
Manila Women's Forum

A Network of Women Professionals

February 2009

Filipinos May Contemplate, “Should I Stay or Should I Go?”

By Monica Atkinson

The Manila Women's Forum had two guest speakers at its meeting last January 19 — Pindie Stephen, the Senior Migrant

Training Officer of the International Organization for Migration, and Sylvia Lichauco, the Founder and President of the Lola Grande Foundation for Women and Children, Inc.

Pindie shared a presentation titled, “A Filipino Phenomenon-Caretakers of the World: IOM's Initiatives in the Philippines.” She said that 10% of the Philippine population works overseas, and are commonly called OFWs. Within this 10%, about 3.6 million are permanent overseas workers, 4.1 million are temporary and 1 million are irregular or undocumented workers. Between 20 and 30% of all seafarers worldwide are Filipino. According to the Philippine Overseas Employment Administration (POEA), approximately 3,170 Philippine OFWs depart daily to work abroad.

In the last decade, there has been a dramatic increase in the number of women working overseas worldwide; this is referred to as the “feminization of migration.” It is largely due to the growth of the nursing, care-giving and domestic help industries.

This trend has brought in more remittances, but it has many negative

(Continued on page 2)



Above: Family of an overseas Filipino worker (OFW) and Pindie Stephen (with red scarf).

FEBRUARY MWF Meeting ■ **When:** 6:30 p.m., Monday, February 16, 2009. **Where:** Sukanya Wignaraja's home, 103 Cambridge Circle, North Forbes Park, Makati City. **What:** Fe Kagahastian, a Filipino currently working in media and communications in Kabul, will lead a discussion on “Filipinos: Champions at Crossing Continents, but Complacent about Shunning Stereotypes.” She will touch on the well-known perceptions of Filipinos abroad, but will focus on how many Filipinos harbor ill-informed stereotypes about other groups. In particular, she will explore Filipino Christians' stereotypes of Muslims and Islam in general, despite the large numbers of OFWs working in the Middle East. What are the fundamental factors shaping such stereotypes? Are there implications for future generations? **Bring:** Something to share for the potluck dinner. **March Meeting:** Monday, 2009 March 16.

(Filipinos... from page 1)

implications too. Women working abroad send a higher proportion of their income home and assume greater responsibility for inter-generational money transfers. Unfortunately, women are more vulnerable to human

rights abuses, usually work in less skilled jobs with limited prospects for upward mobility (called de-skilling), earn lower wages and work longer hours, and may lose out on social benefits. The biggest sacrifice for most women is that they leave their families

and children behind for extended periods of time...even years.

Policymakers are becoming aware of these negative implications, which were presented and discussed at the International Conference on Gender, Migration and Development: Seizing Opportunities and Upholding Rights (ICGMD) held in September 2008 in Manila.

The conference was organized by Sylvia Lichauco, Founder and President of the Lola Grande Foundation for Women and Children, Inc., and our second speaker of the evening. The conference was sponsored by the National Commission on the Role of Filipino Women in partnership with the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM), International Labour Organization (ILO), United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), Women and Gender Institute of Miriam College (WAGI), Migrant Forum Asia, and the Lola Grande Foundation.

Sylvia shared with us her passion and desire to make a difference in upholding the rights of women migrant
(Continued on page 4)



Above: Sylvia Lichauco (extreme right) of the Lola Grande Foundation

Female Overseas Filipino Workers (OFWs) are Younger Compared to Male OFWs

Results from the 2007 Survey on Overseas Filipinos

The number of Overseas Filipino Workers (OFWs) who worked abroad at anytime during the period April to September 2007 was registered at 1.75 million. This number represents an increase of 15.3% over the estimated 1.52 million OFWs in April to September 2006. Of the total OFWs during the period April to September 2007, 92.4% (1.61 million) were Overseas Contract Workers (OCWs) or those with existing work-contract abroad. The number of OCWs in April to September 2007 went up by 16.6% over the 1.38 million OCWs estimated for the same months in 2006.

There were more male (50.9%) OFWs than females (49.1%) during the period April to September 2007. More than half of the OFWs (55.2%) were below 35 years old, the largest number was observed in age group 25 to 29 years. Female

OFWs were generally younger compared to male OFWs. Of the total number of female OFWs, 28.8% belonged to age group 25 to 29 years and 21.3% were in age group 30 to 34 years. Meanwhile, male OFWs were almost evenly distributed among the age groups 25 to 29, 30 to 34 and 45 and over.

One out of three (35.0%) OFWs were laborers and unskilled workers, which include domestic helpers, cleaners and manufacturing laborers. Those who worked as service workers and shop and market sales workers made up 14.3%; trades and related workers, 13.8%; and plant and machine operators and assemblers, 13.4%.

Saudi Arabia remained to be the top destination of OFWs accounting for 19.8% of the total OFWs who worked abroad in April to September 2007. One in 10 (12.1%) OFWs worked in United Arab Emirates. OFWs who worked in Europe accounted for 9.2% while 9.3

percent worked in North and South America. Hong Kong (6.7%), Singapore (6.0%), Japan (5.6%) and Taiwan (5.5%) were also popular destinations of OFWs.

OFWs from CALABARZON (17.7%), National Capital Region (16.0%) and Central Luzon (14.3%) made up almost half of the total number of OFWs. On the other hand, Caraga reported the smallest share of OFWs at 1.0%.

OFWs sent a total remittance of 110 billion pesos for the period April to September 2007, an increase of eight billion pesos (7.7%) from the estimated remittance of 102 billion pesos for the same months in 2006. Included in the total remittances are cash sent (74.6%), cash brought home (20.7%) and remittances in kind (4.7%). Of the total cash remittance sent for the period April to

(Continued on page 3)

“She’s leaving home, bye, bye.”
Do you remember these lyrics? They’re from a 60s song of the same title, by the Beatles. The words refer to a daughter who’s become old enough to leave home and have fun.



But for Filipinos today, it’s more about their mothers, sisters and wives who are leaving home to work overseas.

KaWoMeNaN

Selected and edited by
Beulah Pedregosa Taguiwalo

She’s leaving home, bye, bye

The light of the home is gone

Nawala ang ilaw ng tahanan.

Translated to English, it means “the light of the home is gone.”

Nawala Ang Ilaw ng Tahanan - Case studies of Families Left Behind
By Dr. Honey Carandang is a book

recently published by Anvil Publishing, Inc. It tells the stories of ten families left behind by OFW mothers – stories of fathers, young children, and adolescents facing daily life and the future without the usual source of strength and stability in the home, the mother.

OFWs: The European scene

The global financial melt-down has adversely affected the deployment of female OFWs. In Europe, where Filipina migrant workers used to be mostly mail-order brides,

low-paid jobs are now getting even lower pay. And, there’s now more competition coming from women from Eastern European countries, including and especially in nursing and the domestic services sector.

It’s not all sob stories for OFWs

While their mother worked overseas to support the family, Charo Ronquillo and her siblings were raised by their grandmother.

A native of Cabuyao, Laguna, Charo has always wanted to be a fashion model. So she began entering contests early. In 2005, when she was 17, she got her first real break. She won the

Ford Models’ Supermodel of the World Philippines contest, produced by Runway Productions.

In New York, Charo went on to become the first Asian model to make it to the top three in the Ford Models’ Supermodel of the World competition. Since then, she has been in shoots for top retailers – Saks Fifth Avenue, Bloomingdale’s, Ann Taylor, BCBG by Max Azria, Catherine Malandrino, J Crew. She has also done “go-sees” for Prada, YSL, Marc Jacobs, Richard Chai, Jil Sander, Philip Lim, Valentino, Badgely Mishka, Issey Miyake and Vera Wang.

Touted as “the next Anna Bayle,” Charo is now an OFW herself.

On Mothers: Food for Thought

“Strange new problems are being reported in the growing generations of children whose mothers were always there, driving them around, helping them with their homework – an inability to endure pain or discipline or pursue any self-sustained goal of any sort, a devastating boredom with life.”
– Betty Friedan (1921-2006)

“Some are kissing mothers and some are scolding mothers, but it is love just the same.”
– Pearl Buck (1892-1973)

(Female... from page 2)

September 2007, 76.8% were sent through banks, 14.0% were sent through Door-To-Door and the rest (9.2%) were sent through agency/local office, friends/co-workers and other means. OFWs working in Asia, comprising 78.1% of all OFWs, sent the biggest cash remittance of 57.7 billion pesos. Among occupation groups, OFWs working as laborers or unskilled workers posted the highest cash remittance of 17.6 billion pesos.

(Signed) Carmelita N. Ericta,
Administrator, National
Statistics Office (NSO),
Philippines

AIDS Survival Kits for OFWs

Issues: Discussion of sexuality and reproductive health issues is extremely difficult in the Philippines, a Catholic country. Therefore, it is important to find a way by which OFWs can access information about these matters, and also about HIV-AIDS, at the points where their attention is captive. Searching for an effective way to introduce HIV-AIDS issues and information to migrant workers, especially those with high vulnerabilities (sea-based contract workers, land-based contract workers, and entertainers/sex-workers in Japan), the Women’s Media Circle developed an AIDS Survival Kit for direct distribution to OFWs.

Description: A multi-media approach was used, using two entry levels: at the recruitment processing and training centers, and

through education that addresses the attitude that women must serve and please, at the risk of their lives.

Lessons learned: Creative information materials go far in helping AIDS prevention especially when distributed with the help of government agencies. Instead of simply waiting for OFWs to ask about HIV-AIDS, basic information materials should be given to them directly for their personal reference.

Recommendations: Recruitment processing centers and agencies dealing with OFWs must participate in this program. Videos and other materials about HIV-AIDS should be distributed in places where OFWs congregate.

Adapted from “Creating AIDS survival kits for overseas Filipino workers (OFWs).” Meeting Abstract by Sarabia-de Leon AL; International Conference on AIDS. Int Conf AIDS. 2002 Jul 7-12; 14: abstract no. F818. Women’s Media Circle Foundation Inc., Quezon City, Philippines. Source: National Library of Medicine (NLM) Gateway, U.S. National Institutes of Health.

(Filipinos... from page 2)

workers, and seizing opportunities for enhanced gender equality and greater benefits of migration for women and their families. She believes that education, equal opportunity, policy and governance, health, sports, and environmental ethics are areas of importance to address. Her strategies include: advocacy, capacity building, and fundraising.

Sylvia is enthusiastically moving forward with these strategies and is eagerly seeking others who are interested in helping her achieve this mission through the Lola Grande

Foundation. She also strongly believes that working overseas should be a choice, not an act of desperation. Ideally, it should be an informed choice, with adequate preparations including human rights education, financial literacy and budget management training, social cost accounting, training for families left behind, and philanthropy.

Sylvia is currently working on developing a Filipino Women's Fund; reviewing the Philippine anti-trafficking law (RA9208); organizing a national awareness campaign to combat trafficking; creating a migrant

savings act through the Senate Committee on Youth, Women and Family Relations; and developing a national campaign for sustainable environment management.

For more information, Pindie can be reached at IOM at PSTEPHEN@iom.int or Tel. 848-1260 to 63 Ext. 215.

Sylvia can be reached at slichauco@yahoo.com or Tel. 893-5671, 817-9646 and 0917-855-5652.

Below: Putting a face on the phrase "the feminization of migration."



Manila Women's Forum

Manila Women's Forum (MWF) is a cross-cultural network for women. It provides opportunities to build friendships, talk to women of various cultures, and share information about resources. Our meetings are intended to provide intellectual stimulation and lead to personal and professional development. All women are welcome to join.

The current officers are: **Amy Alexander**, Message Board. **Julia Holz**, Treasurer, Membership and Programs. **Cecilia Leung**, Programs. **Lisa Lumbao**, Chair. **Lisa Stuart**, Message Board Moderator. **Beulah P. Taguiwalo**, Newsletter, Website. **Shari Virjee**, Programs, Message Board.

Cost of membership is P300 per year. Members receive a copy of the current mailing list in addition to the newsletter, which is also sent to non-members. A contribution is collected at each monthly meeting: P20 for members, and P40 for non-members. For more information about MWF, please contact Lisa Lumbao at Tel. 813-0168, or at lumbao@mozcom.com.

Visit our website – a work in progress
www.geocities.com/manilawomensforum

MWF Newsletter
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