The Philippines: Globalization and Migration

By Anny Misa Hefti

Globalization is synonymous to the phenomenon of acceleration. For the past 25 years rapid changes have affected political, economic and social developments. Acceleration is seen in vast technological changes, media revolution, global economic integration and massive changes in production systems and labour markets. All these rapid increases in transnational flow of capital, trade and technology have marked its effects on international migration as well. Global economic restructuring has led not only to disruption in less developed or developing economies, it has also been a factor in unemployment, wage decline or job insecurity in dominant market economies. Heavily indebted countries, like the Philippines have resorted to labor export to help them afloat. But, I will not delve on this issue here, as this is the expertise of my colleagues, Dr. Bello and Ms. Rodriguez.

What to me has considerable impact on international migration is the globalization of technology especially communications technology. Fax and telephone have replaced what used to be snail-pace letter communication. Relations between immigrant communities abroad and home communities have been facilitated by these new possibilities. The globalization of mass communication including TV, film, video and music has reinforced dreams of easy life abroad. These "imagined lives" reach even to peasants in remote villages. Migration becomes very attractive.

Impact of globalization on Migration

Contemporary views on migration depart from the earlier premise of the push-pull theory on migration. According to this theory, people moved either because social and economic forces in the place of destination impelled them to do so, or because they were attracted to places of destination by one or more social and economic factors there. Observers of migration flows have long seen the vast changing nature of migration. What used to be purely economic reasons for migrating no longer hold in many cases. Globalization of communication technology has affected extensively the original impetus of individuals to migrate. Linkages between receiving and sending countries are readily established. Networks connect migrants and non-migrants, where news and information are shared. This sustains the flow of migration. Studying networks particularly those linked with families and households sheds an understanding in the development and encouragement in additional migration.

Let us take an example on the issue of the so-called "mail-order brides" - a rather degrading label. I use this term now, so we know what I am talking about. In early 1980, many Filipinas married Western men through contracts with agencies or through newspaper ads. As they settled down in these countries, they "invited" friends and relatives to visit them who either find work or also get married. In the USA, family reunification has been the main source of increased immigration. One study indicated that 41% of pre-arranged employment of Filipinas in Italy was done by a member of the family. Chain migration especially in family units is of special interest.
to migration researches.

On the aspect of direct labour recruitment, where family reunification is oftentimes not possible, increased migration is still evident because of networking. Job opportunities are readily shared. Earlier migrants assist subsequent migrants with accommodations, jobs, and contacts. Individuals from home countries hear of these successes thus encouraging further migration. Migration may continue even after the initial impetus for migration no longer exists.

**Impact on countries of origin**

Filipinos, being extremely family-centered, would above all remit earnings to the family left behind. The standard of living of these families would improve considerably, and their status in the community elevated commensurate to the remitted green bucks.

It is known that Filipinos abroad remit approximately $7 B to the Philippine economy. A large group of NGOs demand that these remittances be used for structural changes to eventually make migration unattractive. Nevertheless, individual or micro-level processes show their impact on the macro-level. Migrant groups abroad were gradually founded. These associations pool their resources and provide funds for projects in home communities. Many organizations here have helped repair local churches in the Philippines; or expand library facilities, or built playgrounds. Remittances have therefore also effected improvement on the lives of community members outside migrant families.

However, migration has also an impact in the social lives of both the migrants and the families left behind.

Statistics show that Filipinas comprise more than 50% of Philippine migrants, with an upward trend. This fact has various implications. Families may be indefinitely separated. We are well familiar with stories of migrant Filipinas concerning the alienation of their children. They have become the "dollar mommies" with little personal closeness to their offsprings. The husband-wife relationship deteriorates as well due to long separation. It is not unusual to hear of extra-marital affairs done by the husband while the wife is abroad. However, this is not the trend. Studies indicate that marriage and family life have generally remained stable. Women migrants particularly experience isolation especially when language is totally foreign. They are also forced to live in a foreign culture that has low regard for poorer countries. Abuse in many forms is common in these situations.

Increase in consumerism has also been one of the criticisms brought about by remittances sent to families. The creation of global culture brought about by the revolution in mass communications has promoted foreign influences through films, music, TV and videos. Filipinos are well known for donning signature apparel, such as Lacoste, Nike etc. These remittances have also created a dependency attitude to the recipients. The motivation for self-realization has been overshadowed by expectations at migrating. In some cases, the remittances to families have become contra-productive.

**Impact on receiving countries**

Migrants bring to the receiving countries many customs, practices and
behaviour patterns from the home country. Smaller branches of the original culture are recreated in host countries, such as "little Italy" or Chinatown, in New York and Los Angeles. Multi-ethnicity is seen in large urban communities. However, a multicultural society may be threatening to native-born citizens of receiving countries. This can elicit resentment among the citizenry which can trigger social conflicts. Migration politics in many Western countries are not integrative. The effect of these policies is the marginalization of migrant workers. Marginalization takes the form of low incomes, and unskilled jobs. Factors such as unequal opportunities, prejudice and discrimination may be involved in prolonged periods of marginalization.

**An example: Switzerland**

Switzerland has a foreign population of 18.6%, or almost 20% of its population. Swiss authorities have tried many ways to curb the foreign population. Swiss migration policy is restrictive. In 1970, a quota system for Permits to Abode (B-permit) was put at 10,000. However, the number of immigrants continued to increase. Most recently, they adapted the so-called "Three-Circle-Model", as a guideline for issuing working permits. Belonging to the inner circle are countries from the European Union and the EFTA States. The USA and Canada belong to the second circle. The rest of the world, especially countries from the South, fall on the third circle. This implies that countries from the outer circle have practically no chance at acquiring work permits in Switzerland.

Another development in their discriminatory practices is the residence permit of foreign partners (wives and husbands). The permit is dependent upon the 'stability' of the marriage within five years. If the marriage breaks before this "grace period", the foreign partner can be deported.

Swiss NGOs have consistently criticized these discriminatory Swiss migration policies.

Some real life stories affected by these laws.....

**Gender Perspective in Migration**

Earlier studies in migration have ignored the role of women. The presence of women was usually attached to family reunification, hence dependent upon the husband. Current trends, however, show that women are migrating independently. New migratory flows are no longer male-dominated. There is a growing demand for female labour and new social needs have created a demand for services in which only immigrant women are prepared to work. Observers are keeping close watch at the feminization of migration.

It is for me important to include women-specific issues in migration discourses. There exists a division of labour - structured activities in a society are gendered. Not only do men and women undertake different tasks, but women are responsible for activities in the domestic sphere. These different tasks are the basis for the social construction of gender in which women are excluded from some activities, confined to others, dependent on males, docile, subservient and assigned secondary status in the labor market. They often take up the menial and low-paid occupations, with particularly difficult working conditions. We find women migrants working in sweat shops, as domestic servants, as entertainers exposing them to sexual exploitation.
Women migrants face degradation due to stereotypes that devalue women and women's work.

Recognizing the gender issue in migration would also recognize human rights for women.

Migrant women are vulnerable to gender-related violence like rape, sexual harassment and physical abuse. One other serious global problem is trafficking in women. Yet, how serious are governments in dealing with this problem? Migration is very much in the core of trafficking in women - in the entertainment industry, domestic workers, child prostitutes - all of which violate fundamental human rights.

The important economic contribution by migrant women, particularly the invisible work of the domestic helpers, must be recognized. Migrant women should enjoy the same privileges and opportunities as other women in the same society. The gender-agenda should be top priority in shaping migration politics. As one politician said, "if we want to change the world, change the women".

At the NGO Forum on Women in Huairao, China, migration was a hot and contested issue. At the 4th World Congress on Women in Beijing just 50 km away, migration was hardly discussed by the official delegates. They simply want to procrastinate - hoping that the problem will go away? We are sitting on a time bomb! Migration will be one of the major issues in the 21st Century.

**Solidarity**

As global restructuring affect all our lives, our responses have to take global dimension as well. We need solidarity groups at all levels - regional, national and international. Our strategies also have to change. I notice that many groups tend to dwell on situations that caused them to be victims. It is legitimate to demand justice. However, what usually is missing in their manifesto is a plan for action, a trajectory move that takes them out of the victim role. It is time we downplay our pain and our hurts which we, especially women, have already internalized. By celebrating our little successes we bring in new energy and hope into our situation. Thus we create a new identity for us - one with self-confidence. An empowered self can accomplish more than a defeated self. A group with self-confidence can truly make a difference. By actively negotiating, we move forward.

The response of Filipinas in Europe to the global challenges of migration is forming networks, one of which is Babaylan - Philippine Women's Network in Europe. Babaylan was founded in 1992 during the first European meeting of Filipinas in Barcelona. The meeting was to discuss, among others, the meaning of a Single Europe, trafficking in women, and most important, empowering Filipinas in Europe. Forming this network was empowering. This network is our support system. It is heartening to know that we can call upon each other for various activities and support in a variety of issues. Just meeting each other already fuels renewed energy. Like most NGOs our work is 100% unpaid job.

Networking cannot be be underestimated. Through personal and group networking we reach out to undocumented migrant workers. These invisible workers need our support. Babaylan, through the coordination of Rohlee de Guzman of
Limburg in Holland is a member of a network that assists cases of undocumented women migrants who are caught in predicaments. We also need to network with Philippine-based organizations. Many Filipino migrants are being forced to return or voluntarily doing so. We need to be prepared for such situations, especially where injustice is in play. We are well aware of unexplained deaths of OCWs returning in coffins. We have to work together.

What would be a common agenda for an effective and relevant response to globalization and migration? Is there anything more common than - the women? Migrant women are in the center of change. Our political actions or agenda may not be the same - but our consciousness exist. Many times, I feel our presence in political groups has not been regarded seriously enough. Sometimes, we get invited to participate as an afterthought; or perhaps as handy makers of sandwiches? Well, as I have said, we want to change strategies. We want to be active members in planning and decision making. We are capable partners, not simpy assistants. This recognition is due the women, due us Filipinas, as migrants.

I am inclined to take up the standpoint of Giovanna Campani, that the economic position of immigrant women is no longer marginal because it is compatible with the economic developments of post-industrial society and responds to new social needs. Many migrant women groups showing social action, like Babaylan for instance(1) are abandoning the victim syndrome, thus abandoning social marginality as well. We need to shift our perspectives in order for us to move forward. We look at migration as neither a degradation nor improvement (this would be wishful thinking) in women's position, but a restructuring of gender relations. This restructuring need not necessarily be expressed through a satisfactory professional life. It may take place through the assertion of autonomy in social life, through relations with family of origin, or through participating in networks and formal associations. The differential between earnings in the country of origin and the country of immigration may in itself create such an autonomy, even if the job in the receiving country is one of a live-in maid or prostitute. I know of many domestic workers here who have built houses and employ live-in maids in the Philippines.

With an attitude that "we count", migrant women can claim pride in their contribution to society. I look forward to the 'coming-out' of the domestic helpers, entertainers and prostitutes - to be visible and be recognized as members of the working force.

Visibility of migrant women is slowly happenning. Migrant women are increasingly active in associations and creating networks. It is time we claim our place in society.

Globalization has its toll. Countless of questions nag us as this toll rises. How can the clash of values and cultures be minimized and elements of a common culture constructed so that perceived conflicts can be resolved in a world that gets smaller each passing day? How can new forms of livelihood and standards of personal worth be created when the demand for human labour has reached massive proportions disregarding humane prerequisites? What institutional reforms and at which levels in society should changes take place? We do not stop at questions, we need actions.
There is so much work to be done at the grassroots level. Solidarity groups are faced with greater challenges than ever before.

Thank you.

References:
And some Papers from the 4th World Conference on Women, Beijing 1995

Notes
3 Barsotti and Lecchini. 1990. in Philippine Labor Migration"
The number of immigrant women working as domestic helpers or in the sex industry is very high at the world rate. There are 200,000 foreign maids in Italy; 25,000 in Spain( 1991); 60,000 in UK; 86,000 Sri Lankan women in the Middle East(63,000 in Kuwait) alone, 80,000 Filipina maids in Hongkong and 35,000 in Singapore(Campani)