

Harnessing Altruism Towards Social Development: The Filipino-Australian Women Experience

A Presentation by Gregorio Jr. Jabal to the Joint World Conference on Social Work, Education and Social Development 2014 in Melbourne, Australia hosted by Melbourne University at the Melbourne Convention and Exhibition Centre
On July 09-12, 2014

“To me, it is clear: a genuine sense of responsibility can result only if we develop compassion. Only a spontaneous feeling of empathy for others can really motivate us to act on their behalf.”

This is an excerpt from “The Medicine of Altruism” professed by Tenzin Gyatso, the 14th Dalai Lama of Tibet. In this era of life complexities and vulnerable relationship between human and nature, this wisdom always remain a supplication for us all particularly for our leaders of today.

It is a great honor to be part of this prestigious gathering that promotes social and economic equality and expresses mutual cooperation in strengthening the social and cultural wellbeing of individuals, families and communities.

Let me clarify the three key terms of my paper. One, **altruism**¹, defined as a principle or practice of unselfish concern for or the devotion to the welfare of others. Two, **social development** is a process where the highest priority is to fulfill basic human necessities through equal access to services, resources and opportunities. And three, **experience**², used to refer to the philanthropic life practice of the Filipino-Australian women in Australia.

¹Webster’s Encyclopedic Unabridged Dictionary of the English Language, 1994

² Research operational definition

The Filipino Women in Australia

The phenomenon of marriage migration is one of the issues among women of today particularly from the developing nations. Filipino women are amidst them struggling for empowerment to transpire their vital role in social development process.

Let me give you numbers of Filipinos in Australia to picture out what I want to convey. From 1981 to 2012, Commission on Filipinos Overseas' (CFO) records show that Australia has a total of 117,884 Filipino permanent migrants. Records also show that New South Wales is the most inhabited

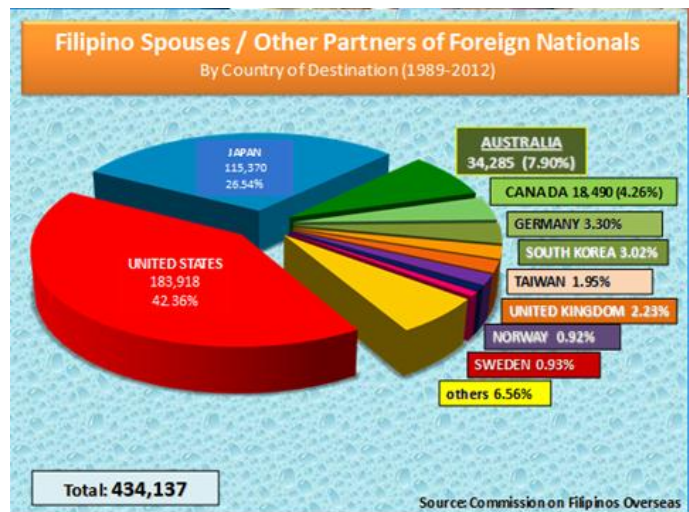


Figure 1: Filipino Spouses/Partners of Foreign Nationals

state by Filipinos. Through marriage migration, Australia is the third country-destination of Filipino women next to the United States and Japan. The 34,285 increasing number of Filipino women in Australia, one way or another, bridges a gap between them and their needy compatriots in the Philippines.

During ancient times, women were considered mediocre citizens in the society. Now, against cultures and social systems, laws are powerful medium to empower women and to acknowledge their vital roles in social development. By the same token, the United Nations Development Program (UNDP), Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and the entire global community have synergized efforts advocating gender equality and women empowerment to combat poverty and to attain sustainable human development.

Dynamics of Filipino Altruism

In my study, I have five points to put across about Filipinos' unselfish concern for their fellowmen and for others. First, ***faith and spirituality*** explains Filipino's religious way of life of sharing one's blessings. Second, ***poverty experiences*** enlighten and make people more compassionate. Third, ***poverty awareness and economic***

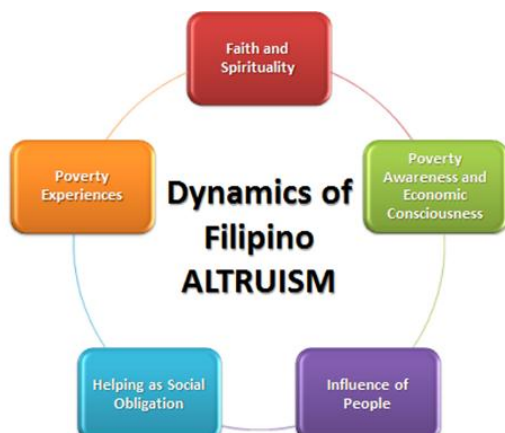


Figure 2: The Dynamics of Filipino Altruism

consciousness motivate someone to help the needy in various ways, intensified by multi-media's influence. Fourth, ***helping as social obligation*** entails responsibility for and relationship with other people. And, fifth, ***influence of people*** demonstrates individual's power to persuade others for

selfless cause. In the family, parents are excellent models to their children. Others are influenced by those who have helped them while others learn from adverse experiences. Here, it reveals that altruism is nurtured and learned.

Transcended Filipino Altruism

More so, my study asserts Filipino marriage migrants' quest for family security and wellbeing. Parcel of land for their families in the Philippines is a common concern. Yet, education is of equal importance, a viable measure to attain family wellbeing. Griffiths³ (1975) confirms that lands are considered investments and society's most prestigious socio-economic goods.

³ "Emigrants' Investments in Their Home Community"

Having secured their families a better way of life, altruism transcends beyond borders. Filipino charity begins from the family to personally chosen individual to group of recipients. At this juncture, welfare agencies, social welfare workers among others become conduits in the process. What does this imply? Altruism lives on, it goes beyond family ties.



Figure 3: Transcended Filipino Altruism

In view of the Filipino culture, *Enriquez and Guanzon*⁴ (1985) explain “*pagkamatulungin*” (helpfulness) as one of Filipino positive values which offers any kind of help to those in need. Magnified by community spirit of “*bayanihan*” (synergy) through volunteerism and cooperation, others come and offer support. In the same manner, the Filipino-Australian women live in that same way obtaining family wellbeing and social security. They share their abundance to less-fortunate “*kababayan*”⁵ in the Philippines, a portrait of human munificence, rejoining towards our mutual social responsibility for human development.

Rethinking the basics of altruism, **resources** are normally viewed as material wealth. Nevertheless, it includes one’s motivations and energies, talent, skills, knowledge or expertise. Still, **commitment and devotion** absolutely exhibit time and full attention, the most significant element of selfless helping. These are mirrored in the philanthropic



Figure 4: Basics of Altruism

⁴ Towards the assessment of personality and culture: The Panukat ng Ugali at Pagkatao

⁵ Meaning, fellow Filipinos

undertakings of the Filipino-Australian women in Australia.

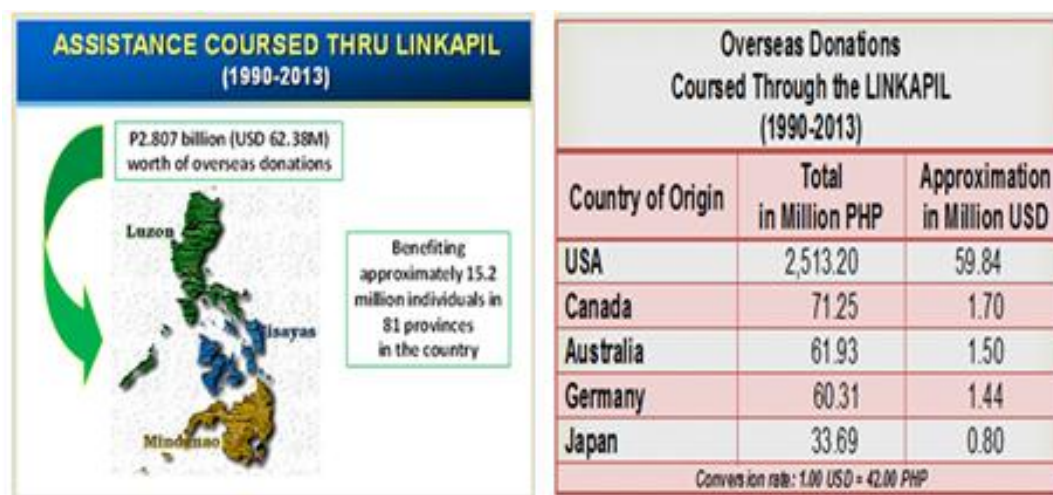


Figure 5: Donations Coursed Through CFO's LINKAPIL

For years, CFO's LINKAPIL⁶ or Link for Philippine Development Program is a reliable partner of Filipino-Australian women to reach out for the needy Filipinos in the Philippines. LINKAPIL is aligned to the UN–MDGs particularly the goals on eradication of extreme hunger and poverty, universal primary education and health-related goals. Since 1990, Australia has 61.93M pesos (AUD 1.63M) worth of cash and in-kind donations.

Assumptions and Opportunities

The Filipino-Australian women's philanthropy and other overseas Filipinos' achievements are indeed seen to be building blocks for the country's development efforts. However, their potentials must be completely tapped for social welfare initiatives.

Similarly, this is one trajectory for emergent countries towards family security and welfare while recognizing women as great players in the process.

⁶ *LiNgkod sa KApwa PILipino*; cfo-linkapil.org.ph/

Filipinos abroad are sometimes perceived to have qualms on channeling their donations to government agencies for some reasons. Too, overseas donors prudently choose their advocacy partners for the assurance of their efforts.

This is an opportunity to reconstruct bridges of powerful synergies between the government and overseas Filipinos for social development initiatives while sustaining public trust.

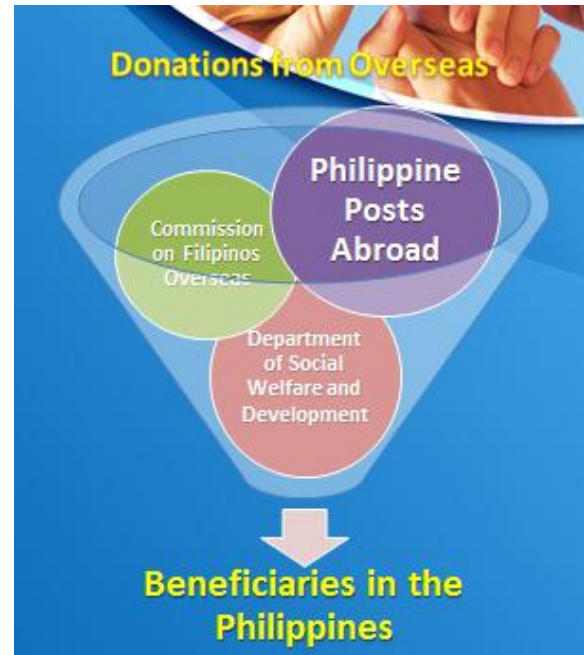


Figure 6: Recommended Flow of Overseas Donations

The Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD), the Philippines' lead agency on welfare and social services, must strategize efficient machinery to funnel donations of all kinds from overseas donors. The Department must strengthen collaboration with the Philippine Posts abroad and the Commission on Filipinos Overseas (CFO) for adept ways of channeling charities from overseas donors to intended beneficiaries in the Philippines.

REFERENCES:

Jabal, G. Jr. (2012). *The Fil-Aussie Women in Australia Touching the Lives of their Fellow Filipinos: A Phenomenological Study*, Unpublished Thesis, Asian Social Institute, Manila

Webster's Encyclopedic Unabridged Dictionary of the English Language, 1994

Illustrated Dictionary of Anthropology, 2004

www.cfo.gov.ph

<http://cfo-linkapil.org.ph/>

<http://www.dalailama.com/messages/world-peace/the-medicine-of-altruism>