

Theme 3: Shaping goals for the empowerment of migrants and communities for social inclusion and human development

Session 3A: Boosting migrants and diasporas' contributions to job creation and development in countries of residence, origin and heritage

Original Speech delivered by Jillian Roque, Public Services Labor Independent Confederation (PSLINK), Philippines

**strikethrough – not read during the session due to time constraints*

PSLINK is a national confederation of public service employees and their unions and associations. We are affiliated with the Public Services International (PSI), the global federation of 669 unions in 154 countries and territories representing 20 million public service workers. We are dedicated to promoting decent work, trade union rights, good governance and quality public services in every part of the world. ~~Protecting and promoting migrants' rights are an important advocacy for us given the large number of public service workers, in particular health workers and teachers, who are moving across borders and the impact of migration to the right to education, health, and other basic services of all people, especially the most vulnerable sectors of society, the informal workers, women and children.~~

We believe, first and foremost, that migrants will only be able to live in dignity, maximize their potential and capacity to contribute to the development of families and their countries of origin and residence if they are fully integrated in their host or countries of residence, enjoy the same rights at work as the locals, and are organized and represented in trade unions -- and are thus protected and able to negotiate for better wages and employment conditions.

A good example is the Bilateral Agreement between the Philippines and Germany that clearly specifies that nurses that will migrate for work in Germany will be treated equally, their skills will be recognized, they should receive comprehensive information, and that they will be part of the trade union in Germany. The BLA also allows for permanent residence. This way, the nurse migrants are able to alleviate the nursing shortage in Germany and provide quality health services in the country of destination/residence. At the same time, their rights are protected, they are able to provide a decent standard of living for their families, and they are more able to meaningfully contribute to community development.

Right to information is also key to ensuring that migrants' rights are protected and that they are empowered to contribute to development. Migrants throughout the migration cycle, from pre-departure, to onsite/employment/residence, and to return and reintegration need to be provided accessible, adequate, rights-based, gender responsive, sector-specific information so that they can fully realize their

potential as agents for development. Migrant information should also include a list of organizations, trade unions, civil society organizations in countries of origin and destination or residence with which they can engage in. In the Philippines we are in the process of developing migration information materials that cover the information needs of migrants from pre-decision, pre-departure, onsite/employment / integration in countries of destination/residence, and return and reintegration. And these materials were developed through a participatory process involving governments, the trade unions, civil society organizations, professional associations, the private sector, and the migrant workers themselves.

Very recently, we have seen the power of migrants and diasporas. You may have heard of the super typhoon – Typhoon Haiyan -- that ravaged our country, more specifically, the Visayas region. More than 6,000 were killed and millions of people were displaced. At that time, Filipino migrant workers and diasporas who were fully integrated in their countries of residence and are organized into trade unions were responsible for mobilizing resources and building a solidarity fund to help in the relief and rebuilding efforts in the typhoon-affected communities in the Philippines. These migrants who had a sense of responsibility, a sense of belonging, to help the communities affected were the first to respond to appeals for relief support, and they were able to raise a significant amount of money as well as helped raise awareness about what was happening in the Philippines at that time in their countries of residence.

And they did not stop in the mobilization of funds. They had partnered with trade unions in the Philippines to ensure that this solidarity fund was used transparently, effectively and sustainably. The trade unions in the Philippines are advocating for a job-led recovery in the disaster-affected communities. The solidarity fund will support creation of decent jobs -- not just temporary, precarious jobs – but decent employment - as well as boost the organizing efforts of trade unions in the Philippines so that they are able to collectively bargain for better working conditions. This is a very concrete example of how migrants and diasporas can boost decent job creation and development.

We have also seen how migrants and diasporas have contributed to political change. Filipino migrant workers have exercised their right to vote during elections in the Philippines. They have become advocates for good governance. After having been exposed to more transparent, open governments abroad, they also want to address corruption and improve the political, socio-economic situation in the Philippines.

One challenge we see is the very limited view of reintegration and diaspora engagement. In the Philippines for instance, reintegration and diaspora engagement initiatives are mostly focused only on providing entrepreneurship trainings, supporting small enterprises. These interventions are also focused on migrants in distress.

Every year the country loses thousands of health workers, particularly nurses to migration. This has serious implications to our public health systems. Every year, we send thousands of our teachers abroad. This has serious implications to our public education system. And the ones who are leaving are often the most skilled, the most experienced. Even if they want to go back to the Philippines, or even if they want to contribute to sustainable development, there are very limited opportunities. Nurses are unable to reintegrate back into the health care system as there are no jobs for them or the ones available pay very poorly. Nurses from Kenya, Ghana, and South Africa want to go back to their home health systems and practice their profession but the skills and experience gained abroad are not recognized. Reintegration programs or diaspora engagement are often geared towards investing in a limited number of private enterprises like soap making, bakeries etc. So ultimately we don't really gain from the knowledge and expertise and experience of highly skilled migrant workers that leave. This is particularly problematic especially when we consider the fact that maternal mortality rate in the Philippines has actually worsened – in fact, it's the UN MDG that is least likely to be achieved by the country. It is indeed ironic that we are the leading country in terms of sending nurses abroad but our health care system is poor and ailing. There should be opportunities for them to reintegrate back into the health care system, or for teachers, in the education system. There should also be opportunities to support strengthening public services. In doing so, the migrants and diasporas will actually be helping address the root causes of unabated migration of our valuable human resources for health and education. In so doing we also ensure the right to stay of workers.

In summary:

For trade unions, the only way to boost migrants contribution to job creation and development is if their human and labor rights are fully ensured throughout the entire migration cycle, if they have access to quality public services and social protection, and are fully integrated in their communities. This is why the trade unions support the inclusion of Decent Work, Social Protection and Gender Equality in the Post 2015 Development Goals.

Migrant workers in order to be able to fully realize their potential as development actors should have access to comprehensive, rights-based, gender responsive information at all stages of migration.

We believe that migrants and diaspora communities are certainly a force to be reckoned with. We don't believe in focusing on remittances as a panacea, as a driver of development, but look at the non-financial contribution of migrants and diasporas. And their potential to become a strong voice, if organized and linked with trade unions and civil society, in pushing for social justice, a more inclusive economy, quality public services, more open and accountable governments.

###