

Meeting/ Round Table Discussion REPORT

Sharing of Good Practices on Local- and Community-Level Mechanisms
to Protect and Promote the Rights of Migrant Workers
in Thailand and the Philippines

ILO Auditorium, Makati City, Philippines
11 January 2012

Opening Ceremonies

- ❖ Welcome Remarks
Lawrence Jeff Johnson—Director, ILO Country Office for the Philippines
(CO-Manila)
- ❖ Message
Camilla Hagström—First Secretary/ Deputy Head of Development Cooperation
Delegation of the European Union to the Philippines
- ❖ Opening Remarks from Meeting/ RTD Chair
Hans Leo J. Cacdac—Administrator
Philippine Overseas Employment Administration (POEA)
- ❖ Background/ Objectives of the Meeting/ RTD
Robert L. Larga—Programme Officer, ILO-EU Migration Project
ILO Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific-Bangkok, Thailand

Background:

- ✓ Many migrant workers remain vulnerable to deception, despite existing anti-illegal recruitment and anti-human trafficking programs and services.
- ✓ Local or community-level mechanisms or services are inadequate, if not lacking, though government assistance is available at sub-national levels.
- ✓ Vertical and horizontal coordination exist, but need to be enhanced to get all stakeholders in the loop.

Objectives:

- ✓ Take stock of existing local and community-level mechanisms and practices to protect and assist migrant workers in Thailand and the Philippines, and generate policy recommendations and other practical measures.
- ✓ Build a better understanding of existing country policies and programs and interventions on the protection of the rights of migrant workers, and how these are implemented at sub-national levels.
- ✓ Identify challenges in local implementation and draw-out concrete recommendations to address such challenges, especially in terms of enhancing coordination between national and local authorities, policy development and reform, and systems for delivering services to migrants, including reintegration assistance.

Topic 1 – Pre-Employment and Pre-Departure Services

A. Pre-Employment Orientation Seminar (PEOS)

Director Melchor B. Dizon, Licensing and Regulation Office (LRO), POEA-Philippines

- The PEOS is a proactive response to the public need for reliable information on overseas employment
- Complements the anti-illegal recruitment program in its preventive approach to curb illegal recruitment and other irregular modes of deployment
- A public information service provided to any individual who is contemplating work overseas; increase awareness of realities of overseas employment
- An educational strategy for worker protection and empowerment
- Objectives:
 - ✓ Increase awareness on realities of overseas employment
 - ✓ Help would-be workers make a decision whether to pursue overseas or not
 - ✓ Increase awareness on the hazards of illegal recruitment and other irregular modes of deployment
 - ✓ Timely forewarns prospective OFWs against the modus operandi of illegal recruiters
- Strategies to strengthen the PEOS:
 - ✓ Forging of formal Memorandum of Understanding with LGU executives
 - ✓ Continued conduct of capability enhancement training for LGUs /PESO Managers and other program partners, including NGOs
 - ✓ Reaching out to the grassroots
 - ✓ Incentives and rewards system
 - ✓ Sustained monitoring and evaluation

B. Pre-Departure Orientation Seminar (PDOS)

Director Ma. Lourdes Reyes, Officer-in-Charge, Fund and Investment Management Office (FIMO), OWWA-Philippines

- The PDOS is a mandatory training for all departing migrant workers to enable OFWs cope with adjustment difficulties experienced during the first months of work overseas.
- Aims to enable overseas Filipino workers (OFWs) cope with adjustment difficulties experiences during the first months of overseas work.
- Addresses the basic need of OFWs for orientation.
- Components—(a) Country-specific PDOS; and (b) Comprehensive pre-departure education program for household service workers
- Modules—migration issues; country profile; employment contract; health and safety; financial literacy; OWWA programs and services; other government programs/ services; travel procedures and tips
- Some positive PDOS developments—(a) Involvement of NGOs in provision of PDOS; (b) strengthened PDOS for vulnerable sector; (c) standard redesigned PDOS module; (d) efforts toward country-specific and skills-specific PDOS; (e) heightened monitoring on compliance; and (f) capacity building and skills enhancement for trainers.

- Recommendations—Make workers appreciate PDOS as a factor for personal success; make PDOS information more accessible to OFWs and their families through regional implementation; continuing development of new materials, and updating of existing collaterals; setting up feedback system

C. Awareness Establishment and Campaign on Safe Migration

*Ms. Lupthawan Walsh, Senior International Affairs Officer,
Department of Employment, Ministry of Labor (DOE-MOL), Thailand*

- Objective—Establish awareness on safe migration for jobseekers, return migrants, community leaders/ labor volunteers, and the general public.
- Pre-employment training: language, workers' benefits, living conditions/ costs, remuneration and work conditions, welfare benefits
- Return program—referral to appropriate government agencies for cases involving work conditions, labor exploitation, and related concerns/ issues
- Training for community network to prevent fraud and illegal overseas employment
- Keys to success—public participation to identify needs and problems of return migrants; peer support network to better understand safe migration

Plenary Discussion:

RECOMMENDATIONS TO ENHANCE LOCAL-LEVEL MECHANISMS/ RESPONSES

- Document the actual work-life abroad of return migrants, with the view to update specific PDOS modules. Build on their first-hand experiences as a deterrent to the recurrence of labor exploitation.
- Utilize migration realities to enhance PDOS modules toward its continuous improvement, with the welfare of migrant workers as primary focus.
- Intensify information campaign against illegal recruitment in the countryside and other remote communities. PDOS can be conducted in the provinces, not merely in urban centers, together with the families of the OFWs.
- The PEOS should complement the PDOS modules.
- Recognizing the role of volunteers in communities, engage people's organizations and civil society in the fight against trafficking in persons, as well as in safe migration.
- Ensure program sustainability by working with community-based leaders who are acknowledged as authority figures.
- Establish partnership with media organizations to effectively and efficiently disseminate key messages to a wider audience base.
- Always be wary against so-called training programs that are actually designed to circumvent labor laws and victimize unsuspecting workers.
- Ensure the accessibility of the PEOS and PDOS by utilizing popular communication strategies and the local language to more effectively deliver key messages to intended audience.

- Develop quality standards to ensure the consistent conduct of PEOS and PDOS.
- Prioritize the profiling of migrants, to include youth migrants.
- Sustain return and reintegration programs through a multi-disciplinary approach.

Topic 2 – Local-Level Assistance and Support to Migrants

A. Community-Level Reintegration Assistance for Return Migrants

Ms. Esperanza C. Cobarrubias, Officer-in-Charge, OWWA-La Union Province, Philippines

- As of 31 December 2011, there were 30,935 OFWs (both land- and sea-based) from La Union Province. There are 15 registered OFW Groups in the province, with 476 members.
- The stakeholders and partner institutions in the province include the following: (a) faith-based organizations; (b) national government agencies; (c) local government units; and (d) non-government organizations.
- The reintegration programs for returned migrant workers are the following:
Phase 1—Profiling; Counseling/ Needs Assessment
Phase 2—Provision of Assistance Needed:
Job referral, skills training, entrepreneurial development,
Phase 3—Monitoring, Evaluation and Documentation
- Strengths of the reintegration program in La Union:
 1. Creation of Inter-Agency for Migrant Concerns
 - close collaboration between National and Local Government Agencies
 - convergence of services for OFWs
 2. Existence of Migrants Desks
 - MOA signed in 16 of 19 Municipalities
 3. OFW Provincial Interim
 - Bannuar Ti La Union
 - OFW Provincial Council
 4. Supportive Provincial Government
 - La Union Multi-Stakeholder Covenant on Migration and Development

B. Economic Empowerment for Returned Migrants

*Ms. Piengpahp Withyachumnarnkul, Chief, Foreign Relations Office
DOE-MOL, Thailand*

- The economic empowerment program for returned migrants of the Thailand Department of Employment (DOE) observed a proactive search for return migrants in the communities, followed by home visits to validate their survey.
- Those identified were then assessed in terms of their needs and problems. This was followed by the provision of skills training, taking into consideration the local resources and job opportunities in the community.
- This DOE program was implemented in the Wichianburi and Nong Pai Districts in Thailand.
- The success of this program was attributed to three factors: (1) effectively responding to the psychosocial needs of the return migrants; (2) commitment of the service providers; and (3) the support and cooperation of the local government officials.

C. The Public Employment Service Office (PESO): The Palayan City Experience

Ms. Emmarie JP. Martinez, City Labor and Employment Officer/ Roberto Bolinao, City Planning and Development Coordinator, PESO-Palayan City, Nueva Ecija, Philippines

- The Public Employment Service Office (PESO) of Palayan City is a showcase of a joint Local and National Government initiative on poverty alleviation, which provides employment opportunities locally and abroad, while initiating programs for their social protection, welfare and benefits.
- Since its inception in 2001, PESO was able to create 2,647 jobs, generate 16, 279 local employments, 12,323 overseas deployments, 6, 837 trainees were placed in actual jobs, and entrepreneurial opportunities.
- Grants and aid from the DOLE, OWWA and the city government have revitalized seven associations.
- The main objective of the program is to alleviate poverty and promote entrepreneurship through job creation and facilitation, provision of skills and livelihood opportunities, and protection of the environment.
- Specifically, it promotes women empowerment through various skills and employment opportunities; promotes gender equality by providing equal opportunities for employment and entrepreneurship; protects the rights of OFWs and migrant workers; and harnesses the city's manpower resources.
- The Palayan City PESO also promotes tourism activities through cultural revitalization and positive attitudes of its residents; encourages the organization of cooperatives, associations and groups to handle communal projects and reawaken the spirit of *bayanihan*; and protects Palayanos from illegal recruiters, and provides them social protection.
- To discourage dole-outs, PESO has required all beneficiaries of its livelihood programs to have a counterpart, not necessarily money but service, building, land, and other forms of equity.
- To be eligible in the livelihood assistance programs, the informal sector should be members of SSS (individual paying member).
- Students and out-of-school youths are required to open their own bank accounts to be eligible in the SPES or summer job program. The process teaches them the value of saving, thrift and hard work.
- All vendors availing of livelihood assistance must also have their own share, such as rolling stores, equipment, tricycles, motorcycle, etc. Farmers should also have their own small farm reservoirs or fish cages.
- The PESO has curbed the incidence of red tape, graft and corruption. Because of its direct services to the people, easy access to all these services is within the reach of the people.
- Since its institutionalization, the PESO has opened up new avenues for constituents to avail of government programs and services. The PESO serves as a one-stop action center.
- Overall, the PESO has protected its work force from illegal recruitment, social abuse, work depreciation, dissatisfaction and enhanced their skill and entrepreneurial abilities, thus increasing their chances for employment and promotion. It has also contributed significantly in the increase of job creation and generation, poverty alleviation, and revenue generation, among others.

Plenary Discussion:
**RECOMMENDATIONS TO ENHANCE
 LOCAL-LEVEL MECHANISMS/ RESPONSES**

- Reintegration programs for migrant workers should be included as part of a strategic development plan of the community (i.e., municipal, city, provincial, etc.) to specifically address the needs of migrant workers using a holistic approach.
- Identify/ assign regular focal Migrant Desk Officers (MDOs) in the municipalities to assist the OFW constituents in the communities.
- OWWA should take the lead in developing the capacities of MDOs to efficiently and effectively deliver programs and services for OFWs.
- Develop the capacities of local service providers to ensure access to programs and services for migrant workers.
- Implement intensive preparatory activities such as entrepreneurial training and financial literacy before extending direct financial assistance to return migrants who choose to set up their own businesses.
- Proactive economic empowerment initiatives should be complemented with financial management programs, including basic accounting, bookkeeping, etc., and values formation through coaching and mentoring to ensure their sustainability.
- Develop community-based enterprise development schemes that will create jobs, instead of focusing merely on extending start-up capital.
- Identify “champions” in local economic development planning.
- Harness migrant workers’ remittances and ensure that these are plowed back to enhance/ contribute to local economic development.
- Reintegration programs should address the needs and concerns of distressed return migrant workers (e.g., labor and sexually exploited, physically abused, deportees, etc.).
- Document stories of both successful labor migration experiences and even cases involving illegal migration victims (including trafficked workers) to come up with benchmarks, and the interventions implemented to respond to them, with the view to develop appropriate policies.

Topic 3: Community Education and Advocacy with Local Authorities

**A. Mainstreaming Migration and Development
 in Local Governance and Development Planning**

*Mr. Noel Valencia, Executive Director/ Ms. Rosalinda Bayan
 Kanlungan Centre Foundation, Inc.*

- The Kanlungan Centre Foundation developed a framework for the continuous mainstreaming of migration and development in local governance and development planning.
- Externally, it sought the advancement of the social and political goals of returned trafficked women migrants, and the social responsibility of the La Union Provincial Government.
- Internally, it worked for organizational cohesion to gradually realize its mission and goals toward transforming the lives of the returned migrants.
- Four strategies were adopted: (1) Ensuring that the ILO mission were congruent with those of the stakeholders; (2) Analyzing the situation of migration and development from a historical and empirical perspective; (3) Defining the strategic direction of migration and development as points of convergence; and (4) Translating the strategic direction and plan into specific action.

B. The Development of the Multi-Disciplinary Team (MDT) Mechanism

Ms. Piengpahp Withyachumnarnkul, Chief, Foreign Relations Office, DOE-MOL, Thailand

- The MDT approach was adopted by the DOE for its ILO-funded Project in the Phetchaboon District from May to October 2011.
- Like the economic empowerment program, a community survey was conducted to locate the returned migrant workers.
- The multi-disciplinary team is composed of: informal debts; legal assistance; vocational skills development; and social welfare.
- Illegal recruiters are now being prosecuted during to the convergence and synergy of individual resources. Coordination among the stakeholders has also improved.

Plenary Discussion:

RECOMMENDATIONS TO ENHANCE LOCAL-LEVEL MECHANISMS/ RESPONSES

- Local laws/ agreements (e.g., Executive Order, Memorandum of Understanding, etc.) have to be in place to institutionalize/ mainstream migration and development at the community level.
- Initiate activities to ensure that Local Chief Executives, including organizations of LGU officials (e.g., League of Municipalities/ Cities/ Provinces) become “champions” of migration and development.
- Transform economic managers from among national government agencies (e.g., NEDA, DOF) as advocates of migration and development at the local level, noting that the Philippine Development Plan mandates LGUs to involve OFWs in local economic development planning.
- Collaborate with government structures (e.g., local development councils, PESO, PSWDO, etc.) to ensure sustainability of plans and programs for migrant workers.

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