



Voices from the field: Migration, Remittances & Development in the Philippines



In 2007-2008, the United Nations International Research and Training Institute for the Advancement of Women (UN-INSTRAW), in collaboration with the Filipino Women's Council and the International Fund for Agricultural Development conducted a study on the gender dimensions of migration and remittances in the Philippines, looking particularly at their impact on household food security and rural development. The study was conducted primarily through personal interviews and focus group discussions with migrants in Italy and their families back home in the Philippines. The effort of linking migrants with their families through these interviews allowed for a more complete picture of the situation, particularly in terms of the impact of migration at the personal, rather than economic, level. These "Voices from the Field" aim to bring a human dimension to the study's findings by focusing on the individual impact of migration and remittances on migrants, their gender roles relationships with their families, their economic well-being and the ways in which their lives, and those of their children, have changed as a result.

These interviews were conducted as a part of a UN-INSTRAW/IFAD/FWC research study "Migration and remittances have positive impacts on gender equality in the Philippines" (2008).

Joselito and Mara: Changing Family Roles



Joselito has been working in Rome as a domestic helper for 5 years. This is not his first time as a migrant worker; he also used to work in Taiwan. Initially, Joselito left for Italy alone. "As a father, I should be ready for everything and I made the decision. It is a need, more than anything else, to be able to support my family and to send my children to school. There were no other options." Later on, his wife Mara joined him in Italy, where she too is employed as a domestic worker.

Joselito was born in 1957 and Mara in 1958 in the farming and fishing province of Pampanga, north of the capital Manila in the Central Luzon Region. They have two sons and one daughter, all university students.

After graduating from college, Joselito worked as a supervisor and union leader at Subic Base, a former U.S. military zone. In 1991, a law was passed to turn the U.S. base over to the Philippine government, and he was laid off from his job. "The Philippine Department of Labor's response was to find jobs for displaced employees abroad, in countries like Saudi Arabia. A lot of employers from abroad came to interview us. But government lawyers didn't know what to do next.

It eventually became clear to me that there was no program for us displaced people."

When Joselito left, Mara, a college graduate, became involved in a number of activities to supplement their household income. "When I was in Pampanga, I used to own a goods store and a grocery store. I was also a rice dealer and a money lender. But the decision to migrate to Italy came soon after my husband left."

"I did not come for financial need. The primary reason was that I just wanted to be with my husband because I was so insecure. I kept hearing stories about husbands cheating on their wives. Second, all three of my children were going to attend college at the same time." Since arriving in Italy, Mara said that her relationship with her husband is much better.

According to Joselito, since he and his wife have been in Italy, the relationship with their children has changed. Mara is a live-in domestic worker, and therefore has little time to call their children in the Philippines. Because Joselito is not a live-in domestic worker, he is able to talk with their children on a regular basis.

"When my kids are seeking support or advice, I am the one available for them. It appears now I am both the mother and father." The children are more distant towards Mara. Before, it was the other way around.

There has also been a change in gender roles in both of their homes in Italy and the Philippines. In Italy, Joselito tends to all the domestic needs: buying household supplies, cooking and cleaning.

"Back in the Philippines, Mara took care of everything in the house. But here, I do."

When Joselito first left, Mara was the head of the household, managing the finances. Today, it is their eldest son that is the head of the household. The family used to depend heavily on the money sent by Joselito, but now, it is Mara's income that fills most of the family's needs. She is now the main financial provider.

While half of what Joselito earns is sent back to the Philippines, the other half is used for expenses in Italy. All of Mara's income goes back to their children. Their monthly remittance is more than €1,000. The money they send is used to cover the children's tuition fees, books and basic necessities. Some also goes towards tending to their small mango grove. Both Joselito and Mara have contributed to local community projects in the Philippines, but Joselito emphasized that in some way the money saved and remitted contributes to the development of the whole country.

There are 89,668 Filipinos migrant workers like Joselito and Mara in Italy. 52,918 are women and 36,750 are men. Most of them are domestic workers or basic caregivers. Italy is the fourth largest source of remittances to the Philippines, behind the United States, Saudi Arabia and Canada. According to the 2006 World Bank Report on Migration and Remittances, Filipino workers in Italy remit an estimated US\$440 million annually.

Luisita and Rey: Living Thousands of Miles Apart

Luisita is 65 years old, and for more than 21 years she and her husband Rey have been living apart. She lives in Sta. Catalina, Philippines; a municipality of 12,500 people in the province of Ilocos Sur. Rey is 57 years old and lives in Rome, Italy, where he works as a housekeeper.

Both have only completed elementary school, and all five of their children are university graduates. Two of them now work as nurses in Singapore and New York. Another of their children is thinking about migrating. Though Luisita recounted with great pride the educational achievements of her children she said that "I don't want all of them to go abroad. If they do, I won't have a companion anymore."

Luisita manages a sari-sari (small convenience store) near her modest home. "Our house is small compared to that of other migrants. They are able to build big homes because they do not have as many children to care for. We had five, one after the other."

Rey and Luisita first heard about Italy from their neighbors that vacationed there. However the family quickly realized that the decision to migrate was not the most difficult part of the process. Rey made more than one attempt to get to Italy. He tells that they paid an agent €710 for the first trip. More than twenty years ago, the financial sacrifice was great for a poor family of seven. Luisita and Rey had to borrow from family members to be able to pay for the trip.

When Rey left for the trip, his first stop was in Lausanne, Switzerland, before switching to a connecting flight to Rome. "There were many other

Filipinos like myself going on this trip to Italy. But we all got blocked by immigration at the Italian airport." Rey, along with his Filipino companions were deported back to the Philippines

Rey and Luisita decided that they should pay the extra €285 for another trip. Rey's second departure was emotional. "We cried like it was burial when he was about to leave. From the morning until after he left, I cried all day long."

After landing in a different location in Europe during the second attempt, it took Rey and his companions one more week to reach Rome. They secretly crossed the border to Italy at night. "It was extremely dark. The agents tried to hide us and made sure we were hiding. There were about twenty of us, and I was the only man." The train eventually stopped at Termini, Rome's central train station.

Since Rey has been in Rome, he has regularly sent money back to the Philippines. The amount that he sends varies from €300-800 per month. He doesn't have a bank account in Italy, and prefers to send money via door-to-door with an extra cost for the delivery. In the Philippines, Luisita said that her husband now sends about half of what he used to, which is enough to make ends meet.

"Up to now, most of the remittances go to the children and for paying bills, electricity, the computer, food etc."

Rey admits that he gambles, and loses most of the time. His gambling affects the amount of money he is able to remit in a month. As Luisita and Rey describe, it is his "vice." Yet both have learned

to cope with it, as gambling is one of the few diversions that Rey has during his time off. Their experience as husband and wife is one like many others. The drive to better their children's lives through education is met with sacrifices. An element of danger also exists, as many are smuggled illegally through national borders and risk being deported, only to try once again to find a better way to support their families.



Migrants dream of a better life for their children. They invest a significant portion of their remittances on education financing primary school through university from abroad

There are 89.668 Filipinos migrant workers like Rey in Italy. 52.918 are women and 36.750 are men. Most of them are domestic workers or basic caregivers. Italy is the fourth largest source of remittances to the Philippines, behind the United States, Saudi Arabia and Canada. According to the 2006 World Bank Report on Migration and Remittances, Filipino workers in Italy remit an estimated US\$440 million annually.

Malou: A Provider to All

Malou is 56 years old and was born in the city of Vigan, the provincial capital of Ilocos Sur in the Philippines. She graduated from university with a degree in nursing, and her husband Jun is a university professor of agriculture. They have two children in their early teens.

Malou has spent much of her life abroad, working in Saudi Arabia, Libya, and Italy. "Since 1982, I got used to going abroad. It became a habit, a way of life, looking for work elsewhere." The decision to move to Italy was because the family could not make ends meet.

"My husband and I decided together. It's because we were not coping with the expenses. If I was in the Philippines working as a nurse, my earning would be so low. My kids are growing up and they have greater needs. I'm able to give them more because I'm here."

A failing business in the Philippines further solidified the decision to migrate. "I managed an agricultural supply store, and we also sold fruits and vegetables from our farm. But the store went bankrupt because many people borrowed money from us and did not pay us back. Even until now."

Malou has worked as a domestic worker for 7 years. She sends an average of €400 a month to Jun, who manages the money. "My remittances go to food, school, transportation, and electric bills. I have very little left for savings."

Back in the Philippines, she has noticed some

significant changes in their household dynamics. "My husband decides everything once I send my remittance. Like, for insurance and the children's education plan. I don't control where the money goes."

It has also become apparent to Malou that she and Jun are also experiencing a change in their relationship. "When I'm home, my husband and I have many arguments. He complains about taking care of the kids. He says that he is tired of it, but I tell him that what I do now as a financial provider is what he is supposed to be doing. We are changing roles. There is financial stability, but there are other kinds of changes as well."



Migrants that invest in farm land also invest in new agricultural equipment, which increases the productive capacity of their land.

Malou plans on moving back to the Philippines when her children are finished with college. Until then, she continues to work for the good of her family, which extends beyond her husband and children. "I send money to my cousins to help them with their medical expenses and their day-to-day

needs. My nieces and nephews are in college, and I give them money to help cover their fees." Malou also gives regular donations to community building projects. "I don't make a lot of money, but I try to help more people with what I have."

Malou's dream is to be able to buy agricultural land to farm their own food. But before she can fulfill that dream, she will focus on helping other people fulfill theirs.



Many local farmers are not able to compete with land that is farmed with new equipment. The rising costs of food and farming technology endanger the food security of those who do not receive remittances.

There are 89.668 Filipinos migrant workers like Malou in Italy. 52.918 are women and 36.750 are men. Most of them are domestic workers or basic caregivers. Italy is the fourth largest source of remittances to the Philippines, behind the United States, Saudi Arabia and Canada. According to the 2006 *World Bank Report on Migration and Remittances*, Filipino workers in Italy remit an estimated US\$440 million annually.

Luzviminda: From studies to domestic work

In 1993, Luzviminda made the difficult decision to leave her family, her job and her life in the Philippines and migrate to Italy. At the time she was 32-years old. While her husband and her two sons still live together in the Philippines, Luzviminda lives alone in Rome.



Born in 1961 in Cabaroan, a poor province in the Ilocos Region, Luzviminda decided to migrate to Italy in order to improve the living conditions and provide more opportunities for her family. It was a difficult decision to make, as she said during an interview with UN-INSTRAW: "When I was in the Philippines, my

earnings then were not enough to make ends meet. My husband owns a fishpond. My salary was not enough. My husband and I jointly took the final decision".

As she later explained, in the ten years before leaving the Philippines, she graduated from university and shortly thereafter found work as a teacher and a hairdresser. But still her family was not able to cover all of their expenses.

One day she heard that her husband's cousin, a school teacher who had migrated to Italy, was able, after only a few years, to buy a house in the Philippines. Luzviminda's sister also went abroad and, after only two years of working, was also able to buy a house. With these two experiences in mind, Luzviminda considered that working abroad could be a solution to her family's financial problems.

"My goal in coming to Italy was to be able to raise funds to buy properties back home. My husband and I pawned our land for €2,500 to our godmother from Hawaii to be able to pay for the travel".

Luzviminda now works as a maid in Rome, and she occasionally works as an interpreter for €35 per hour. "I also do hairdressing on Sundays. I am the one who sends the capital for the family farm. I send a minimum of €900 and up to €1.500."

The remittances that Luzviminda sends back to the Philippines help not only her husband and two children, a daughter of 14 and a son of 18, but also her two sisters and her brother. Altogether, 6 people live on the income that Luzviminda provides, and as she revealed to UN-INSTRAW, she is proud to work hard and not spend money during her time off.



In addition to their immediate family, many migrants also send money to their elderly parents and other members of their extended family. Often, migrants sacrifice their own financial security in the destination country to ensure the well-being of their families abroad.

"The biggest part of my remittances goes to education. My son is a computer engineer, while my daughter is attending high school." Moreover, additional money is used for the maintenance of the land, the farm and the fishpond.

There are 89.668 Filipinos migrant workers like Malou in Italy. 52.918 are women and 36.750 are men. Most of them are domestic workers or basic caregivers. Italy is the fourth largest source of remittances to the Philippines, behind the United States, Saudi Arabia and Canada. According to the 2006 *World Bank Report on Migration and Remittances*, Filipino workers in Italy remit an estimated US\$440 million annually.

Boyet: Remittances and Rural Life

Boyet was only 26-years old when he decided to help his family by migrating from the Philippines to Italy, leaving behind his wife and their five children. When Boyet and his wife Dimalanta made this choice together, their hope was to provide a good education for their sons and daughters and help increase their chances for a better life.



After meeting basic needs such as food, electricity and education, migrants often invest in the construction of new homes or the purchase

Boyet was born in 1951 in a poor city in the Ilocos region of the Philippines. Before marrying he lived on his family's farm, taking care of rice production. When they got married, Boyet and Dimalanta opened a small store, which, for a long time, was their only source of income.

However, it would have been impossible to pay school tuition fees for five children from the income generated by the store alone. Boyet's decision to go to Italy was supported by his brother-in-law and his sister.

"They told me if I would go abroad I could send my children to school. They heard about Italy from our neighbors who have a son there. Through his monthly remittances, they bought a small house in two years."

Following the same difficult path of many other Filipino men and women, Boyet concluded that migrating would be the best opportunity to alleviate the poverty of his family. "When I left the Philippines I didn't have any plans. I only thought that if I would send money I could put my son and my four daughters through nursing school. I didn't know how long I wanted to stay," he told UN-INSTRAW.

In 1977, Boyet arrived in Rome determined to find a job. After two weeks he found work as a domestic helper and he seemed happy with his occupation. "My employer is a politician. He is a very accommodating and generous person. When I have an economic problem and I need money he always offers me his help." As he pointed out, he is responsible for almost all the household expenses and fees.

"I am still the head of the household. My wife tells me how is it going in our family and she informs me about our kids and their studies. When I come back to the Philippines twice a year, I can see where my earnings go. My wife knows how to save and invest money."

With the income from remittances, Boyet and Dimalanta's five children have been able to focus on their studies and do not have to work. "My one son and my four daughters have now graduated.

I always said to them to study very hard because that is the only inheritance I can give them, and they listened to me."



After meeting basic needs such as food, electricity and education, migrants often invest in the construction of new homes or the purchase

Boyet hopes the remittances that he sends will greatly contribute towards securing better opportunities for his family: "I send sometimes €300, €400 or €500 each month and sometimes also €800. This money is for day-to-day expenses, transportation, food, tuition and hospital fees." He also contributes to helping his community back home by giving donations to poor children.

There are 89.668 Filipinos migrant workers like Boyet in Italy. 52.918 are women and 36.750 are men. Most of them are domestic workers or basic caregivers. Italy is the fourth largest source of remittances to the Philippines, behind the United States, Saudi Arabia and Canada. According to the 2006 *World Bank Report on Migration and Remittances*, Filipino workers in Italy remit an estimated US\$440 million annually.

Mali: Sustaining daily life

Mali migrated to Italy from the Philippines when she was 46 years old, three years after her husband had moved there for work as a domestic helper. Both of them now work in Italy and send money home to their sons, who are concluding their studies in the Philippines.

Mali was born in 1958 in Pampanga, a poor province in the Central Luzon region. After leaving her country, she became the main provider for her household and a determined worker.

"When I was in Pampanga I used to own a goods store. I also had a grocery store; I was also a rice dealer and money lender. I was a busy business woman," she recounted in an interview with UN-INSTRAW.



Migrant domestic workers in Italy often care for children. In turn, many of them hire domestic workers in the Philippines to help care for their own children in their absence.

However, the money Mali and her husband made working in the Philippines was not enough to ensure that her sons, aged 22 and 19, and her daughter, aged 18 could go to university. In fact, the family was not even able to cover their basic living expenses.

In 2002, Mali's husband left to find work in Italy in order to try and add to the family's income. Three years later, Mali decided to join him. Upon arrival, Mali was welcomed by her husband and shortly afterwards, she started working as a live-in nanny for a family in Parioli, Rome.

"We have three kids; our oldest is here with us in Rome. But unfortunately our second son and our daughter are in the Philippines. My relation with my husband has improved since I joined him in Italy. But my relationship with my kids is not as close as it used to be when I was with them and their father was there as well."

As a nanny, Mali is satisfied with her working conditions and has a good relationship with her employer that includes mutual respect and understanding. She looks after a five-month old baby and is able to go back to her home on the weekends. Mali works regular hours and her main responsibilities are to take care of the child, clean and cook.

Mali's 19 year-old son is now the head of their household in the Philippines. Since he is older than the daughter, he is considered the head of the family and was therefore given the responsibility of managing the remittances sent by his parents.

"I trust our kids and it is all up to them how to use the money we send since they use it especially to be able to finish school. Our remittances go straight to my son, so our son has to take care of finances."

The two children in the Philippines are still studying and are not employed. The eldest finished a Bachelor's degree in hotel and restaurant management, while the daughter is studying at a college in Baguio. They have a maid at home who is responsible for the cleaning and cooking, and their grandmother helps in running the household.

As a result of the €2,317 a month that Mali and her husband send their children, they can pay their school fees, food, clothes, allowance and other expenses – they lead a better life and have more hope for the future.



Women migrants often choose other women in the Philippines to receive and manage their remittances. Women migrants often choose other women in the Philippines to receive and manage their remittances.

There are 89.668 Filipinos migrant workers like Mali in Italy. 52.918 are women and 36.750 are men. Most of them are domestic workers or basic caregivers. Italy is the fourth largest source of remittances to the Philippines, behind the United States, Saudi Arabia and Canada. According to the 2006 *World Bank Report on Migration and Remittances*, Filipino workers in Italy remit an estimated US\$440 million annually.