must be on the same page’ towards the realization of their family goals for migration and reintegration.

***Nurturing relationships and fostering open communication.*** Interviewed migrants shared that most of the time they found it difficult to talk with their spouses and children. The training taught them ways of how to communicate with their spouses and children.

Many MDWs have left their families to work abroad when their children were still young. Hence, many children have grown up without their mothers by their side. Hence, it is not surprising that migrant mothers and children would both have difficulties in relating with one another. Most children treated their mothers as mere ‘remittance provider’ and not mothers they could talk to and take care of them despite the distance. That further leads to estrangement of relationships.

MDW participants shared that they owed a lot from the trainings because slowly they have mended their relationships with their children. They learned that they should share their own life and work situation with their children for them to realize that they have never abandoned them and their work abroad is just temporary for them to meet the family needs and those of their children. They learned that constant and open communication is the key in fostering good relationships. They realized that they need not hide from their spouses and children the difficult life that they had while abroad. They learned that revealing their life and work experiences help their spouses and children understand them better and appreciate more their hard work and sacrifices.

Migrants also encouraged their spouses and children to also do the same with them, to share their own situation—problems, needs and desires—with them. They acknowledged what was taught in the trainings—the importance of open, honest and regular communication in bridging the communication gap and developing a better relationship with their spouses and children.

MDWs noticed changes in their children’s attitudes and behaviors towards them. Their children have become more open in sharing their experiences and feelings with them. They have also become more responsible in their studies. Many children shared that making good in their studies is their way of recognizing the hardships and sacrifices of their migrant mothers. Some said that they are studying well so that they could finish their studies so that their mothers could finally return home and be with them.

After the trainings and learning from other migrant experiences, many MDWs consciously and regularly communicated with their spouses and children. They now look forward to a better, open and close relationships with them.

**Confronting and resolving family conflicts and problems.** MDWs became capable of confronting family issues and concerns with their spouses and children. As revealed by the training participants, dependency of husbands and other relatives and communication gap between them and their children rank high among the problems that they had to confront with as migrant women.

They have realized that they had to confront and resolve such family issues and concerns, otherwise, their migration and reintegration goals would not be realized. As discussed earlier, many of them have learned to say NO to the whims and capricious demands of their dependent husbands and relatives. What they did was to make them realize that they had to contribute to the family income by finding employment and engaging in business endeavors. They also set a limit to the money that they send their relatives and demanding that they must live within the budget.

MDWs also bravely mended their problematic relationships with their children. They opened themselves with their children and constantly communicated with them. MDWs realized that money, gifts and other material things that they send their children are poor substitutes to open expression of affection and regular communication.

**Personal development and social responsibility**

Not only were the MDWs in Hong Kong and Singapore empowered to take full control of their finances and empowered to manage well their relationships and families, they were also empowered to develop themselves and to lead their fellow migrants toward reaching their goals in migration and in reintegration to the Philippines. This third facet of women migrant empowerment meant MDWs 1) learning social and nterpersonal skills and 2) assuming the leading role and responsibility for fellow migrant workers.

Case studies of Pinoy WISE leaders and active members in Hong Kong and Singapore reveal the changes in mind set and behaviors of MDWs after the trainings with regards personal development and social responsibility. These are summarized in Table 5.

**Table 5. Mindset, Attitudes and Behavioral Changes Before and After Interventions Regarding Personal Development and Social Responsibility**

| PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT AND SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY:<br>Learning Social and Interpersonal Skills; Acceptance and Assumption of Leading Role and Responsibility for Fellow Migrant Workers |                                                                                                                      |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Mindset, Attitudes and Behavioral Changes                                                                                                                                            |                                                                                                                      |
| Before Step-Ladder Interventions                                                                                                                                                     | After Step-Ladder Interventions                                                                                      |
| Meek and shy domestic workers                                                                                                                                                        | Confident speakers and trainers                                                                                      |
| Mere follower and ordinary member of social organization                                                                                                                             | Leader of Pinoy WISE and organizes trainings and meetings                                                            |
| Learned from other migrants’ mistakes and experiences and listened to advises                                                                                                        | Motivator and mentor to fellow migrant workers                                                                       |
| Treats self as beneficiary of projects and interventions                                                                                                                             | Makes full use of interventions and expresses ‘ownership’ of the projects so that they and other MDWs attain success |

**Learning social and interpersonal skills.** Through the Coming Home project, the migrant women developed themselves as capable and responsible leaders, speakers, trainers, mentors and role models of other migrants.

Yolly, who for years worked as MDW in Singapore shared her story of empowerment: “Kapag kasambahay ka, ang liit ng tingin sa iyo. Pinapatunayan namin na may kakayahan kami dahil sa Involvement namin sa Pinoy WISE. Kaya namin maging public speaker, trainer and mentor. Kaya naming ibigay ang oras para makatulong sa kapwa.” (When you are a domestic worker, people belittle you. We have proven our ability because of our involvement with Pinoy WISE. We became public speakers, trainers, and mentors. We provide our time to help other MDWs.) She added that working with Pinoy WISE and “volunteering is good for the soul.”

Lori Brunio of Pinoy WISE-Hong Kong proudly said that all the trainings in Hong Kong, from Levels 1-5 except the trainings of trainers conducted by Atikha were organized and manned by Pinoy WISE leaders and members. They painstakingly invited fellow MDWs to participate, acted as speakers and facilitators during the trainings. After the trainings, they monitored and mentored their fellow MDWs in pursuit of their individual plans. These they all did, on top of being full-time domestic workers serving their employers in Hong Kong. The step-ladder program was fully implemented by MDWs for their fellow MDWs.

Andi Mendoza narrated her experience as a trainer: “Public speaking. Laking tulong sa pagbabahagi ng karanasan. Dati nakaupo lang, after a month, nagii-speak na ako sa harapan. Ni minsan di ko pinangarap na magsalita sa harap, ngayon gamay na gamay na. Masarap ang feeling na ang akala nila ang galling-galing ko. Nag-level up kami. Nagulat sila nang sinabi naming domestic worker din kami at me amo din kami.” (I learned to speak in public. It helped in sharing my experiences. Before I sat at the back and just listen to the speakers. After a month, I am one of the speakers in the training! I never dreamt of being a speaker and to talk in front of many people. Now, I am used to it. It was a nice feeling

that the MDW participants regarded me as a good speaker. We did our very best. The participants were surprised to learn that we are MDWs like them, MDWs with employers to serve.”

Mariz Pascual, a Pinoy WISE trainer in Singapore proudly shared the following: “Naging confident sa sarili. Mas marami na akong alam kaysa dati. Naging trainer sa mga trainings sa Singapore. Parang naging proud sa sarili dahil naisip ko di ako tapos sa pag-aaral pero ngayon nakapagshare ka kahit household worker ka. Naging trainer ako kasi gusto kong mashare ang natutunan ko para mas maraming matulungan sa Singapore. Kung hindi, maraming tatanda ng walang ipon at di makakauwi sa Pilipinas.” (I became self-confident. I have learned a lot by being a trainer in the trainings in Singapore. I am proud of myself because come to think of it, I never finished my studies but now I can speak and share my experiences despite being a mere household worker. I wanted to be a trainer because I wanted to share what I learned and so that many more MDWs will be helped. If not many of them will not be able to save and come home to the Philippines.)

Andi’s and Mariz’s experiences, joy, confidence and pride are shared by many other organizers and trainers of the GEAR UP/Pinoy WISE step-ladder program in Hong Kong and Singapore, from being ‘mere domestic workers’ and from being beneficiaries of the program to becoming the implementers of the Coming Home Project. They treated the project as their own and implemented it well.

**Acceptance and assumption of leading role and responsibility for fellow migrant workers.** Lisa Mayor of Pinoy Wise Singapore explained her involvement with Pinoy WISE: “I have realized that because of the financial literacy (training), money is so important. I want to help others to do the same. The training made a deep impact on me, I want others to experience the same, or even more.” Lisa is now back home in Naga City in Bicol and vowed to continue working for Pinoy WISE, this time, by working with migrant families in Bicol.

Lisa and other Pinoy WISE leaders and members could have just paid attention to their own migration goals and plans of reintegration, and could have just focused on the well-being of their families but they chose to be active in Pinoy WISE, to be of help to their fellow MDWs. Why? The Pinoy WISE leaders and members felt it was their obligation and responsibility to share their own transformation, their own experiences in making their lives and that of their families better. They wanted their fellow MDWs to also benefit from the GEAR UP program just like them. They wanted their fellow MDWs, just like them, foresee a successful return and reintegration to the Philippines.

In addition, Pinoy WISE became a network of friends, a network of trusted friends who can be counted on to help them pursue their own migration and reintegration goals. Wilma Padura of Pinoy WISE-Hong Kong added: “We are also motivated to share what we have learned. We were positively affected by GEAR UP so we wanted to pay it forward; we wanted other OFWs to benefit also.”

Women migrants in Hong Kong and Singapore are changed by their own circumstances. But they are dramatically being transformed by interventions. They are empowered by the much-needed interventions. Migrant women have not only learned and realized their potential and abilities as women, they have also boldly and courageously assumed responsible roles both in their families and among their fellow migrant workers. They have been empowered and have taken full control of their lives and that of their families, and help direct the lives of their fellow women migrant workers.

## **Towards Empowering More Migrant Women**

More than access to trainings, more than being trained to become assertive and vocal as women, women empowerment should mean economic empowerment. That means being able to be in full control of their own earnings and resources and making decisions, and taking actions. That empowerment should mean being able to decide responsibly what to do with their finances and their family. That should mean being an assertive woman in the family, challenging traditional notions of masculinity and femininity and becoming a strong advocate of gender equality and shared family responsibility in thought and in practice. Empowerment should also mean consistently harnessing one's own potential as a woman aside from being a migrant worker, wife or mother and taking in social positions of responsibility towards the betterment of fellow MDWs and other people.

We should make it easier for migrant women to be empowered. We should intervene towards their empowerment. We owe it to them and their families.

# **‘Returning home for good!’: Facets of a Gender-Responsive Reintegration Program**

*Augustus T. Añonuevo*

**U** *Umuwi na sa atin. Nag-for good na!*” (Returned home for good!). Often you hear it from Filipino migrants to refer to their fellow migrants who have returned and permanently settled in the Philippines after years of working abroad.

The phrase ‘returning home for good’ does not only mean returning permanently to one’s home country but also indicates an explicit desire of a migrant for a good life upon his return to the Philippines. The question had to be asked: Did the Filipino migrants who returned to the Philippines really ‘returned home for good’?

## **Successful Reintegration and Successful Migrant Returnees**

The concept of reintegration is defined as “...a process by which migrants after their return from overseas employment resettle themselves into the social and economic structure of their countries of origin” (Amjad, 1989, Canal, 1992 & Shah, 1994 as cited in Arif, 1998, p.100). Reintegration is viewed as synonymous to the concepts of successful return migration and sustainable return. The synonymous concepts mean the absence of re-migration which entails the migrant’s attainment of socioeconomic success and the guarantee of returnee’s rights to public and social services and freedom of movement (Anarfi & Jagare, 2005).

Based on such definitions, many Filipino migrants would have failed in their return. Not many can be assumed to have reintegrated successfully to the Philippines. No hard data are available not only of how many migrants have returned but also of how many have led a good life upon return to the Philippines. Anecdotal data, however, point out that many Filipino migrants could have returned unsuccessfully to the country, i.e. without economic security source nor an intact family to return to or worse, without both.

In my doctoral research, I found out that the Filipino migrant returnees attached various meanings to their successful return to the Philippines, more than economic success or social reintegration that most in the literature account to as the components of successful reintegration. For the Filipino migrant returnees, successful return meant “fulfillment of set goals for migration, accomplishments upon return in the Philippines, bouncing back from difficulties and attaining a better life than they had before migration, ‘professional success’, attainment of peace of mind, contented and happy life in their home country, helping other migrants and other people in need and gaining recognition because of these engagements, and self-transformation from being migrant workers to becoming accomplished individuals” (Añonuevo, 2019, p. i).

My study found out that successful migrant returnees were “1) goal-focused; determined in pursuit of these goals and overcame challenges and difficulties (prior to and during migration and upon return) to attain their desired life goals; 2) self-taught financially literate individual(s) who exercised self-discipline and prudence in managing and investing (their) hard-earned money; and 3) developed (themselves) by gaining new knowledge and skills and by learning from own experiences and from the mistakes and failures of other migrants and returnees” (Añonuevo, 2019, pp.185-186). These Filipino migrant returnees are indeed individuals with a strong sense of purpose and resolve.

It can be said that these successful Filipino migrant returnees were literally on their own in making it back successfully to the Philippines. My own study clearly pointed out that individual factors, actions and circumstances, not large-scale structural circumstances and factors determined their decision to return home and attainment of successful reintegration to the Philippines.

We should not, however, be hasty in concluding that large-scale circumstances and interventions will not play a role in the successful reintegration of OFWs in the future. In my dissertation, I also stated the following: “This study’s findings, however, should not lead us to a definitive conclusion that large scale structures and social circumstances will not play a role in the successful return migration of migrant Filipinos in the future. It is probable that in the future when a favorable climate for return exists (e.g. that includes a government reintegration program that ably supports and assists returning migrants), then one can expect more migrants to come home successfully aided by large scale interventions” (Añonuevo, 2019, p. 198). And that statement was proven correct by the Coming Home Project which implemented interventions that have enhanced the reintegration preparedness of many migrant domestic workers in Hong Kong and Singapore and facilitated the successful return of some of them to the Philippines.

### **The Coming Home Project and Reintegration Preparedness of MDWs and Their Families**

Reintegration “denotes longer-term efforts to anchor returning migrants in the societies and communities to which they return, including their reinsertion into local labor markets, education systems, and broader sociocultural contexts” (Ruiz Sotto, Dominguez-Villegas, Argueta, & Capps, 2019, p. 11). Efforts and interventions are indeed necessary for migrants’ successful reintegration. But return migration is not a heterogeneous phenomenon. There are migrants who were forced to return due to different ‘crisis’ circumstances and there are those who planned their return to their home country. Hence, different reintegration programs are to be designed for crisis return and for planned return of migrants.

The Coming Home Reintegration Program for Domestic Workers in Hong Kong and Singapore to the Philippines was designed to address the reintegration needs and challenges that are faced by Filipino migrant domestic workers. The project prepared and capacitated both the migrants and their families in the Philippines towards a successful reintegration to the country.

The Coming Home Project sought to strengthen the economic security and livelihoods of migrant domestic workers (MDWs) from the Philippines who are based in Hong Kong and Singapore as well as their families in the Philippines. The goal was achieved because economic and social interventions were provided to the MDWs and to their families that enhanced their reintegration preparedness. The project was popularly known as the Coming Home Project and/or Go Earn Achieve Return-Uplift Philippines after it was adopted by Pinoy WISE and OWWA.

## Characteristic Features of a Gender Responsive Reintegration Program

As it was envisioned and implemented by Atikha and its partners, GEAR UP was a reintegration program that sought to answer the reintegration needs of MDWs and their families. It was holistic, integrative, participatory and gender-responsive reintegration program.

**A holistic program.** The program encompassed the different phases of migration that all MDWs undergo: pre-departure, on-site and return. Moreover, it strategically addressed actual challenges experienced by MDWs and their families. The project sought the economic and social preparation on reintegration of MDWs and their families.

**An integrative program.** The reintegration program tailored the services and assistance that it provided to the migrants' and families' needs. Hence, it coordinated the services provided by its various institutional and organizational partners and made them available and accessible to the MDWs in Hong Kong and Singapore and to the migrant families in selected provinces in the Philippines.

**A participatory program.** The program engaged the active participation of MDWs. The program treated them not only as its main beneficiaries but also its main implementing partners. In addition, the program also engaged government, non-government organizations and those from the private sector which provided their expertise, resources and services to the reintegration program.

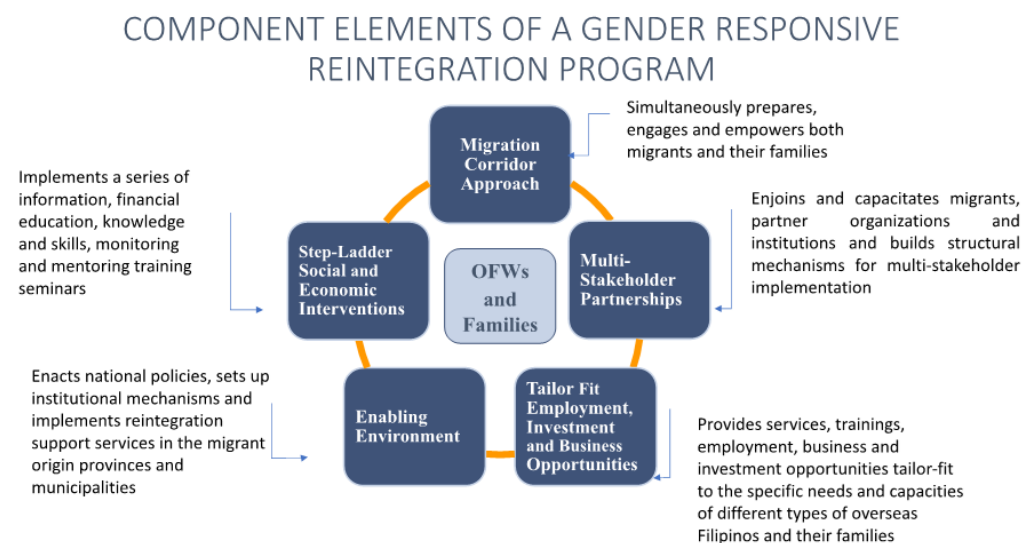
**A gender-responsive reintegration program.** The program addressed the needs of the Filipino women migrant domestic workers in Hong Kong and Singapore. It capacitated the women MDWs in managing their own finances and in managing the challenges faced by their own families. Practical gender needs on financial management, shared family responsibility, and gender equality were integrated in the various trainings of the program.

## Component Elements of a Gender Responsive Reintegration Program

Drawn from the implementation of the Coming Home Project, GEAR UP and the results of the program evaluation, a gender-responsive reintegration program must have the following component elements: 1) implements a migration corridor approach; 2) provides step-ladder social and economic interventions; 3) engages multi-stakeholder partnerships; 4) creates an enabling environment for reintegration; and 5) provides tailor-fit employment, business, and investment opportunities for migrants and their families.

These component elements as illustrated in Figure 11 below were integrated in OWWA's Comprehensive OFW Reintegration Program Framework. It was presented by Estrella Dizon-Añonuevo, Atikha Executive Director and OWWA Board of Trustee Women Representative during the National Consultation on Comprehensive Reintegration Program of OWWA-NRCO.

**Figure 11. Component Elements of a Gender Responsive Reintegration Program**



## Migration corridor approach

Reintegration programs should reach, organize and capacitate both the migrants working in destination countries and their families of migrants in the Philippines. Both should be prepared simultaneously for the eventual reintegration of the migrants to the Philippines.

The Coming Home Project was eventually owned by the MDWs. Through Pinoy WISE, MDWs actively supported and implemented the project for they learned not only how to manage not only their finances but also their families---the two reintegration challenges that they all face. They now have exhibited enthusiasm and confidence in their foreseeable reintegration to the Philippines.

Reintegration programs should cater to the reintegration needs of migrants but must also pay attention to migrant families in the provinces. The actualities of these families could make or break the successful return of migrants. Financial dependency of families to migrant remittances, for one, weakens the ability of migrants to prepare well financially for their

return. Broken or weakened marriages and children in disarray regarded as indicators of a failed return should be prevented.

There are programs that cater to migrant children, husbands and migrant families in the Philippines. But these are few and their scope are limited in reach. They should be supported and expanded. School-based and community-based programs that teach financial literacy, responsibility in the family, gender sensitivity, and the realities of migration should generate more support. Gender sensitivity programs, assistance for employment and engagement in business to counter idleness and financial dependency of husbands and other migrant relatives should be actively offered.

Mastering the use of social media is critical in implementing information, education, monitoring and mentoring activities of a multi-country and multi-province reintegration program like the Coming Home Project. The use of social media and technology should be maximized in succeeding reintegration programs.

## Step-ladder social and economic interventions

Migrants' successful reintegration to their home countries should be ensured. Migrants need assistance in planning and realizing their eventual return to their country of origin. Hence, step-ladder economic and social interventions from pre-departure to return phases, on both sides of the migration corridor are to be provided to migrants and their families.

The step-ladder program as implemented was a series of information, financial education, knowledge and skills, monitoring and mentoring training seminars that systematically enhanced the reintegration preparedness of MDWs and their families. It included the following: Level 0: Pre-Migration Orientation Seminar which oriented would be migrants and their families about overseas migration and specific work and life conditions of their destination country; Level 1: Family and Income Management Training which teaches migrants and families how to manage their finances and their families; Level 2: Reintegration Planning and Mentoring which guided migrants in making their reintegration plans

and were mentored to realize their goals and plans; Level 3: Business and Investment Forum which presents various services, savings, investment and business opportunities in the Philippines especially in their provinces of origin; Level 4: Skills Training which trained migrants on knowledge and skills that they were interested in or were required by employment or business that they had in mind upon return to the Philippines; and Level 5: Entrepreneurship Training and Mentoring which trains migrants in setting up and managing business. This step-ladder program need to be further developed and its reach be further expanded among migrants in more destination countries and in more provinces in the Philippines.

The step-ladder program as implemented by the Coming Home Project, integrated the many but uncoordinated reintegration services of the national and local governments, NGOs, and private sector for the MDWs and their families. It also integrated the handling of social and family concerns as part and parcel of reintegration interventions. There remains a need, however, to standardize

the training programs for MDWs and other OFWs since there are numerous entities that provide financial education trainings for them.

Furthermore, monitoring mechanisms and mentoring systems must be developed to aid migrants and returnees to steadfastly pursue their migration and reintegration goals and plans.

### Multi-stakeholder partnerships

Empowered and organized MDWs and families are to be treated not only as program beneficiaries but as partners in program implementation as trainers, mentors, organizers and as role models.

There is a need for organizing of OFWs and families. The project proved that organizations like Pinoy WISE when provided with adequate training in destination countries and in the provinces become effective partners in the implementation of gender responsive reintegration program. Migrants' and their families' active participation is

key to successful implementation of a gender responsive reintegration program.

Migration is a cross-cutting issue and needs committed support from different migration stakeholders from the national and local governments, NGOs and the private sector. These stakeholders can provide the needed technical, financial and human resources for the program. Since the different agencies are also involved in various initiatives, there should be an inter-agency reintegration committee that coordinates the initiatives of the different partner organizations. Clear and binding partnership agreements and performance indicators must also be set among partner institutions and organizations.

Structural mechanisms are to be set up in implementing a multi-stakeholder reintegration program. As practiced in implementing the Coming Home Project, Atikha was the main program implementer while it counted on the Pinoy WISE in Hong Kong and Singapore, POLO-OWWA and local government units and other partner

organizations as its main conduit implementing organizations in countries of destination and in the provinces, respectively. Similar implementing structures are to be organized at the national, sub-national, provincial and city/municipal levels in implementing reintegration programs.

### Enabling environment

At the national level, policies must be enacted that not only harmonize government services to returning migrants but also harnesses their knowledge, skills and resources towards the development of the country and their communities of origin. At the local levels—provinces, towns, cities and communities, reintegration support services must be in place to help returnees and their families. In addition, structures, resources and personnel must be provided at the national and local levels that support the implementation of a comprehensive and gender responsive reintegration program. These comprise what should be referred to as the enabling environment for

reintegration of migrant workers in the Philippines.

Current efforts at the national, sub-national, provincial and city/municipal government levels are laudable but they must be continuously pursued and developed. The efforts of NEDA and its Subcommittee on International Migration and Development in integrating migration and development in the Mid-Term Development Plan should be consistently pursued towards an enactment of clearer national policies on migration, reintegration, and development. Work has still to be done in creating a national coordinating mechanism that would direct all efforts of government, non-government and private sector towards implementing a national comprehensive reintegration program for all OFWs. At the sub-national level, the practice of NEDA Region IV-A in setting the directions and integrating migration and development programs in the plans of the provinces and coordinating efforts of different government agencies with regards to

migration, reintegration and development must be expanded to other regions in the country. In the same vein, the migration, reintegration and development programs as implemented in the provinces of Batangas, Iloilo, and Quezon must be promoted to other provinces in the country.

MDWs and other OFWs will return to their provinces, municipalities and communities of origin. This is the rationale for the corridor approach in implementing a reintegration program. The local areas must be able to address the needs of migrant returnees and at the same time, must be able to harness the resources that migrants bring to their communities. Best practices in addressing the reintegration needs and in harnessing the development contributions of returning migrants must be shared to as many local governments especially in provinces, towns and cities with less experience in receiving returning migrants.

### **Tailor-fit employment, business and investment opportunities**

Return migration is a heterogeneous phenomenon. Migrants with different sociodemographic characteristics and migration experiences return to their countries of origin for different reasons. But they all benefit from a reintegration program. Because of the heterogeneity of migrant returnees, “...reception and reintegration services are most effective when they target returning migrants’ individual needs and circumstances and consider the barriers they face in readapting to daily life—including push factors that they may have prompted them to migrate in the first place” (Ruiz Sotto, Dominguez-Villegas, Argueta, & Capps, 2019, p. 10).

Services, employment, savings and investment opportunities must be made available to migrants and their families. These opportunities must be available to migrants while they are still abroad. Investment and business forums held in the

destination country should tackle and deliver the services, investment and business opportunities that are available in the provinces in the Philippines where most migrants who attended come from. The Coming Home Project implemented such a forum in Hong Kong and Singapore and it is recommended that this be replicated in other destination countries.

There is also a need to engage more cooperatives like Soro-soro Ibaba Development Cooperative, Lagawe Multi-Purpose Cooperative, Sapang Multi-Purpose Cooperative, financial institutions like the Bank of Philippine Islands and other private sector institutions to offer more tailor-fit savings, investment and remittance schemes and packages for the different segments of OFWs.

Reintegration program and its services in the long-term must be localized. It requires a firm resolve of the local government to integrate migration and reintegration in its development planning, provide the necessary financial, technical and human resource support, map available services

and package savings, investment and business opportunities for migrants and their families. But this will also mean that the national government and its agencies must also lend its support to all local governments that implement reintegration programs.

## Towards Implementing a National and Comprehensive Reintegration Programs for OFWs

Successful return is an undertaking of every migrant who first and foremost, must rely on his resolve, perseverance, hard work, abilities and capacities. But all migrants need all that he can get in making his or her return and reintegration to his home country successful. These statements are reflected in the definition of reintegration laid out by the Comprehensive OFW Reintegration Program (CORP) Framework adopted by the OWWA-NRCO in 2018: “Reintegration is a holistic process by which a migrant, on his own or with the assistance of government and other duty bearers (private sector, development NGOs and organizations) returns, to his home origin for good, by intention, through a series of preparations and interventions geared towards her/his specific needs, goals, interests, potentials and capacities”.

For a national reintegration program to be implemented successfully, it must incorporate the characteristic features and the component elements of a gender-responsive reintegration program for MDWs as implemented and as discussed in the earlier sections of this article. Furthermore, the CORP could learn from the experiences of Mexico, El Salvador, Guatemala and Honduras in implementing reintegration programs for migrant workers. In their critical review of the reintegration programs and services of four Latin American countries, Ruiz Sotto, Dominguez-Villegas, Argueta, & Capps (2019) concluded: “The most promising practices in Mexico, El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras are those that operate under an integrated framework that tailor’s services to migrants’ needs, coordinates services across institutions, and leverages existing services at the local level. Ensuring that these services are successful and sustainable will require collaboration across sectors, regional shared responsibility, consistent funding, and better monitoring and evaluation mechanisms” (p. 30).

Three important points are to be reiterated that are common in the experiences of the four Latin American countries and the experiences in implementing the reintegration program for MDWs which are valuable in implementing CORP. These are 1) implementing an integrated framework and coordinated approach; and 2) developing reintegration pathways suited for different migrants.

### Integrated framework and coordinated approach

CORP offers an integrated framework that guides the implementation of a national and comprehensive reintegration for all OFWs. What does an integrated framework entail? “An integrated approach to reception and integration involves offering services that increase economic self-sufficiency of returning migrants while simultaneously addressing their other individualized needs, such as education, health care and psychosocial support. (Ruiz Sotto, Dominguez-Villegas, Argueta, & Capps, 2019, p. 12) That means, first and foremost that a reintegration program like CORP must ensure that migrants are economically empowered so much so that re-migration overseas will no longer be an option for them. Access to services that answer their other reintegration needs should also be made available to them.

Ensuring economic self-sufficiency of returning migrants and making various services available to migrant returnees require according to Ruiz Sotto, Dominguez-Villegas, Argueta, & Capps (2019) “strong coordination between governments and international and civil society organizations to comprehensively address challenges at the individual, community and structural levels, and in doing so, to provide migrants with the social stability and psychosocial wellbeing to facilitate their long-term reintegration” (p.12). That would mean therefore the necessity of a national coordinating body that will coordinate all government agencies, at the national and local level, non-government organizations and private sector involved in migration and development and harmonize their services and made them accessible to migrants and their families.

The reintegration program and the reintegration assistance and services must in the long term be localized. Migrants will eventually return to their localities of origin where they will permanently settle to be with their families. All resources, services, expertise, best reintegration program practices must be shared and cascaded to LGUs especially those with high concentration of migrants and migrant families. Policies should be at the national level but reintegration program implementation, in the long term should be made local.

Ruiz Sotto, Dominguez-Villegas, Argueta, & Capps (2019) advise us all: “Efforts to improve understanding of the needs of returning migrants and the assets that they bring their home countries should be targeted both to government officials and to the general public. By incorporating modules on return migration into training of public officials at all levels, governments can raise awareness of the specific needs of this growing population and explain legal and procedural changes in the provision of government services. Better and more uniform implementation of existing government services across localities could increase migrants’ participation and improve their livelihoods, especially in municipalities with less experience in receiving returning migrants” (p.28).

### **Different reintegration pathways for different migrants**

Henderson and Willough (2009) suggest the creation of reintegration programs that suit the needs of different categories of returning migrants. Such programs should account for differences of migrants in age, gender, work and employment experience, among others.

The CORP clearly differentiated crisis return from planned return. It clearly delineated the different services and assistance that the national reintegration program should offer to crisis migrant returnees and those migrants who planned their return. That clearly are two distinct pathways formulated by CORP and should be distinctly developed further, taking note of the possibility that tackling crisis return could be overwhelming to government resources and personnel.

The Coming Home Project has pilot tested the reintegration pathway for domestic workers. Based on the evaluation, it is recommended to be mainstreamed by the OWWA-NRCO, national government agencies and LGUs in the destination countries and in migrant-source provinces.

The CORP must strive to develop more reintegration pathways that specifically cater to the characteristics and needs of different occupational categories of OFWs like professionals, factory and service workers, and seafarers. The occupational categories of migrants differ not only in migration experiences and reintegration needs but also in expertise, knowledge and skills that they bring along with them upon their return to the Philippines. CORP must not only provide services but eventually must be able to programmatically harness the resources and capacities of returning migrants.

All efforts must be coordinated and all initiatives towards a working national reintegration program must be encouraged. We owe all OFWs a comprehensive and gender sensitive reintegration program. They have every right to return to their home country and live a happy and decent life with their families.

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# Coming Home

Innovations and Impact of a Gender Responsive Reintegration Program on Filipino Migrant Domestic Workers and Families



## Coming Home

*Coming Home: Innovations and Impact of a Gender Responsive Reintegration Program on Filipino Migrant Domestic Workers and Families* deals with outcomes of the implementation of the Coming Home Project and the results of the evaluation of the said project.

The book discusses the innovations and interventions implemented by Atikha in capacitating the Coming Home Project's beneficiaries, Filipino migrant domestic workers in Hong Kong and Singapore to effectively manage their finances and families towards a successful return and reintegration to the Philippines. It discusses the effects of the interventions done by Atikha and its partners to the migrant domestic workers, their relatives and children.

*Coming Home* looks forward to the development and sustained implementation of a national, comprehensive and gender responsive reintegration program for all overseas Filipinos.



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