Summary

In a world that has become increasingly globalized, the number of international migrants has grown rapidly, reaching 244 million in 2015. The rise in the number of international migrants reflects the increasing importance of international migration which has become an integral part of our economies and societies.

Over the decades, the Philippines has consistently remained as one of the top ten emigration countries in the world and continues to emerge as the fastest growing population of international migrants. Data from the latest Stock Estimates of Overseas Filipinos compiled by the Commission on Filipinos Overseas (CFO), show that as of December 2013, there are approximately 10.2 million Filipinos in more than 200 countries and territories worldwide. With nearly tenth of its population who lives abroad and possesses various skills and resources, the Philippines diaspora population is one of the key driving force for the country’s development.

The massive scale and broad geographical spread, inter-generational character, diverse profile and varied migrant experiences overseas characterize the level of complexity and the necessity for a more pro-active approach towards harnessing the development potential of international migration. Remarkably, the Philippines, gaining a considerable experience in migration governance in the last decades, has created strategies to benefit from the multiple opportunities of international migration.

This policy brief presents three of the initiatives that the Philippines has created in order to facilitate engagement among its diaspora and manage their contribution towards the country’s inclusive and sustainable development. It also relates to a number of lessons learned and recommendations for engagement strategies to be more effective.

Context

The unprecedented movement of Filipinos across national boundaries has resulted in the emergence of a global community with a collective strength that can fuel the Philippine development. While many overseas Filipinos have found gainful employment and some acquired permanent residency or citizenship in their host countries, they remain deeply involved and maintain close ties by engaging in philanthropic undertakings and socio-cultural programs which reflects their strong attachment and continued interest for the

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1 “Trends in International Migrant Stock: The 2015 Revision”, UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs – Population Division, December 2015
2 “Migration and Remittances Factbook 2016”, World Bank Group
Philippines. The impact of migration is most often strongly felt in the provinces and home towns where migrants come from and thus local government units (LGUs) are critical and strategic in linking migration to development. To maximize the benefits brought about by migrants to national and local development, it is necessary for LGUs to institutionalize migration and development (M & D) initiatives. It is also important to highlight the central role that local authorities play in bringing sustainability and reinforcing the impact of migration and development initiatives.

**Link for Philippine Development – the Lingkod sa Kapwa Pilipino (LINKAPIL) Program**

In view of forging broader and deeper partnerships among Filipinos beyond borders, CFO institutionalized the *Lingkod sa Kapwa Pilipino (LINKAPIL)* or *Link for Philippine Development* program in 1989. A conduit for development support from overseas Filipino communities, the LINKAPIL provides a mechanism for the transfer of various forms of resources from overseas Filipinos to support small-scale, high-impact projects that address the country’s social and economic development needs. Types and forms of assistance offered through LINKAPIL include scholarships from micro-enterprise development, health and welfare assistance through medical and surgical missions to communities hit by calamities, feeding programs for children in poverty-stricken communities and small-scale infrastructures support such as school buildings and water systems.

Between 1990 and 2015, total donations through LINKAPIL program amounted to PhP 3.2 billion or USD 68.8 million. Notably, the philanthropic kindness and generosity of overseas Filipinos were best demonstrated when the Philippines was struck by Typhoon Yolanda (Haiyan) in 2013, one of the most destructive natural calamities the country has ever experienced in history. Overseas Filipinos, as individuals or groups, were among those quickly raised funds to be sent to the afflicted areas. An informal survey conducted by the CFO revealed that almost US$44 million cash and in-kind donations were mobilized by overseas Filipinos and brought into the Philippines for the relief and rehabilitation efforts for the victims of the typhoon.

Indeed, the diaspora has the potential to make many contributions. The most palpable among these are the remittances which positive development impacts are clearly felt by those left behind in their countries of origin. In 2015, the Philippines ranks third globally in terms of remittances receiving US$ 29.7 billion, next to China with US$ 63.9 billion and India with US$ 72.2 billion topping the list. These remittances continued to be a major fuel of domestic demand and accounted for almost 9.8% of the Philippine’s gross domestic product (GDP) and 8.3% of gross national income (GNI). From remittances, households with migrants are able to spend more on purchase for food and household needs, education, healthcare, to pay debts, to save money, to purchase real properties, to undertake house improvement, to invest in financial instruments, and to engage in

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4 To know more about LINKAPIL, visit [http://www.cfo-linkapil.org.ph/](http://www.cfo-linkapil.org.ph/)
5 CFO Data on LINKAPIL Inflows
7 Migration and Remittances Factbook 2016, World Bank Group
business enterprises.\textsuperscript{8} In the process, remittances generate demand for goods and services that creates jobs for more Filipinos.\textsuperscript{9}

**Building a Future Back Home – the Overseas Filipinos Diaspora Remittance for Development (OFReD) Project**

In 2011, CFO together with the National Economic and Development Authority (NEDA), partnered with the provincial government of Ilocos Norte and implemented the *Overseas Filipinos Diaspora Remittance for Development (OFReD) Project: Building a Future Back Home*\textsuperscript{10}. A project spearheaded by the United Nations Development Program (UNDP), the OFs-RED Project aims to harness the potential of overseas remittances for poverty reduction and consequently, local economic development. Specifically, it endeavors to support policies that transform overseas remittances for development, savings and investments, and build up viable collective remittance fund. The project was piloted in the province of Ilocos Norte found in the northern region of the Philippines and one of the top origin provinces of Filipino migrants.

At present, a *Collective Remittance Fund* had been setup to finance the credit needs of new or existing migrant-owned enterprises in the area. The fund came about when the Provincial government of Ilocos Norte, the Western Union Foundation and the Cooperative Bank of Ilocos Norte, which is also the depository bank, pooled in PhP 1 million (approx. US$21,400) each to jumpstart the fund. The fund is loaned to former or active overseas Filipino or their dependents with new or existing income generating enterprises. As of June 2016, the pooled fund has financed 68 enterprises thru 120 loan releases. Most of the borrowers are women whose entrepreneurship generated local employment, sustained and increased family income and contributed to local economic development. The high repayment rate and the continuing success and expansion of the SMEs engaged in the project served as the impetus for the Cooperative Bank to add another PhP 10 million (approx. US$214,000) to the fund.

The public-private partnership that underpins the work of OFs-RED is already proof of the power that engaging non-traditional actors in development and leveraging their unique capacities can yield. OFs-RED expands the development paradigm by not only attempting to harness the potential of remittances, but by recognizing the important role played by local governments.

**Engaging the Diaspora through Technology: The BaLinkBayan Portal**

The revolution in information, communication and technology, including the rise of social media, has facilitated not only international migration, but also the delivery of services by the government for its migrants. With the growing awareness on the contribution of diaspora for sustenance and development and the potential of modern technology to further harness these contributions and to provide better and faster services to the Filipino


\textsuperscript{10} To know more about the project, kindly visit the website at www.ofredtipudno.com}
diaspora and their families left behind, the CFO established the **BaLinkBayan**\textsuperscript{11}, the overseas Filipinos one-stop online portal for diaspora engagement. **BaLinkBayan** is a creative combination of two terms, “*balikbayan*” a returning Filipino migrant and “*link*” referring to inter-connectivity created through the Internet.

As a portal for diaspora engagement, **BaLinkBayan** ([www.balinkbayan.gov.ph](http://www.balinkbayan.gov.ph)) seeks to bring together overseas Filipinos into an integrated and comprehensive platform that taps into their knowledge, expertise, skills, networks, material and financial resources to contribute to the development of the Philippines. Thus the online portal facilitates diaspora investments, donations, volunteer opportunities and existing online government services. These are done through interactive maps, research studies, insightful migration-related articles, most frequently asked questions about doing business in the Philippines and links to partner agencies offering the services tailor-fit for Overseas Filipinos’ interests and needs.

The interactive maps allow easy access and viewing of data and information on business and investment opportunities in the provinces. For instance, one of the maps presents the various cities and towns’ competitiveness indexes to give the Overseas Filipinos an idea which are the business-friendly areas in the country. Overseas Filipinos may select from a menu of services that include agriculture, financial investments, franchising, small and medium scale manufacturing, services, retail and real property. In terms of diaspora philanthropy, the interactive maps show the needs of the communities such as classroom shortages, through poverty core indicators and the conduct or the lack of foreign medical missions throughout the country. The **BaLinkBayan** has likewise piloted local level transactional services such as online business registration and payment of real property taxes in selected cities and provinces in the Philippines.

**Conclusion and Recommendations**

In an increasingly interdependent and globalizing world, diasporas have become an important stakeholder in a wide range of development scheme. While the Philippines is far ahead in terms of initiatives in mobilizing its diaspora for development, more remains to be done to translate these into a concrete policy framework for deliberate, systematic, comprehensive and coherent engagement.

A great deal of lessons can be derived from the Philippine’s experience for engagement strategies to be effective:

- Local authorities are closer to the ground and are able to better comprehend and address the real situation of migrants. The local authorities, once they become aware of their respective migrants’ and their families’ situation and are given the appropriate technical assistance and capacity building, are in a better position to respond to the situation. Local governments bring together a set of actors with unique resources, reflecting the synergistic potential of public-private partnerships.

\textsuperscript{11} To know more about BaLinkBayan, visit [http://www.balinkbayan.gov.ph/](http://www.balinkbayan.gov.ph/)
Distinguish the differences between the various categories of diaspora because each group requires varying approaches of engagement strategy. Know the diaspora, map them, become aware of their skills and experiences, what they are willing to offer and their expectations and acknowledge the diversity of their agenda, interest and strategies.

Cultivate or create a relationship of trust between the diaspora and the government of origin and host countries. The purpose for engagement needs to be clear. This meant opening the streams of communication between and among parties and creating a welcoming environment for them to engage.

Foster stewardship where commitment is sealed through a reporting mechanism on the part of the government and a reward and recognition system for the diaspora. Ways to give back to its diaspora by way of policies, legislation, activities and recognition must be developed by the government.

To systematically engage the Filipino diaspora in national and local development, greater institutionalization of various relevant initiatives needs to happen at all levels of government. Greater policy coherence and effective coordination especially among relevant government agencies are likewise called for.

Finally, one must go beyond the policy confines and spaces of traditional migration-related agencies and officials to involve development agencies and planners and other policy sectors and actors thus expanding the policy and program options for the Filipino diaspora.