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*With respect to population policy, whatever happened to the constitutional principle of separation of church and state?*

## **Salonga: GMA must address population problem, or else...**

**By J. Likha Yatco**  
*PopDev Media Service*

Former Senate President Jovito R. Salonga is admonishing President Gloria Macapagal Arroyo to summon the political will to carry out a real population policy that is not influenced by the Roman Catholic Church.

“She must address this problem, or else we will be faced with something that is beyond our capacity to solve,” he said. “Overpopulation implies not only massive poverty but also more corruption and criminality.”

Salonga, head of Kilosbayan – a non-profit, non-partisan organization engaged in efforts to encourage people’s participation in matters of public policy – noted that when President Arroyo gave her State of the Nation Address before Congress last year, she did not even mention the population problem.

“One time she gave hope when she spoke about the need to address this problem. Later, she endorsed natural family planning, which is the approach preferred by the Catholic Church. The population policy has become politicized,” he observed.

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Salonga, a three-time Senate election topnotcher, rattled off the consequences of not pursuing an apt response to the population problem, considering its magnitude: “We don’t have sufficient food and shelter for our poor people, especially in the urban areas. The results are the rising tide of criminality, a poor educational system, lopsided development, a yawning gap between the few rich and the very poor. How can we have a strong Republic under these circumstances? These issues have to be faced by the leadership.”

Although the Constitution is clear about the separation of church and state, Salonga lamented that political leaders are finding it expedient to follow the lead of the Catholic Church hierarchy.

For his part, the Liberal Party chairman emeritus has encouraged some senators like Juan Flavio Velasco and congressional representatives not to be afraid of the Church. Neither has it escaped him that some people in the Catholic Church are also agitating for a liberal approach. “I know of a nun who distributes condoms in her poor district in Manila,” he said.

Salonga also noted that more and more prominent businessmen in the country like Peter Garguero and Washington Sycip are advocating a sound population management policy. “All governments must take the lead role. If not, we’ll have a big population problem like in India,” he added.

The 18.5 percent failure rate of natural family planning, Salonga pointed out, is high compared to the more effective artificial methods. He cited the examples of predominantly Catholic countries like France, Italy and Spain where encouraging the use of contraceptives has allowed their respective citizens to improve their lives and by extension, their national economies.

Salonga observed that some Filipino Catholics show excessive devotion to what the Catholic hierarchy says. “But the educated ones use effective family planning methods, including condoms,” he added.

On the average, the Philippines has an annual population growth rate of 2.3 percent. This roughly translates to two million babies born yearly. “It means we have a growth of around the population of Quezon City every year,” Salonga remarked.

He is saddened by the reality that “we are reduced to encouraging our talented people to go to other countries of the world in the meantime that we’re not able to make use of them to help in solving the country’s problems.”

South Korea is his favorite example of a former human-resource exporter that has been able to prosper and encourage its immigrants to return home.

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Salonga elaborated: “Their overseas workers have returned to help make that country become one of the most progressive in Asia. This has not happened in the case of the Philippines. Why should we depend on exporting our people?”

The Philippines with its small land area has earned the dubious distinction of being the 12<sup>th</sup> most populous nation in the world after China, India, the United States, Indonesia, Brazil, Pakistan, Russia, Bangladesh, Nigeria, Japan and Mexico.

Salonga continues to believe that there is a direct link between population growth and poverty.

“We now have a population of 82 million, but our resources are growing scarcer. It is estimated that by the year 2032, our population will reach 164 million. How can we support that?” he asked.

The education sector is a case in point. “Think of the number of classrooms, the teacher shortage, the growing number of children who have to be accommodated in public schools.”

While education is supposed to have the biggest allocation in the national budget, Salonga said, the education secretary has acknowledged that under the current budget, his department receives only 10 percent of the allocation – just enough to cover the salaries of personnel (with the remainder going to libraries and lab material).

“Most of it is eaten up by paying our foreign debt,” Salonga said.

Despite his seemingly bleak analysis, Salonga is not giving up on Filipinos, the majority of whom are young people. His latest book, *The Intangibles That Make a Nation Great*, made up of his selected speeches, lectures and writings, is dedicated to the youth: “that they may dream and soar on wings like eagles.”

At the close of the book’s introduction, he said: “With humility and compassion, we might be able to do something about the sufferings of our fellow human beings and in our own little way serve as the salt of our earth and the light of our little world...” — ***PopDev Media Service***

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*Young people get information about sex from pornography.*

## **Porn and the Pinoy teenager**

**By Perla Aragon-Choudhury**

*PopDev Media Service*

At a popular newsstand on Visayas Avenue – mixed in with the dailies and the *komiks* and the movie mags – are 26 assorted publications that, if they were movies, would be labeled “for adults only” because of their sexually explicit content.

The news dealer (let's call her Lagring) and her husband have raised their two children on the sales of their small family business for the past 10 years. But she believes that the tabloids (with their shots of nude women and titillating stories) may have something to do with the erosion of values in their community this side of Tandang Sora.

Once, at a videoke bar with her husband, she saw how the men ogled the barely dressed singer and the teenagers ordered to keep them company. “Why are you here?” Lagring recalls asking one of the girls. “Well, she has to support her family, she said. Maybe she has to feed a child without a father. But others like the easy money, compared to factory work where they might get below minimum wage.”

Whether here or elsewhere in the world, pornography (from the Greek words “porno” and “graphos” which literally means the writing of prostitutes) is pervasive, and accessible through the various media – print, tv, radio, ads, movies, stage, video, phone, computer. Sex, indeed, sells. And lax laws in a society with increasingly permissive moral standards help porn thrive as well.

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Much concern has been raised about the harm pornography can do, especially to curious and impressionable young people left to their own devices by busy or absent parents. Some researchers go so far as to suggest a direct link between exposure to porn and the incidence of sexual crimes such as rape and pedophilia.

An expert on the subject of media and the effects of pornography is Dr. Victor Cline, a clinical psychologist and professor at the University of Utah who has treated many victims of pornography addiction.

According to Cline, this is how it's supposed to work: A person's repeated exposure to sexually arousing material, which might have begun out of curiosity during one's teens, can become addictive over time. Pretty soon, in what's called the escalation stage, he needs stronger sexual stimuli to turn him on. Then he becomes desensitized, accepting as normal what he once thought was gross or deviant. Finally comes the need to act out, to turn fantasy into reality.

Dr. Elizabeth Ventura, chair of the psychology department of the University of the Philippines, however, thinks the issue is a complex one.

Asked by *PopDev Media Service* if there's a relationship between exposure to pornographic material and the sexual behavior of adolescents, Dr. Ventura notes that studies in the West (local research has yet to be done) generally found no significant effects.

"The men, who read this type of materials more often, may be easily aroused. But it does not follow that they act. Some might simply do self-stimulation," the professor says.

More than sexual behavior is the question of attitudes, presumably because the latter dictates the former. Ventura says she is more concerned about how porn affects teens' attitude towards women and towards sex itself:

"Since first impressions last and since it is women who are commonly shown in pornography, that kind of a template might last long in their minds – that this is sex, that this is the way women are treated, that women are for pleasure and exist for their ends."

She also warns about the possibility of sex being viewed out of context and thus distorting it.

A recently released qualitative study titled "Filipino Adolescents in Changing Times" commissioned by the Philippine Center for Population and Development and conducted by the UP Center for Women's Studies states: "Sex and sexuality are major arenas of curiosity, high information need and experimentation especially among male adolescents... Curiosity and information needs fall on the peer group and dubious sources such as pornographic materials."

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Hans (an alias), who just said goodbye to his teen years, confirms he got his first taste of pornography when a classmate brought sex mags to class when he was a high school freshman. Today, his favorite source of porn is the Internet where he frequents x-rated sites and joins chat-groups. Confused about his sexual identity (he's not sure whether he prefers men or women as sex partners), he admits that porn may not be the harmless recreation some think it to be.

Parents and schools, Ventura insists, cannot wriggle out of their roles in educating young people about sex. The gap must be filled – and in the right way.

“I believe it is our responsibility as adults to communicate the right information, inculcate the right attitudes, put sexuality in the right context and in the framework of being a natural part of the total human experience,” says Dr. Ventura. “If only we could have materials just as readily accessible as smut!” — *PopDev Media Service*

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*The direction of the country's family planning program in the aftermath of the USAID's contraceptive support phaseout will depend on the results of the 2004 elections.*

### **COMMENTARY**

## **Family planning's new road map**

**By Frankie Llaguno**  
*PopDev Media Service*

After handing out pills, IUDs and condoms free to all comers for decades, the Philippine family planning program is moving towards a more selective, but uncertain, future.

With its principal donor determined to phase out contraceptive donations, the country's family planning program is poised to follow two main paths.

The first is where the government, especially its local arm, will continue to provide pills, IUDs and condoms free to users who need but cannot afford them.

This will be done at public health clinics at both national and local government levels where only those who cannot pay will get contraceptives for free.

The second is where middle and upper income users who want pills, IUDs, condoms and injectables must now pay private suppliers for them.

Steps are under way to improve market conditions for such private providers. It is estimated that the market can meet the paying needs of some 2.1 million Filipino contraceptive users.

A Pulse Asia survey shows there is strong public support for family planning. Hopefully, this support could convince users who are better off to pay for the contraceptives they used to get for free.

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But whether free or paid for, the two paths arrive at the same place: where Filipino women, especially those who want to work or pursue careers, are liberated from the tyranny of unwanted and frequent pregnancies.

The road map is based on a 2002 decision of the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), the country's biggest donor of contraceptives, to shift to other forms of assistance to the Philippine family planning program.

The USAID has been the major donor providing family planning assistance to the Philippine government since 1970, giving as much as 80 percent of contraceptive supplies each year.

But it will stop donating contraceptives after its last \$3 million worth of average annual assistance is given in 2004. From there on, the government must pay for the contraceptive needs of the poor as the USAID donations phase out.

America has been very patient for the Philippines, a former colony and part of its "coalition of the willing" against Iraq, to cease being Asia's economic laggard so that it can fund its own family planning program. Now, the waiting is over.

### **Contraceptive self-reliance**

Not that the Philippine government was entirely passive. A step towards contraceptive self-reliance began as far back as 1999, during the term of President Joseph Estrada, when it launched its contraceptive interdependence initiative or CII framework.

In 2000, the Health Department (DOH) and the National Economic and Development Agency (NEDA) adopted the CII framework.

In January 2001, Joseph Estrada was deposed as president by People Power II, and Gloria Macapagal Arroyo, with the blessing of the Catholic Church and the military, was installed as his successor.

Despite the political upheaval, there appeared to be some continuity in the government's commitment to contraceptive self-reliance.

In September 2001, the DOH issued the Philippine National Family Planning Policy stating that the Philippine government would assume greater responsibility for the family planning program.

However, Ms. Macapagal has now clarified that the family planning program DOH would be supporting is responsible parenthood through the use of natural family planning methods only.

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The pill, IUD, condoms and injectables – all tabooed by the Catholic Church – are out.

This has created a split between the Office of the President and local government units where many provinces, cities and towns are providing reproductive health services with a full array of modern contraceptive methods.

### **Looking to the future**

This split will reach a critical stage after 2004, when the USAID's yearly donation of contraceptives stops.

The big question: Will the family planning program that must give free contraceptives to the poor be funded by taxpayers' money?

Given the soaring budget deficits plaguing the country each year, it will take a government firmly committed to family planning to bite the bullet.

And Ms. Macapagal's exclusive support for natural family planning, if continued beyond 2004, will make for a chaotic transition.

Given this situation, the public may have to wait for the national and local elections to take place in May 2004 for more clarity on the direction of the country's family planning program.

The question of a strong government commitment to family planning will depend on who will be sworn in as the next president of the Philippines.

Hopefully, it will be a president who realizes that smaller families empower women, boost family incomes, and help slow down the fastest growing population in Asia, after Cambodia. — *PopDev Media Service*

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*Frankie Llaguno, a freelance writer, was formerly an information officer of the United Nations Population Fund in New York City.*

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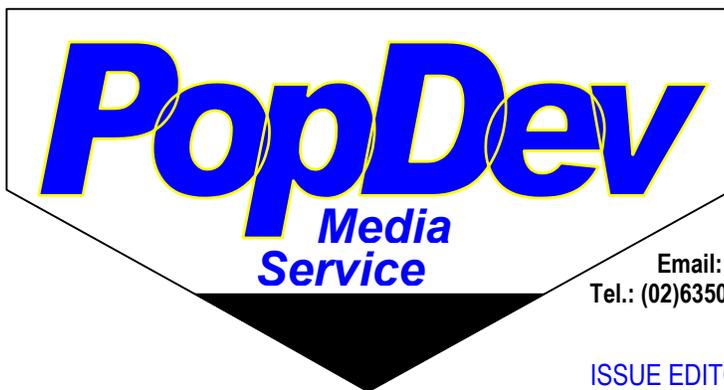
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*How can the increasing number of solo parents cope with the problems besetting them?*

## **Solo parents: Hope for the lonely**

**By Antonio Ortiz**

*PopDev Media Service*

At 51, Allan Mercado (an assumed name) is far from being a happy man. Gone is his roly-poly build; in fact, he's lost a lot of weight. A former community development worker, he also doesn't have a regular job, merely earning now and then from projects that come his way here and there.

Eight years ago, his wife of 15 years left him – for a much younger woman. The two even “solemnized” their lesbian marriage in Las Vegas but they have now also parted ways. Still, it does not look like Allan and his wife will get back together again.

“*Matagal ko’ng inakala na magkakabalikan pa kami,*” the Ilocos native says. “*Pero tumigas na ang puso niya.*” (I had thought for a long time that we would reconcile but her heart has hardened.)

Until they themselves got married, two of the couple's three children lived with Allan after the separation. For five years, he played the role in which an increasing number of Filipinos, regardless of socioeconomic background, find themselves today: a solo parent.

If parenting is no easy task, being a solo parent is doubly difficult. Whatever the circumstances that brought it about – whether one is widowed, separated, unwed, or abandoned; or whether he or she is an adoptive parent, the single head of a household, or a spouse to an overseas worker – the problems can be daunting.

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Financial lack poses the most pressing challenge, particularly among solo mothers left to fend for themselves and their children. One reason may be that women usually hold jobs that earn less than men. Take the case of one aging female teacher. Unable to make payment on a usurious loan, all she could do was to tremble in fear and shame when issued a warrant of arrest while in school.

In order to have more badly needed money, some women take on extra work like sewing, selling food or tutoring. This often leaves them too tired to attend to their children's needs, much less their own.

Which leads to another problem solo parents face: withdrawal from social activities. Unwed mothers, for example, find themselves without emotional support after being shunned by friends and relatives. Weighed down by demands they must face single-handedly, others simply lack the time and energy for social interaction.

No wonder many solo parents experience feelings of depression, low self-esteem, loneliness, self-pity, guilt, anger, bitterness and as a result, become temperamental, if not irritable. There may be a few who report relief especially after coming out of an abusive relationship. But many are more likely to say: "*Mahirap pagdating ng gabi...naghahanap ka ng katabi mo.*" (Nights are hard, you wish someone were beside you.)

The needs of solo parents and their children are among the concerns the Foundation for Adolescent Development (FAD) – with funding from the Philippine Center for Population and Development – want to address through the project called "Empowering Parents on Adolescent Health, Sexuality and Development." Recently, a pilot test was completed to explore how school PTAs can be tapped to educate parents on such matters as what to expect during adolescence, teen sexuality and health issues and the importance of the parent-child relationship.

"There is no formal course in parenting," said psychologist Cristina Palces, one of the resource persons during the final seminar held at the Philippine Women's University. "Most parents simply learn through direct experience."

Engaging solo parents and their children in dialogue is very important if they are to be helped. When one parent is absent for whatever reason – and all the responsibilities fall on the shoulder of the remaining parent – the children, often than not, are adversely affected. This could manifest in delinquent behavior, such as dropping out of school, falling prey to drug addiction or experimenting with sex.

Solo parents who took part in the group discussion agreed that forgiveness is a vital part of the healing process. They also shared coping tips:

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- Join a support group.
- Find and engage in gainful work.
- Study to increase your knowledge and improve your skills.
- Take care of your health by eating well and exercising.
- Have a hobby or recreational activity.
- Make saving a portion of your earnings a habit.

According to its executive director Cecilia Villa, FAD wishes to stress to solo parents that despite enormous challenges, they have the ability as well as the duty to raise their children as well-adjusted, responsible human beings.

Despite everything, Allan, has not lost hope. He says, “*Wala namang pagsubok na ibinigay ng Diyos na lampas sa kakayanan ng tao na harapin at pasanin.*” (We have the capacity to face and bear any test given by our Creator.) — ***PopDev Media Service***

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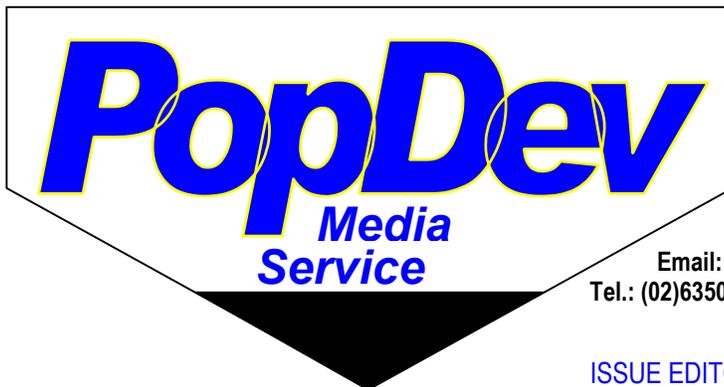
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*The country's serious population problem and its negative effects deter more foreign investments.*

## **AmCham urges RP private sector: lead population management drive**

**By Bernard L. Supetran**  
*PopDev Media Service*

Until the government frees itself from the pervasive influence of the Catholic Church, the private sector should assume the lead role in curbing the country's runaway population growth rate that mires the Filipino people in poverty.

The American Chamber of Commerce of the Philippines (AmCham) made this suggestion regarding the population issue in an advocacy paper titled "The Roadmap to More Foreign Investment" released recently.

Founded in 1902, the Makati-based AmCham is the biggest foreign trade group in the country and counts among its members such huge American companies as Citibank, IBM, Intel, Caltex and MacDonald's.

The 97-page document sums up the results of two surveys conducted last year among executives of American corporations here to find out how the Philippines can improve the business environment to make it a more attractive investment destination.

Recent perception surveys show the Philippines slipping in terms of global competitiveness: it is ranked ahead of Indonesia and Vietnam but below Malaysia, Indonesia and Thailand as an investment site.

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“FDI (foreign direct investment) appears to be falling back to levels of the early 1990s, a period following military coup attempts and power blackouts,” the paper notes.

While the overall business climate was rated fair by the 17 business sectors included in the survey, a majority reported deteriorating – rather than improving – trends in their respective industries.

Besides weak governance, corruption, poor infrastructure and the loss of English language proficiency in the workforce, uncontrolled population growth is seen as a major weakness that needs to be remedied to reverse that downward trend.

The paper observes that the four post-Marcos administrations from Corazon Aquino to Gloria Macapagal Arroyo have not been successful in addressing the population problem because of the lack of government funding required to implement an effective family planning program. Fear of the political influence of the Catholic Church, which opposes the use of artificial methods of birth control, appears to be the driving factor behind this lapse.

As a result, the Philippine economy has lagged behind its Southeast Asian neighbors. For instance, it is estimated that it will take 62 years for the country to catch up with Thailand, which – with a population growth rate of only 0.9 percent versus our 2.3 percent – has more than double our per capita income.

“The strong republic is a weak state if it cannot implement population management policies,” said John Forbes, head of the chamber’s Legislative and Community Affairs committee. Tasked with policy advocacy and government liaison, the committee was instrumental in conducting the survey among its members.

“In the Philippines, you have a government that is too religious and a church that is too political,” he quipped in a *PopDev Media Service* interview.

Exactly what steps can the private sector take to help contain overpopulation?

“Companies can do more to educate workers about family planning and make available birth control materials and should take into consideration family size when hiring new employees,” the document states. “Bonuses could be given to employees who have vasectomies or tubal ligations,”

Employers also need to be reminded of the often-overlooked provision of Section 134 of the Philippine Labor Code requiring companies with over 200 employees to maintain a clinic that provides free family planning services including contraceptives, Forbes said.

He likewise cited the need to institute a reward system among corporations to encourage employees to raise small families.

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“In light of the phaseout of contraceptive support by the USAID, the private sector should all the more help find ways to assist parents in planning their families,” he added. —  
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*Female labor migration confers benefits but also exacts tolls.*

## **Pinay migrant workers: Beyond stereotypes**

**By Roberto C. Navarro**

*PopDev Media Service*

Janet's first stint as a migrant worker brought her much anguish.

Employed as a domestic helper in Abu Dhabi, she was maltreated by her female employer and was nearly raped by the man of the house. She returned to the country, with help from the Philippine embassy, after three months. Her dogged effort soon landed her another job abroad – as an entertainer in Japan. While there, she escaped another rape attempt by a nightclub customer. Eventually, a failed liaison with a Japanese lover resulted in the birth of a son. To her siblings' dismay, she later went into yet another relationship with a Filipino, the father of her next child. One problem with her current partner, though, was that he would not let her easily forget her "Japayuki" past. Given the chance, she would want to work overseas again.

Janet belongs to the steadily growing ranks of Filipino women who leave the country every year to work in over a hundred places around the globe. In fact, female migrant workers have outnumbered their male counterparts since 1992. More often than not, these women – being more conscientious as well as frugal – bring material benefits to their families much more than the men do: they are able to help send their children or siblings to school or finance what many Filipinos regard as a prized possession, a home of their own. On top of this, their significant

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share of the total dollar remittances contributed by overseas Filipinos (close to US \$6.8 billion as of last count) help prop up an otherwise sluggish Philippine economy.

As is well known, a host of problems confront both male and female migrant workers – especially the undocumented – with death (mostly from health-related causes) the most serious. It is the women, however, who are more vulnerable to abuse and exploitation because of the nature of the jobs they hold.

“Entertainers and domestic workers are in great demand so a lot of women find themselves in these occupations,” says Maruja Asis, Ph.D., director for research and publication of Scalabrini Migration Center (SMC). “But unlike those in factories where conditions can be monitored, these jobs are unprotected. Domestics are especially prone to abuse since they’re isolated from other workers.”

From 1999 to 2000, the SMC – an institution devoted to the study and dissemination of information about migration issues in the Asia-Pacific region – conducted a survey of 100 Filipino women who had returned from working abroad, as part of a larger study of female labor migration in Southeast Asia. In-depth interviews with ten of the respondents yielded life stories that shed light on many aspects of their experience, especially the internal changes it brought about in themselves. The earlier-cited case of “Janet” (the alias used in the SMC study) was one of those ten life stories.

The desire to better the economic lot of their families, indeed, surfaced as the single biggest motivation of women who sought jobs in foreign countries. “I didn’t want to leave my children’s education to chance,” said Linda, married to another OFW and mother of five children, to explain why she decided to work as a domestic helper in Hong Kong for 12 years.

But contrary to their image as often depicted in the media, the women did not see themselves as “hapless victims.” Many of them tended to downplay the difficulties they encountered at the workplace: the long hours, the lack of food, the hard work, the maltreatment by employers, the loneliness of being away from family and worry about husbands and children. Instead, the majority found ways of rising above them.

“The women viewed these as experiences to learn from – and as trials and obstacles from which they came out as stronger persons,” says Dr. Asis.

Asis points out that migration has led to a redefinition of the women’s role, particularly for those who left children behind in the Philippines. As traditional nurturers of the family, mothers are supposed to stay close to home. Working abroad, women migrants have had to find

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other means of being “a good mother” despite the distance (both physical and emotional) that separated them from their children.

Constant *communication* with family members, whether by mail or by telephone, showed their effort to maintain close ties; the amount and regularity of the money they sent back home attested to the depth of their commitment.

From their life stories, Asis saw a new sense of self emerge beyond the stereotypes of “martyr mothers” and “altruistic daughters” usually attached to female migrant workers. Even as they advanced their families’ interests, they also gained something for themselves in the process: the strength of character born out of surviving the adversities they had experienced.

But despite such positive outcomes, migration exacts other costs besides those that are frequently enumerated.

For all the good that it does, remittances could widen the economic disparity between the OFWs and other people in the community. “If you look at the countryside, you’ll know if there are many OFWs in a particular area because of the houses they have built. Their children, too, go to better schools,” says Asis, noting a tendency for OFW families to become “more materialistic” just because they have the resources to realize their dreams.

That the migrants’ sense of national identity can become fragile poses another worrisome aspect of overseas employment. Add to that the impact on the Philippines of political events in the countries where they are deployed.

“We are vulnerable to outside forces, like what happened during the war in the Middle East. We worry about the safety of OFWs in the region. There is also the challenge of how we will manage with the unexpected return of thousands and thousands of OFWs,” says Asis.

Women like Janet will – despite the hardships – continue to seek work abroad in the foreseeable future if no other viable option becomes available in our country. “We will have to ask ourselves,” Asis cautions, “if this is the kind of development that we must pursue.” —

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