



# MEETING THE CHALLENGES OF LABOR MIGRATION

The role of a Philippine vocational training school in shaping social and economic outcomes of labor migration.

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◆ Master thesis Human Geography ◆

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## Summary

This thesis is about strengthening the role of a vocational training school in the Philippines, in fostering the development outcomes of labor migration and mitigating its social costs.

The school under study is AMG Skilled Hands Technological College (ASHTEC), a school which facilitates labor migration by co-providing training for construction workers who want to work abroad. This is done in cooperation with the construction company EEI Corporation (EEI). The school also offers other courses, such as Information and Communication Technology. Some graduates of those other courses have also left the country as Overseas Filipino Worker (OFW), on their own initiative. ASHTEC is part of a development organization, and is set up for the underprivileged. It is characterized by a holistic approach towards its students. In order to transform students into responsible, Christian workers, a moral values program is given to all students. The staff members of ASHTEC are aware of negative impact migration can have on migrants' lives, especially on the social level. Therefore the moral values program for EEI trainees addresses some topics related to migration. Nevertheless, there is no coherent vision on what needs to be addressed exactly.

In order to investigate upon the role of ASHTEC, fieldwork has been done in the Philippines. Three research methods were used: participant observation, semi-structured interviews, and study of literature and documents. Semi-structured interviews were done with staff members of ASHTEC, in order to gain background information on the school and its role in facilitating migration. The stories of OFWs once trained at ASHTEC have been listened to in order to understand what their lives look like and to understand their decisions. Experts from migrant organizations have been consulted to get a clear view on the links between migration and development, and on the role of schools in addressing social costs and benefits of migration.

Although being a migrant worker is often related to a type of work, interviews with migrants show that it is a way of life with its own specific challenges on the social, mental, spiritual and financial level. Challenges which together tend to form a pattern. Social relations influence greatly the course of migrants' lives, including the economic possibilities migration brings them. At the same time migration shakes up identity processes and religious convictions. It clearly influences mental well-being of migrants and their relatives. Separation from relatives, new living environments, and higher wages, means old routines are discontinued. New ways of constituting family life, faithlife, and managing money need to be established. New efforts need to be made to maintain meaningful relationships and a meaningful life. Deteriorating family relations are the cause of stress and have the potential to make the whole migration period a failure. Faith in God gives migrants strength in battling stress and loneliness, and helps them cling to Christian moral values. The reason OFWs

usually mention for going abroad is 'providing for the family'. Sending money home is part of maintaining good relations with home. If OFWs and their families however adjust their lifestyle to a higher income, this new lifestyle can often only be maintained by migration. This limits the possibilities of an OFW to return to the Philippines, even though almost all OFWs indicate they wish to return to the Philippines someday. OFWs usually save money on an irregular basis. Few OFWs have clear plans for their return, which results in developing spending habits in which return is not taken into account. The absence of concrete plans enlarges the chance of having a migration period which is much longer than initially thought. The length and benefits of migration are thus influenced by the relationships with relatives and the abilities to plan and save for the future. Clearly, envisioning migration of OFWs as a purely economic process, and as such considering decisions regarding migration as rational and aiming at maximizing utility, reflects a poor understanding of human behavior.

It is regularly suggested that migration is part of a livelihood strategy, and as such contributes to development. Yet the lack of a coherent plan behind migration of many OFWs, suggests that livelihood approaches overrationalize people's behavior. Decisions are usually greatly influenced by social expectations and the creation of meaningful activities and a meaningful social setting. If migration is part of a strategy, is it often merely a survival strategy, not an accumulation strategy. Migration helps people to get by at the moment of migration, but for many it does not help them in taking a structural step out of poverty which eventually becomes independent of remittances (money sent home). The culture of migration in the Philippines causes a normalization of migration, which leads to a non-reflectiveness on the practice. Considering the fact that most OFWs wish to return to the Philippines sooner or later, it is desirable that OFWs and their families come to use migration as an accumulation strategy, not merely a survival strategy. This gives migrants the option to return to the Philippines, without falling back into poverty. It is also the most sustainable way to contribute to regional economic development, because sustainable economic development means more than increased cash inflows from abroad used for consumptive purposes, it means the creation of economic activities and job opportunities through investing in existing and new economic activities.

Migration does not naturally lead to 'a better life'. In order for ASHTEC to play a role in fostering the development outcomes of migration and mitigating its social costs, there is a need for a broader understanding of three things. The first is the realities of migration and its impact upon the lives of OFWs and their families, including how certain struggles are related (e.g. loneliness, social relations, faithlife, spending habits). There is also a need for a realistic view on the opportunities migration has for economic development of OFWs and their families within certain periods of time. This means

temporality of migration needs more attention. The third issue that needs to be understood is the potential of migration for regional economic development through investments in economic activities.

It would be useful for ASHTEC to develop a coherent vision on migration, which explains why they facilitate migration, what exactly they train people for (e.g. is migration the goal, or is migration only temporary? If it is the latter, what will a post-migration life and career look like?), and how all this relates to the vision, mission and core values of ASHTEC. At the moment the core values of 'holistic approach' and 'sustainability' are under pressure.

Practical recommendations for improving the role of ASHTEC would be (1) adjusting the Moral Values Program for EEI trainees so they will be better prepared to handle changes they face due to migration, and are able to maintain good relationships with relatives, (2) link up with other organizations to organize goal setting and financial literacy workshops for OFWs and family members, (3) promote investments in entrepreneurship and business activities among OFWs, and (4) raise awareness about (il)legal recruitment procedures among all ASHTEC students.

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## Abbreviations

ASHTEC	-	AMG Skilled Hands Technological College
CFO	-	Commission on Filipinos Overseas
COWA	-	Committee on Overseas Workers' Affairs
ECT	-	Electronics and Communication Technology
EEl	-	EEl Corporation (Philippine construction company with projects in and outside the Philippines)
ICT	-	Information and Communication Technology
IOM	-	International Organization for Migration
JBIL	-	Job and Business Incubation Laboratory
JBS	-	Jobs and Business Services
MVP	-	Moral Values Program
NSO	-	National Statistics Office
OFW	-	Overseas Filipino Worker
OJT	-	On-the-job training
OWWA	-	Overseas Workers Welfare Administration
PDOS	-	Pre-departure Orientation Seminar
POEA	-	Philippine Overseas Employment Administration
SMC	-	Scalabrini Migration Center
TECD	-	The Evangelical Church of Dubai
TESDA	-	Technical Education and Skills Development Authority
TVET	-	Technical and Vocational Education and Training
UAE	-	United Arab Emirates

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## **CHAPTER 1: Introduction**

### **1.1 Introduction**

From April to June 2012 I stayed in the Philippines. During that period I spoke with many Overseas Filipino Workers (OFWs). All had their own story to tell. Some had worked abroad for many years, others had just finished their first year abroad. Some had returned to the Philippines for good, some were on vacation, but still had an existing contract to work abroad. Through Skype and other communication means, I spoke with OFWs who were still working abroad. The stories below, of Allan, Julius, and Luke are compilations of the many stories I heard. They give an impression of what this research is about.

Allan is 28 years old, married, and has two children. He has been working in Saudi Arabia for seven years now. Ten years ago he studied Automotiv at AMG Skilled Hands Technological College (ASHTEC), but he could not find a job. The ASHTEC staff then informed him about the possibility to be trained to become a welder abroad. He reacted positively. The first few months abroad were terribly hard, loneliness and homesickness haunted Allan. After a few months however, he found ways adapt to his new life. It gives Allan a great deal of satisfaction to be able to support his wife, two children, two brothers, parents, and parents-in-law financially. He is glad his children are not deprived of the things he was deprived of as a child: good living conditions, good schooling, and some toys. Allan does not like living abroad, and misses his family very much. He would like to go back to the Philippines, but at the moment he does not see how he could return without becoming poor again. The first years he did not save any money. Since about two years he saves some money every now and then. Allan wishes to start his own business someday, but he does not know what type of business yet. Allan and his wife call each other on the phone every day. He trusts his wife on being faithful, and she trusts him, because they both know they fear the Lord. He holds meetings and prays a lot with other Christians in Saudi Arabia, although they have to keep this a secret because the Saudi religious laws forbid gatherings of Christians.

Julius is 30 years old, married, and has three children. He is working in Singapore as a pipe-fitter. He also studied Automotiv at ASHTEC, and later on followed training to become an OFW. Julius has been abroad for eight years now, first in Qatar, and later in Singapore. He grew up in a large family, who applauded his decision to go abroad. His wife was also positive towards it. When Julius went abroad for the first few times, he was not very serious with what he wanted to achieve. He spent a lot of money on luxuries, and so did his relatives. A few years ago, a desire to return to the Philippines grew, together with a realization of how impossible this would be with the current spending habits of him and his relatives. Julius decided to take fate into his own hands. He cut back on the remittances

he sent home, had a few harsh fights with his relatives, and now saves money on a bank account which cannot be accessed by anyone but him. Julius continues to save money because he wants to start a business in the Philippines. A repair shop. He is tired of being away from his wife and country, and sees the ugly face of loneliness regularly. His faith in God gets him through difficult times abroad. Julius struggles with the temptation of women regularly. Many other OFWs are having affairs. Julius tries to be among what he calls 'real Christians' as much as he can, to pray together and motivate one another to hold on to God and Christian moral values.

Luke is 23 years old and unmarried. He studied Information and Communication Technology (ICT) at ASHTEC. After finding a vacancy for an office worker in Dubai, he left to work abroad. Luke works at an office in Dubai for four years now. He likes the life he lives there, and the money he makes. He supports his parents in the Philippines, by sending them large amounts of money every month, to spend freely. The money is mainly used for medication, schooling, and luxuries. Luke recently started saving some money for emergencies. He has no future plans. If he finds a girl in Dubai, he might stay there for a very long time. But if life is not enjoyable in Dubai anymore (or his visa is not extended), he might try to start working elsewhere as an OFW. Luke lives with three fellow OFWs in an apartment. Even though he went to church in the Philippines, and he still considers himself a Christian, he does not attend religious meetings anymore, neither does he do bible-study.

The stories above describe aspects of the lives of some OFWs who are graduates of ASHTEC. The stories show that migrants and their families experience migration differently, deal with migration differently, and the benefits they have from migration also differ. As can be read, ASHTEC play a role in facilitating labor migration. This research is about the current and possible role of the school in facilitating migration and helping migrants to make their migration beneficial for them personally, and also for the wider community.

## **1. 2 Research goal**

The technical and vocational training school ASHTEC plays a central role in this research. This school, located in Central Luzon, facilitates migration by co-providing training for construction workers who want to work abroad. This is done in cooperation with a large construction company, EEI Corporation (EEI). ASHTEC also offers other courses such as Information and Communication Technology (ICT), Electronics and Communication Technology (ECT) and Welding Technology. Some graduates from these three courses have also left the country to work abroad, although the amount of construction workers abroad trained by ASHTEC/EEI is much larger. The staff of ASHTEC feels unease about the links between migration and the goals of the school (which are e.g. spiritual and economic

development and positive societal impact), because of stories of migrants who experience problems, especially related to their family life. That is the reason why this research was initiated.

The central goal of this research is to *“study how ASHTEC, as a vocational training school, can play a role in the management of migration of (ex-)students, in order to create an environment in which students can make well-informed decisions surrounding migration, and in which migration can contribute to well-being and regional economic development.”*

### **1.3 Research questions**

In order to reach the goal, the following research questions are formulated.

Main question:

*How can the vocational training school ASHTEC improve the role it plays in making migration contribute to well-being of students and graduates, and to regional economic development, while at the same time trying to minimize the social costs of migration for migrants and their families?*

The fact that the question starts with ‘how’ implicates that it is fundamental to first describe and analyze what role ASHTEC currently fulfills, and how this role has evolved over the years. The ‘how’ also indicates that this research aims to contribute to developing a strategy to ‘solve a problem’.

The two areas of ‘how the situation presents itself’ and ‘how it can be dealt with in the future’ are reflected in three sub questions which lead to answering the main question. The first two aim at getting a clear picture of the current situation, while the last one aims at improving the role of the school.

Sub questions:

1. *What role does migration play in the activities and the vision of the ASHTEC and how has this role evolved over the years?*
2. *What challenges<sup>1</sup> did graduates (OFWs) face related to their migration (before, during and after migration)?*
3. *How can the ASHTEC improve the role it plays in making migration contribute to well-being of students and regional economic development, while at the same time trying to minimize the social costs of migration for migrants and their families?*

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<sup>1</sup> Challenges are understood as situations which are demanding or difficult to handle in a satisfying manner. I distinguish economical, social, psychological and spiritual challenges.

## 1.4 Societal relevance

The Philippines is known for its so-called 'culture of migration'. About 10 percent of the country's population lives outside of the country. Migration is a popular way to increase income, and it is institutionalized by the public and private sector. The government promotes migration of Filipinos, because of the great amount of remittances the country receives. The government has the target of sending 1 million Filipinos abroad every year. Since 2006 this target has been met. The high number of Filipinos abroad, and the promotion and regulation of migration by the government, has directed attention and curiosity from other countries (see e.g. Bakunda & Walusimbi Mpanga 2011). Cortez points out that "*Philippine migration management is considered by other sending countries as the best practices model.*"(2007: 10) The promotion of migration is reflected in the way Philippines migrants are addressed in campaigns. They are called *bagong bayani*, the new heroes. Every year, the government (Department of Labor and Employment) gives the Bagong Bayani Award to an 'outstanding OFW'.

ASHTEC is part of the umbrella organization AMG Philippines. The mission of ASHTEC is to "*...develop, transform and empower youth through holistic Christ-centered programs so that they will be God fearing, self-sustaining and exhibiting distinctiveness to others.*"<sup>2</sup> ASHTEC has been set up as a school providing vocational training for the underprivileged. It offers three educational programs: Information and Communication Technology (ICT) (two years), Electronics and Communication Technology (ECT) (two years), and Welding Technology (one year). The last course provides the students with the "*necessary proficiency for the students to be globally competitive in the construction industry here and abroad.*"<sup>3</sup> Besides these courses, the school co-provides training with EEI Corporation, a large construction company. At a location next to the school, construction workers receive specialist training in order to start working for EEI, mainly on projects abroad. Regularly, those who have finished the welding course at ASHTEC, enroll at the EEI-training afterwards. Trainers from EEI teach skills, while ASHTEC provides a Moral Values Program (MVP). About a 1000 graduates of ASHTEC already work in The Middle East, mainly in Saudi Arabia and Singapore. It can be hard for migrants-to-be to foresee what it actually means to migrate for a period of some years. ASHTEC staff noticed that problems occur in migrant families, such as difficulties with getting used to working abroad or to being back home, marital problems. Since the ASHTEC staff has an active role in job placement and facilitating migration, they wish to reflect upon the impact of migration on families and the role the school could play in mitigating negative impacts.

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<sup>2</sup> From a PowerPoint presentation of ASHTEC given by the Resource Development Coordinator, 24 April 2012

<sup>3</sup> Website AMG Skilled Hands Technological College. Courses. <http://amgskilledhands.org/index.php/courses/> Accessed 5 February 2012.

Students are from poor families, who do not have the financial means to pay fees for regular schools. By means of educating and developing life skills of students, ASHTEC aims to contribute to the eradication of poverty in the Philippines. Education is thus tightly linked to development. As can be read in the mission statement, ASHTEC takes a holistic approach towards students, with attention for the overall well-being of students, not only for the acquirement of technical skills. It promotes honoring God in everything a person does: as well in their private, as in their professional life. Someone unfamiliar with the Christian faith might consider this approach to go even beyond holism, as the focus on serving and knowing God is the basis for all activities of the school. Yet for the staff this focus is perfectly natural. Faith in Christ, and norms and values associated with Christianity are believed to influence behavior and livelihood choices, leading to sustainable positive change. In line with the holistic approach, the ASHTEC staff has set up life skills programs. These programs focus on e.g. interpersonal behavior at a job and at home, or living a Christian life. Stories of problems in migrant families make the staff wonder how the situation of migrants relates to the goals of the school. Some goals might be reached (economical goals of e.g. job placement), while for other goals this conclusion cannot be drawn that easily (positive social impact). Migration, as one of the attractive options to make money and have a job, challenges some of the norms and values, such as social commitment to the family.

It is important to reflect upon the role of the ASHTEC, because migration might be threatening the positive impact the ASHTEC attempts to have.

### **1.5 Scientific relevance**

Migrants and their families are *“financially and socially vulnerable, though with tremendous untapped economic potential.”* (Cosico 2011: 1)

There are two aspects deserving more attention in migration literature. The first is the potential of individual migrants and their families to shape their migration experience and its outcomes, and the second is the potentials of educational institutes in spreading information about migration realities and potentials.

When reports and articles are published about migration, the social and economic aspects of migration are often not taken together, or at least not as being mutually constitutive. Whether or not migration is considered successful or desirable, depends very much on the focus of the researcher (e.g. economic or social, macro or micro, long-term or short-term) and the metaphysics about mobility (nomadic or sedentarist<sup>4</sup>). In general, there is a lack of attention for the role of personal factors on

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<sup>4</sup> See Cresswell 2006

the willingness to migrate and on shaping the benefits of migration. Factors such as family ties, need for esteem, acclaim of values, longing for adventure, religious convictions, and knowledge of and insight into formal systems, play an important role in livelihood decisions people make. If those factors do not get the attention they deserve, explanations of migration can become simplistic. This can be noticed in the dominance of economic theories in explanations of migration, and the strong focus on policies when negative consequences of migration are addressed. Reports and articles which address migration as well at the macro as the micro level, often eventually aim at bettering understanding of migration at the top (i.e. improvement of policies), instead of at the bottom (i.e. in personal lives of migrants). The social sciences have a task of investigating migration and explaining its complexity not only to policy makers and academics, but also to the wider public.

Literature focusing on the agency of individual migrants and their family members in shaping the migration experience and its outcomes appears to be rare, yet very much needed. Although reports with titles like 'Making Migration Work for Development' (Migration Globalisation and Poverty DRC, 2009) sound promising, no attention is given to ways to support individual migrants and their families in making migration work for *their* development.

Some Philippine organizations and researchers call attention for the potential migrants and their families have for shaping migration experiences and its outcome. These include financial institutes (ASKI Global Ltd. who partnered with Metrobank Foundation), as well as several NGOs (Atikha Overseas Workers and Communities Initiatives (Atikha)), Unlad Kabayan Migrant Services Foundation (Unlad Kabayan), and governmental institutes (Overseas Workers Welfare Administration (OWWA)<sup>5</sup>). Most of them provide financial literacy trainings to OFWs, and try to make people aware of how they can manage family relations and finances well.

This research is deals with the role of a school, a knowledge institution. Migration and knowledge are linked in several ways. Two ways are often distinguished in which migration influences the available knowledge and skills in sending countries: brain drain and brain circulation. Brain drain means the knowledge and skills of people do not benefit the home country because people leave the country. Brain circulation means that the country actually gains from migration because circular movements of migrants bring new knowledge into the country. Available knowledge in countries like the Philippines is however influenced by migration in another way as well. The popularity of migration as a career option has influence on what courses schools offer. Nursing schools and maritime schools have high numbers of enrolment, which is mainly attributed to the high chance of getting a job abroad with such education (Asis 2008: 88). Some families save money to send one family member

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<sup>5</sup> For a critique on the programs of OWWA, see Ochi 2005.

to school, in order for this member to earn money abroad and contribute to the well-being of the rest of the family. Every school, from an elementary school to a tertiary school, somehow has to deal with migration and its consequences. This can be because the students come from migrant families, because students aspire to migrate, or even because the school trains students for a job abroad. A general focus on migration in a society triggers some to study harder in order to find a good job abroad, while it withholds others from studying in the first place, when they notice that available low-skilled jobs abroad can provide them a good salary anyway.

Reports mentioning the potential of educational institutes like schools in fostering development potential of migration for development and helping migrant families cope with the hardships migration brings along, are rare. This seems at odds with the potential schools have for playing an active role in this matter. Contacts between students and schools are well established, and this creates an environment of trust (ideally speaking). Schools have a wide reach into communities and have the opportunity to build long-term relationships with migrants and their families, also after graduation. There is a potential of keeping track on migrants and their families through networks like alumni associations. Asis acknowledges the potential of schools:

*“The school can be an avenue for delivering programs to OFW families. The 2003 study [ECMI-CBCP, AOS-Manila, SMC, & OWWA, 2004] found that children seek out their teachers when they have problems. In this regard, teachers may need some more training or materials in counseling to enable them to guide their students. School programs and activities can be launching pads for information-education drives on parenting, financial literacy, and other relevant topics.” (2008: 92)*

Unlike Asis, most researchers who mention the links between migration and education treat the school solely as a potential actor for providing opportunities for migration, but not as an actor which could influence the outcomes of migration. This means there is a potential of schools, still to be employed. The organization Atikha tries to make the connection between educational institutes and informational programs about migration, but they mainly focus on primary and secondary schools. The role of institutes for tertiary education has clearly not gained the attention it deserves as well in theory as in practice. By investigating upon the role educational institutes, like a vocational training school, could play in fostering the outcomes of migration, this research contributes to discussions about migration, education and development.

## 1.6 Central concepts and their definitions

The three main concepts central to this research are: migration, education and development. It is important to first define what is understood by the concepts migration, education and development in the context of this research.

### *Migration*

For this research, the focus is on temporary international labor migration. Internal labor migration is left out of this research, just like forms of permanent outmigration. Even though the amount of people permanently living abroad, or internally migrating for work, are both high in the Philippine context, the case under study (OFWs trained at ASHTEC) called for a narrowing of the research focus to temporary international labor migration. A definition of temporary labor migration provided by the International Organization for Migration (IOM) is:

*“Temporary labor migration is the relocation of a worker to a place of work outside of his home country for a limited period of time as stated in the terms of a labor contract.”<sup>6</sup>*

The UN takes a broader notion when defining a migrant worker, including as well documented as undocumented workers.

*“The term “migrant worker” refers to a person who is to be engaged, is engaged or has been engaged in a remunerated activity in a State of which he or she is not a national.”<sup>7</sup>*

Temporary labor migrants from the Philippines are labeled Overseas Filipino Workers (OFWs). In the media and in regular Filipino life this term is used for as well documented as undocumented labor migrants. Even government agencies apply the term in newsfeeds and migration documentation for anyone who works abroad. The term ‘undocumented OFW’ or ‘illegal OFW’ can be found regularly. Legally, however, the term OFW is only applicable to those workers abroad who are registered as OFW with the Philippine Overseas Employment Administration (POEA) and who have a valid Overseas Employment Certificate (OEC), as the Commissioner of the Bureau of Internal Revenue (BIR) points out in an advisory piece on taxation procedures.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Definition taken from slides of a powerpoint presentation of IOM Consultant and former Head of Philippines Overseas Employment Administration (POEA) Tomas Achacoso, Bangkok, 2005. [http://www.colomboprocess.org/follow\\_sub2/session%201/Presentation%20Slides\\_Understanding%20International%20Labour%20Migration%20Phenomenon.pdf](http://www.colomboprocess.org/follow_sub2/session%201/Presentation%20Slides_Understanding%20International%20Labour%20Migration%20Phenomenon.pdf) Accessed 12 June 2012.

<sup>7</sup> International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families. Part I, Art 2, 1. <http://www.un.org/documents/ga/res/45/a45r158.htm>

<sup>8</sup> Kim S. Henares. Revenue Regulations No. 1-2011. <ftp://ftp.bir.gov.ph/webadmin1/pdf/56432RR%201-2011.pdf> Accessed 26 July 2012.

The group of migrants I focus on during this research, are people trained by ASHTEC who work or have worked as OFW. All migrants interviewed, did fit into the legal definition of OFW. However, for reasons of convenience, I use the term OFW for as well documented as undocumented migrants when labor migration from the Philippines is discussed. I thus espouse the definition of the UN mentioned before.

### *Education*

Education in the context of this research can mean two things. Firstly, it can refer to schools and the educational programs they offer in general. In the context of this research, this would mainly refer to tertiary education in the Philippines, especially the whole range of programs offered by ASHTEC. This means as well multiple years schooling offered solely by ASHTEC, as short training programs offered in cooperation with EEI Corporation.

Secondly, education can also refer to any activity through which people are provided with information about a certain topic. In the context of this research, this can be any program or activity organized by schools or other organizations, which informs people about the realities of migration or gives them advice on how to handle changes in their lives due to migration.

### *Development*

In general, there are three ways in which development is interpreted. The first is development as purely economic. This can be measured by e.g. GDP. The second is development as human development. This is usually measured by a range of socio-economic indicators combined – life-expectancy, mean years of schooling, etc – which eventually results in a place on the Human Development Index (HDI) or the Human Poverty Index 1 or 2 (HPI-1 or HPI-2). The third interpretation of development approaches development from a sustainability perspective. The Human Development Report 2011 defines this as follows: *Sustainable human development is the expansion of the substantive freedoms of people today while making reasonable efforts to avoid seriously compromising those of future generations.*<sup>9</sup> The issue of environmental impact plays an important role in this last line of thought.

In this research the interpretation of development is broad, and differs somewhat from the interpretations mentioned above. The broadness can be read in the research goal, which is to “develop ideas about improvement of the role of the ASHTEC in the management of migration of (ex-)students, in order to create an environment in which students can make well-informed decisions

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<sup>9</sup> United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), Human Development Report 2011, p.2 [http://hdr.undp.org/en/media/HDR\\_2011\\_EN\\_Complete.pdf](http://hdr.undp.org/en/media/HDR_2011_EN_Complete.pdf) Accessed 26 July 2012.

surrounding migration, and *in which migration can contribute to well-being and regional economic development.*”

The last (italic) part could be replaced by: ‘in which migration can contribute to development’. Development is thus taken as an increase in well-being and regional economic development.

Well-being is something hard to measure. Attempts are made (e.g. HDI), in which well-being is usually called quality of life. But indicators measuring this quality of life are not all relevant in the case of this research (e.g. measuring access to health services). For this research I take well-being as the result of an interplay between four fields of a person’s life: the economic field, the social field, the psychological or mental field, and the spiritual field. All those fields are somehow challenged during migration, which means well-being is under pressure. The challenge is to deal with all fields in such a way, that negative impact on well-being due to migration is minimized, and positive impact is maximized.

Regional economic development is understood as businesses development and an increase in employment opportunities in the region, resulting in an increase in economic means available. One thing that is fundamental for creating new businesses is the availability of capital. Migrants earn more money than most non-migrants, meaning they have more opportunities for creating, spending and investing capital. Some might argue that spending capital on consumer items is supporting the local entrepreneurs already. But the challenge is to use capital generated by migrants in such a way that it contributes to regional economic development on the long term through the creation of economic activities and job opportunities.

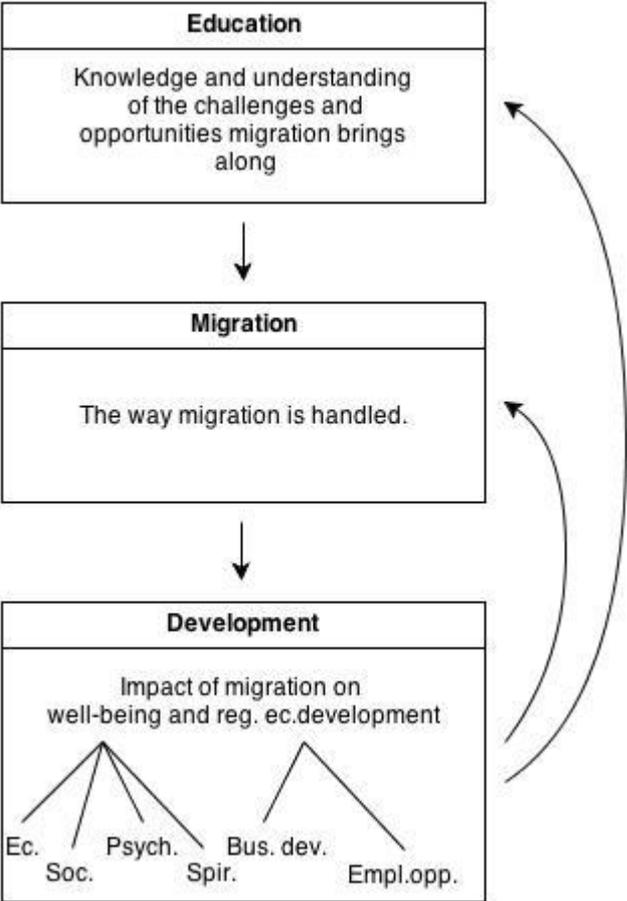
#### *Relations between concepts*

The assumption is that knowledge about, and understanding of, the challenges and opportunities migration brings along, influences the way people handle migration in such a way that the impact of migration on development is different. The impact migration has on development (either positive or negative) influences migration decisions, e.g. migrants can decide to work abroad for a longer time, adjust spending habits, or look for contact with other Christians abroad. This again influences the development outcomes. The way migration is handled, and the development impact, thus mutually influence each other. The development impact migration has, is of influence on the knowledge and understanding of migrations opportunities and challenges.

Knowledge and understanding can be increased during educational programs. In this way it does not have to be acquired in fragments during migration, through e.g. stories heard and trial and error of

the migrant himself. Instead migrants can be prepared to face challenges and get a clearer migration realities and where migration can lead them and their relatives beforehand.

**Figure 1:** Relationships between central concepts





## **CHAPTER 2: Understanding labor migration from the Philippines**

### **2.1 Introduction**

In order to understand the context in which ASHTEC and the OFWs trained at ASHTEC operate, this chapter will provide background information on labor migration from the Philippines, and how it relates to development of the country. First some general characteristics of migration flows will be presented, then the 'causes' of migration will be laid out, and eventually the links between migration and development will be explored.

### **2.2 General characteristics**

In the early 1970s Filipino workers were first recruited overseas in large numbers, because the Gulf states needed workers for ambitious infrastructural projects. Since the Philippines experienced a bigger population growth than economic growth, the Marcos government agreed on facilitating labor migration to the Gulf states. What was supposed to be a short time solution to economic problems, remained. In the 1980s neighboring countries in South-East Asia needed workers for their industries, and the range of destination countries for Filipinos grew. In the Philippines the economic and political situation did not improve structurally, and thus working abroad remained attractive.

The annual deployment of Filipino workers abroad has seen an enormous growth since the 1970s. In 1975, the number of contracts processed was 36,035 (Battistella in Asis, 2006). In 2011 the number of contracts processed was 1,850,463 (POEA, 2011). The government target of sending one million Filipinos abroad every year, has been met since 2006. It is said that about 10% of the total Filipino population lives and/or works overseas. In 2011 this was about 10,455,788 people (CFO, 2011).

The Commission on Filipinos Overseas (CFO, 2011) distinguishes between three migrant types: permanent settlers, temporary labor migrants, and migrants in an unauthorized situation. They are defined as follows.

Permanent: Immigrants, dual citizens or legal permanent residents abroad whose stay does not depend on work contracts.

Temporary: Persons whose stay overseas is employment related, and who are expected to return at the end of their work contracts.

Irregular: Those not properly documented or without valid residence or work permits, or who are overstaying in a foreign country.

In December 2011, permanent settlers comprised 47% of the total amount of overseas Filipinos, temporary workers 43%, and irregular migrants 10% (CFO, 2011). Clearly the categories indicate legal

distinctions, with the third category being the definition of a legal exception. Irregular migrants themselves might consider themselves a temporary or permanent migrant. A second note that needs to be made is that it is questionable whether migration numbers can ever be exact, especially when irregular migrants are included.

Labor migration from the Philippines is often divided into ‘Landbased’ and ‘Seabased’. Many Filipinos work on ships. In fact, in the world of seafarers almost everyone works or has worked with Filipinos. About a fourth of the seafarers worldwide is from the Philippines (Asis, 2006). In 2011, 25% of the deployed Filipinos were sea-based and 75% land-based (POEA, 2011).

Logically, this large amount of migrants has a huge impact on the economy, for example through remittances. 12% of the country’s GDP consisted of remittances in 2009 (World Bank, 2011). The largest amount of remittances comes from Filipinos who live abroad permanently. The largest share of these permanent settlers lives in the United States of America (Ang, 2007).

The top 10 destination countries of Filipinos are: US, Saudi Arabia, Canada, UAE, Malaysia, Australia, Qatar, Japan, UK, and Kuwait (CFO, 2011). The top 10 destination countries of OFWs who were newly hired or rehired in 2011 can be seen in Table 1. Saudi Arabia was the most popular destination, with 24% of all new hires and rehires. The main destinations of OFWs trained at ASHTEC are also on the list: Saudi Arabia, Singapore, and Qatar.

**Table 1:** Number of Deployed Landbased Overseas Filipino Workers by Top Ten Destinations, New Hires and Rehires: 2011 (POEA, 2011)

<b>Destination</b>	<b>Amount of OFWs</b>
All	1,318,727
Saudi Arabia	316,736
United Arab Emirates	235,775
Singapore	146,613
Hong Kong	129,575
Qatar	100,530
Kuwait	65,603
Taiwan	41,896
Italy	31,704
Bahrain	18,230
Malaysia	16,797
Other	215,268

Filipinos working abroad usually work on temporary contracts. They often work in service, production, and health sectors. There is no big difference between the amount of male and female

OFWs. In 2010, women accounted for 48% of OFWs, and men for 52% (PCW, 2013). Asis (2008) mentions that migration from the Philippines has some characteristics which makes it different from migration from other Asian countries. Firstly, the workers are widely distributed in all regions of the world. Secondly, Filipinos have a broad range of occupations abroad, from less skilled to highly skilled work. They are known for being highly represented in specific job categories such as nursing, seafaring, and domestic work. Thirdly, in general, Filipino workers have followed more years of education in comparison to other Asian migrants. And finally, women form a big share of migrating Filipinos. The amount of women migrants is expected to grow, since woman are often working as caregivers and nurses: occupations which are increasingly in demand in aging populations.

### 2.3 Causes of migration

The decision to migrate is a complex one. Social, economical, and geopolitical contexts all influence individuals' behavior. Although one must therefore be suspicious of causal relations (as these tend to be over-determining) a range of general factors which foster the initiation and continuation of migration from the Philippines can be found in literature.

Asis & Baggio (2008) distinguish between three types of factors which foster the continuation of migration: external factors, domestic factors, and the culture and institutionalization of migration. In Table 2 some causes from different sources are summarized using these categories.

**Table 2.** Causes of migration from the Philippines (from Aldaba 2008, Asis 2008, Asis & Baggio 2008)

<b>External factors:</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- emigration pressures because of uneven economic development in the region</li> <li>- pull factor due to aging populations in developed countries</li> <li>- migration facilitating factors such as greater connectivity due to fast and cheap communication and travel possibilities</li> </ul>
<b>Domestic factors:</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- low wages</li> <li>- unemployment and underemployment</li> <li>- poverty and inequality</li> <li>- weak governance and corruption<sup>10</sup></li> <li>- political instability</li> <li>- armed conflicts in some areas</li> <li>- natural disasters</li> <li>- deteriorating educational systems</li> </ul>
<b>Culture of Migration:</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- the institutionalization of migration by the government</li> <li>- the institutionalization of migration by the private sector</li> <li>- the general believe that migration is the best way towards a better life</li> </ul>

<sup>10</sup> Transparency International (Annual Report 2010) listed the Philippines as one of the more corrupt countries in Asia, with a rating of 2.4 on a scale of 1-10 (10 being highly clean and 1 being highly corrupt).

The reasons 'lack of job opportunities', 'irregular employment' and 'low wages' were the most dominant reasons given by migrants for leaving the country in a 2004 study (referred to by Asis 2008).

Economic reasons dominate Table 2. Wages are higher overseas, e.g. in overall terms sixteen times higher in Japan, and five times higher in Taiwan in 2007 (Abella 2008: viii). The economic growth of the Philippines has lagged behind those of some neighboring countries. Unemployment, underemployment and regional unevenness in employment opportunities make migration a considerable option. The unemployment rate was 7,2% in January 2012. It has been generally steady from 2007 on. Before 2007 it used to be higher. The underemployment rate was 18,8% in January 2012, following more or less the same pattern as the unemployment rate.<sup>11</sup> The youth unemployment rate (15-24 yrs) was 17,4% in 2009<sup>12</sup>. Another persisting problem concerning employment is that many employers only give out temporary contracts, leaving workers with a lot of insecurity for the longer term.

Colonial ties with the USA has given Filipinos easier access to the USA. General knowledge of English, which is also a legacy of the colonial period, is a characteristic of Filipino workers which positively distinguishes them. The history of migration from the Philippines, combined with promotion and facilitation of migration by the government, has laid the foundation for a culture of migration. The culture is visible and promoted at basically all levels of society. A feature of a culture of migration is the fact that migration has become something normal, even something desirable, regardless of domestic needs and opportunities. The dominant belief is that the road towards a better life is paved with money from abroad. In 2008, one out of five Filipinos in the country agreed with the statement *"If it were only possible, I would move to another country and live there."* 54% disagreed to this statement.<sup>13</sup> Asis (2008 :86) mentions soundings taken by Pulse Asia which indicate willingness to migrate among children. In a nationwide survey from 2003, 47% of children between the age of 10 and 12 reported they wished to work abroad someday. Among children of OFWs, this was 60,4%. Migration has become an economic and a social issue. Once family members migrate, other members are likely to follow this pattern. Working abroad becomes a livelihood strategy for families (De Jong, 2000). Decisions to migrate are often more influenced by perceived opportunities and rewards, than by actual opportunities. (Cortez 2007: 10)

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<sup>11</sup> Website National Statistical Coordination Board (NSCB). (2013) *Household Population 15 Years Old and Over by Employment Status* [http://www.nscb.gov.ph/secstat/d\\_labor.asp](http://www.nscb.gov.ph/secstat/d_labor.asp) Accessed 20 March 2013

<sup>12</sup> Website of CIA The World Factbook. 'Unemployment, youth ages 15-24' <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/fields/2229.html> Accessed 20 March 2013

<sup>13</sup> Pulse Asia. (2008) *October 2008. Nationwide Survey on Hopelessness and Intention to Migrate.* <http://www.pulseasia.ph/UlatngBayan2008.html> Accessed 16 May 2013

Since the 1970s the Philippine state has been a dominant facilitator, and later on, a promoter of migration. It has set up facilitating structures, and protection of OFWs is high on the agenda of the state. Laws about protection and assistance of Filipinos abroad have passed in the last decades. According to Orbeta, the Philippines has *“one of the most elaborate systems of institutes managing migration flows in the world.”* (2008:17) Besides this legal framework, there is general promotion of migration, by addressing OFWs as *bagong bayani*, the ‘new heroes’ of society and the economy, and by honoring them especially on certain days, weeks and months which are named after them.

*“June 7 is Migrant Workers Day (a government-designated event to commemorate the passage of the Migrant Workers and Overseas and Filipinos Act of 1995), the first Sunday following Ash Wednesday is National Migrants Day (an initiative of the Catholic Church), the month of December is Overseas Filipinos Month (spearheaded by the Commission on Filipinos Overseas), December 18 is International Migrants Day (an initiative of civil society; it is now a global celebration, which started in the Philippines in 1997).”* (Asis 2008: 78).

When migration from the Philippines is being explained and analyzed, one cannot end up with simple causal relations. The history of migration from the Philippines, and the management of migration by the government, ask for a deeper understanding. The culture of migration which has developed, disregards simplistic conceptualizations of human intentionality and behavior (e.g. human beings as being rational and focused on maximizing utility). The Philippines shows that, even though reasons for migration are in the end believed to be mainly economic, the social and cultural context plays a role in shaping decisions regarding migration and its outcomes. Local perceptions of places and mobility influence people’s behavior. Macroeconomic explanations of migration (such as neo-classical theories of migration, or the new economies of labor migration) which explain migration as a result of economic imbalances and individual calculations, might be helpful for gaining insights into the initiation of migration, yet they are not suitable for explaining the cumulative causation of migration as it can be seen in the Philippines, nor its outcomes on economic development. Many factors in the lives of (potential) migrants influence the decisions they make. During the lives of migrants, their interests and motivations for migration change, due to new experiences, and information and people encountered, which change perceptions of opportunities and constraints abroad and in the Philippines.

## **2.4 Migration and development**

As visible in Table 2, most of the so-called causal factors of migration relate to the economy and the political-economy. Flows of people are often understood as the result of economic imbalances. Economic imbalances between countries are seen as main push and pull factors, which drive

migrants out of their situation into a new country. Skilled and unskilled migrants fill gaps in the labor markets of other countries. The link between migration and development is called the migration-development nexus. Since flows of people have intensified, so have debates about migration and development. Therefore the migration-development nexus needs to be examined a little more.

Asis & Baggio note that policymakers often approach migration as the independent variable, and development as the dependent variable (2008: 2). This means that migration mainly influences development, and therefore the focus should be on facilitating migration in a profitable manner. However, one can wonder if this is justified. If inequalities and imbalances are drivers of migration, it might be more valuable to consider development the independent variable, and migration the dependent variable. The focus should foremost be on development and thus on the deeper problems which drive people out of the country. As Thomas Crouch, the country director of the Asian Development Bank in the Philippines pointed out: *"OFWs are a symptom of the country's wider problems"*. (in Opiniano 2004: 17)

Some argue that migration in these high numbers is one of the reasons the Philippines stay underdeveloped in many respects. Increased cash inflow has not led to an increase in job opportunities in the country. Large numbers of educated and skilled workers migrate. More cash has become available, but skills and knowledge are often lost.

*"Some quarters have argued that the loss of technical and managerial people is large enough that productivity of capital suffers, discouraging investments and making the country less competitive in the world market."* (Abella, 2008: vii)

What Abella is essentially talking about, is the problem of brain drain. Educated people leave the country to invest their skills and knowledge elsewhere. Countries bear the costs of education, but not the benefits. However, since most migrants migrate temporarily, often circular, the possibility of brain gain and brain circulation needs some thought in the Philippine context. Skills do not just get lost abroad, skills can also be developed, gained, and transferred to others during and after migration. If skills are built up abroad, there is a potential for development when they can be used in the home-country. ASHTEC has invited some OFWs who work in Dubai, to come over to teach students at ASHTEC particular IT-skills. This would be an example of brain gain. With the right policies in place, the country can benefit from the experiences and skills developed abroad. Reality however teaches that many people who intent to migrate temporarily, eventually decide to become residents of another country (Tullao & Rivera, 2008: 21). Besides this, many OFWs work as factory workers, housemaids, nannies or entertainers: jobs which provide little opportunity for skills development. Some are overqualified for the jobs they do, leading to brain waste.

Ellerman (2005) gives an example of what can happen if the monetary gains of migration are not used for economic development of the home country. He describes what happened to the guest workers from Southern Europe and North Africa in the period after the Second World War.

*"[W]hen unemployment rose abruptly in Northern Europe (such as in 1974 and 1980), hundreds of thousands of guest workers lost their jobs and returned to 'the same unemployment and underemployment they had left' (Jacobs 1984:74). The remittances, in the meantime, had not put their home regions on the road to development: "Remittances, while they last, do alleviate poverty in abandoned regions, just as any forms of transfer payments from rich to poor regions alleviate poverty while they last. The money buys imports for people and institutes which they would otherwise have to go without, but that is all it does." (Jacobs 1984:75)"*

What we see is that countries can as well gain and lose from migration. (See Table 3 for a list of benefits and costs for sending countries) The development potentials of migration exist, *"but the development potentials of international migration are not automatic or inevitable."* (Asis & Baggio 2008: 11). Migration can clearly lift the burden of poverty, but whether this is for a long or a short time depends on the way money and skills are invested and the wider (political) environment in which this takes place. Asis and Baggio (2008) note that sending countries which have benefited from migration had clear policies and programs in place.

Remittances are the most recognized contribution to development. Statistics of the Bangko Sentral ng Pilipinas (BSP, central bank of the Philippines) show a total amount of remittances of 21,391,333,000 US dollars in 2012.<sup>14</sup> This number is based on bank reports submitted to the BSP. This are officially registered remittances. How big the real amount of remittances is which enters a country cannot be measured exactly, since flows of money cannot always be traced. Results from the 2011 Survey on Overseas Filipinos (SOF) show that the amount of the total remittances covered cash sent home was 73.0%, cash brought home 22.3%, and remittance in kind was 4.8%. Most OFWs send their remittance through banks (71.9%). Others have them delivered door-to-door (6.2%), through an agency/local office (4.7%), through friends/co-workers (0.5%) or by other means (16.8%).<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Website of BSP. 'Overseas Filipinos' Cash Remittances' <http://www.bsp.gov.ph/statistics/keystat/ofw.htm> Accessed 1 May 2013

<sup>15</sup> Website of National Statistics Office (NSO). 'Total Number of OFWs is Estimated at 2.2 Million (Results from the 2011 Survey on Overseas Filipinos)' <http://www.census.gov.ph/content/total-number-ofws-estimated-22-million-results-2011-survey-overseas-filipinos> Accessed 1 May 2013

**Table 3:** A range of benefits and costs from the perspective of a sending country

<b>Benefits</b>	<b>Costs</b>
Reduces unemployment: unemployed people can now have a job elsewhere.	Creates unemployment: needed workers leave because of better prospects elsewhere.
Generates remittance earnings which go directly to the people involved.	Creates dependency on remittances.
Generates financial, human and social capital.	Skills mismatch in the country: societal needs vs. migration aspirations.
Improves household earnings for food, health, housing and education.	Inequality between those who can and those who cannot benefit from migration.
Improves quality of life, creates money to spend on more than surviving.	Has a destabilizing impact on family life.
Promotes stronger trade links between countries.	Exploitation of workers abroad.
Brain circulation / Brain gain	Brain drain / Brain waste
Contributes to societal change through the circulation of information and ideas.	A culture of migration develops: migration becomes and remains a desirable option, regardless of the economic situation and needs of the home country.
Hometown associations can foster development.	Non-investment hampers the pace of development.
Remittances are independent of the economic cycle in the home country. In times of economic hardship, remittances from abroad tend to replace (parts of) income declines.	Inflation because of remittances.

It is clear that remittances lift the burden of poverty for many families. However, doubts exist about the lasting impact of remittances. Whether remittances can contribute to development on the long term, depends very much on what they are used for. In general, spending can be classified as consumption or as an investment. Remittances are generally spent on consumption, investment in entrepreneurial activities, and philanthropy or charitable giving. Most of the money however goes to consumption, while investment generally means buying property, mainly housing (Luz in Songco 2009). Tabuga (2007) found that households spend more conspicuously on consumer goods, but at the same time they also increase the amounts of money spend on education, real estate, medical care and durable goods. Some investments, such as in housing or business, have a direct effect on poverty people experience. Other investments, such as in education, help preventing intergenerational transmission of poverty. Parents do not necessarily profit from it immediately, but it helps reducing poverty in the next generation.

Even though the Philippine government has been occupied with facilitating and promoting migration, it has not been active enough in structuring migration in order to foster development (Asis and Baggio 2008). Unemployment is still a big problem in the Philippines: a driver of overseas employment. Recent economic growth has mainly been a jobless growth. This, combined with population growth, means unemployment continues. The focus on migration is visible in all facets of society, also in the educational system. There is a tendency to choose education which provides a chance for migration. Another widespread phenomenon is the issue of doctors learning to become nurses abroad. There is friction between economic aspirations and societal needs. When this will not be dealt with thoroughly, the situation will likely remain.

*“Due to overproduction, the Philippines has excess numbers of entry level nurses and seafarers, who cannot be absorbed by the local economy. At the same time, the country lacks specialized nurses and officers, who are in great demand domestically and internationally.”*

(Asis 2008: 88)

What migration looks like and how it can contribute to economic development depends largely on government policies. Yet it is also shaped by the aspirations of migrants, their willingness to invest in development, structures facilitating investments and movement and knowledge of these structures, the situation in and between the home and host country, gender and family expectations, legal and cultural regimes of rights and duties, religious norms and values, and so on.



## CHAPTER 3: Current insights

### 3.1 Introduction

After having presented the research aims and the Philippines context of migration in the former chapters, it is time to look at some already existing knowledge and theories which foster understanding and lay the foundation for the direction of this research. To this end this chapter first explains the concept of livelihood, and deals with the role of migration in people's lives as part of a livelihood strategy. Livelihood frameworks help to conceptualize relations between migration and livelihoods. Later on in this thesis (Chapter 7) the insights from livelihood studies will be critically reflected upon using insights resulting from the thesis research. The second part of the chapter deals with impacts of migration upon migrants and their families' lives as divided into social impact, changes in the management of money, and mental and spiritual aspects of migration.

#### 3.2.1 Livelihood approaches: a way of studying poverty.

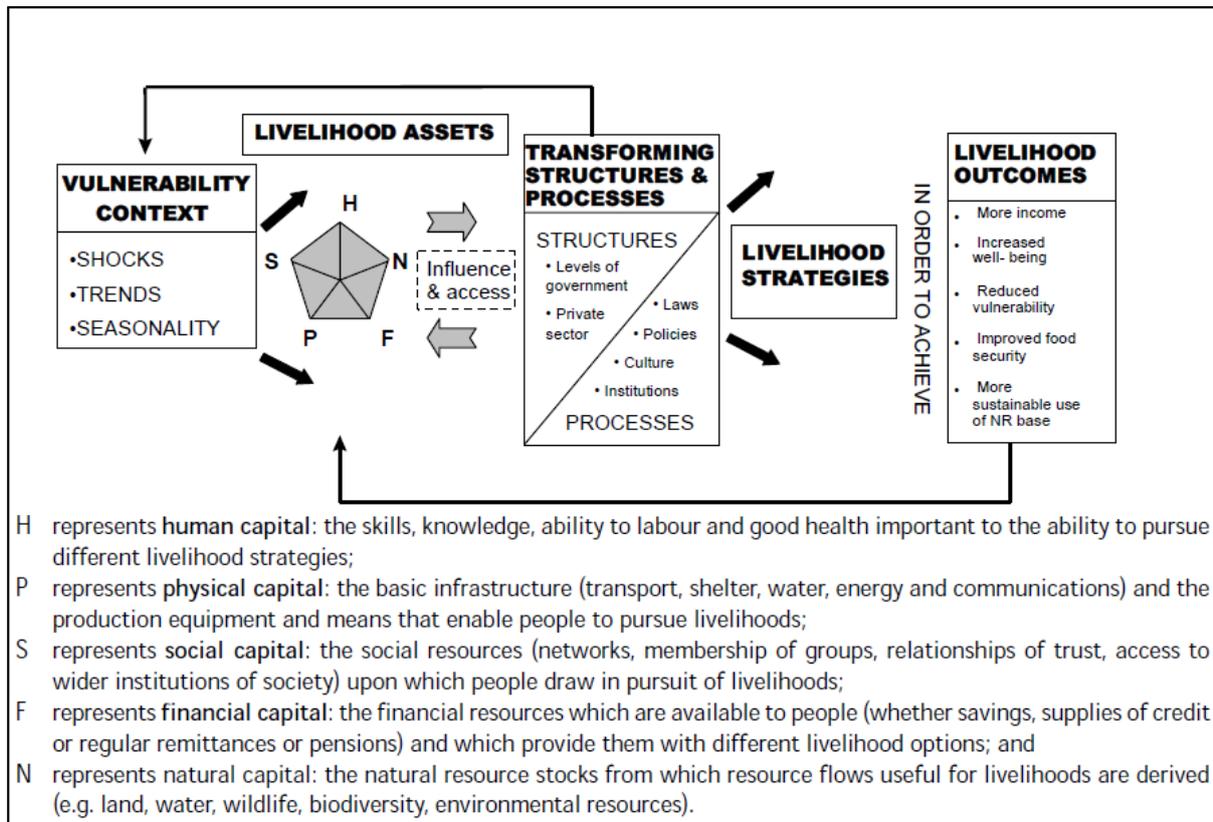
The word 'livelihood' refers to the way people make a living. Several approaches are used to study livelihoods (see e.g. Carney et al. 1999). They are called livelihood approaches, and were designed to study poverty. Livelihood approaches gained popularity in the 1990s. They offered a holistic and people-centered alternative to economic assessments, which had been popular before, when poverty reduction theories often had an economic perspective, reflecting neo-liberal ideals by focusing on employment, means of production, income and open markets. Besides these economic concerns, education also received some attention during that time. Yet these focuses did not provide an *"integrated view of how people make a living within evolving social, institutional, political, economic, and environmental contexts."* (Ellis, 2003: 4) Livelihood approaches do take into account these factors, while also paying attention to different assets people use to make a living (e.g. knowledge, social networks and natural resources). The most dominant livelihood approach, from the UK Department for International Development (DFID), will be introduced in order to get an idea of what a livelihood approach is.

DFID defines livelihood as follows:

*"A livelihood comprises the capabilities, assets, and activities required for a means of living. A livelihood is sustainable when it can cope with and recover from stresses and shocks and maintain and enhance its capabilities and assets both now and in the future, whilst not undermining the natural resource base."* (Carney et al 1999: 8)

The DFID has translated the definition into a conceptual framework which helps to understand how a livelihood is comprised (see Figure 2).

**Figure 2** DFID’s Sustainable Livelihoods Framework (From Carney et al., 1999: 9).



On the left side, the vulnerability context is shown. The vulnerability context contains external conditions which can have a serious impact on people’s lives, because they influence the availability and employability of assets. Examples of shocks, trends and seasonality in the vulnerability context are: death of a household member and natural disasters (shocks), population composition, policies, and developments in technology (trends), price fluctuations and employment opportunities (seasonality). L. de Haan notes that “*shocks are violent, and come unexpectedly*”, while other factors could be seen as stresses, because they are “*less abrupt, but may last longer*” (L. de Haan 2008: 4).

The vulnerability context influences the ability to employ livelihood assets. The employment of five livelihood assets of human capital, physical capital, social capital, financial capital and natural capital is shaped by the wider ‘transforming structures and processes’ in a society, yet the employment of assets also shapes these structures and processes. The structures and processes have influence on the vulnerability context. By using and combining assets in the specific context, people comprise a livelihood strategy, which aims at achieving a livelihood outcome.

The framework clearly shows that the ability of people to pursue a certain livelihood strategy in order to achieve a certain livelihood outcome, depends on as well personal (internal) as structural, institutional and environmental (external) factors and how they correlate. When using this framework it appears shortsighted to reduce poverty to merely a lack of finances, property, or education people have at their disposal.

### **3.2.2 Migration and livelihood approaches**

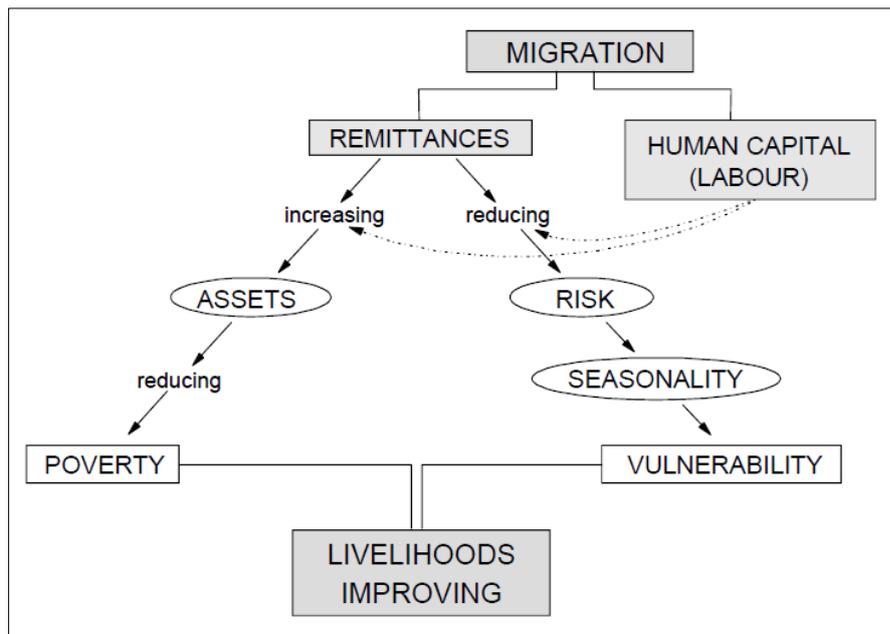
Migration theories have often reflected dominant poverty reduction theories. Before the 1990s, when poverty reduction theories had an economic perspective, economic explanations of migration were popular (e.g. neo-classical theories of migration, new economies of labor migration). Social sciences provided some theories about migration which were less economically focused (e.g. network theory, institutional theory, migration systems theory), yet they were in general more useful for explaining the perpetuation of migration, or the growth of numbers of migrants (as captured by the concept of cumulative causation), than the initiation of migration. In general, policies reflected economic explanations of migration. Before the 1990s, when economic, neo-liberal approaches to poverty reduction were popular, migration was considered an undesirable phenomenon, an indicator of failures of development and non-viability of existing livelihoods (Bebbington 2000: 509). When livelihood approaches gained popularity in the 1990s, a new vision on poverty reduction appeared, yet the negative connotation migration had, as being problematic and unnatural, largely remained (Ellis 2003). Many livelihood studies inherently have a sedentarist perspective, a perspective in which mobility is considered unnatural.

A. de Haan (2000), L. de Haan (2008), Bebbington (1999) and Ellis (2003) are examples of those who try to rethink and reframe popular livelihood models so that a more neutral take on migration is likely. They try to get rid of the negative connotations of migration, and argue migration should be envisioned as part of a household strategy which deserves a neutral approach. Migration can substantially improve a livelihood. The positive contribution of migration to livelihoods is usually envisioned more or less as presented in the scheme of Ellis (Figure 3). Migration creates remittances and human capital, which eventually reduces poverty and vulnerability, as such improving the livelihood.<sup>16</sup> Besides criticizing the negative connotations regarding migration in many livelihood studies, the authors mentioned have some critical notes to make about livelihood approaches. Those will be discussed in the next sections.

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<sup>16</sup> Whether it is an investment in human capital in the form of labor for a migrant himself, depends however on the type of work being done abroad, compared to the skills and qualifications somebody has.

**Figure 3:** Positive links between migration and improvement of livelihoods (From Ellis 2003: 8).



### 3.2.3 Criticism of livelihood approaches I: Power relations, access to assets, culture and meaning

Critiques of livelihood approaches, often bring to the fore that the approaches largely neglect inequality in societies, an inequality which results in difficulties in accessing and employing assets. Even though livelihood approaches pay attention to external structures, it turns out that in practice the focus is often on assets, which leads to an overvaluation of the agency of people/households.

*“Despite its roots in various social science disciplines, the livelihood approach tended to focus much more on opportunities than on constraints, more on actor’s activities than on structure, more on neutral strategies than on failed access, power or conflicts.” (L. de Haan 2008: 10)*

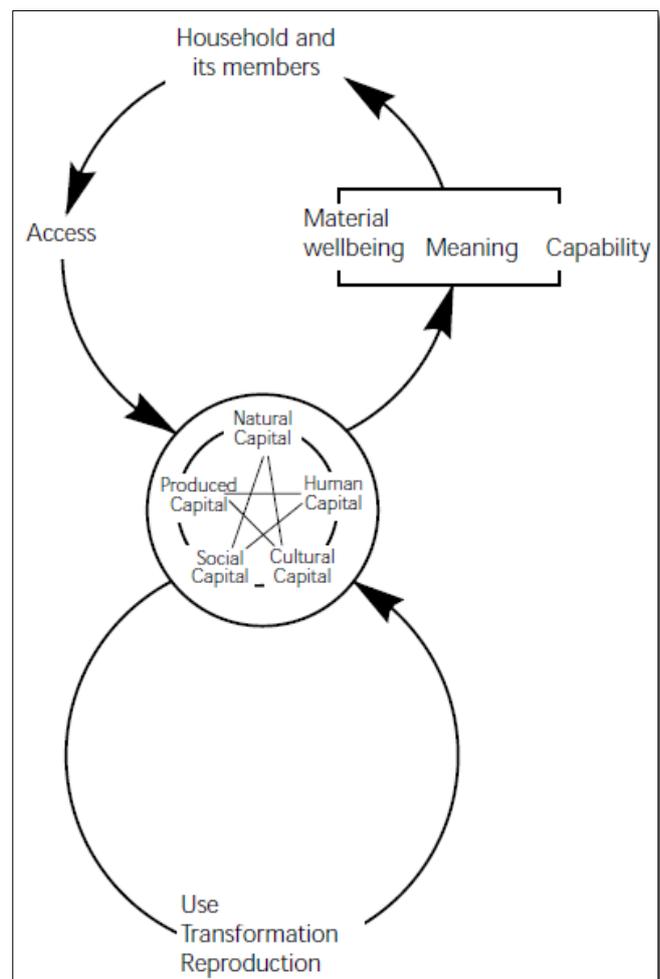
This could be a result of wishful thinking, and a reflection of the time in which this framework was designed. It was designed for eliminating poverty in a time that the focus moved towards local people and their agency instead of focusing on structures imposed on people. Carney et al. (1999) mention that important concepts like power relations and gender concepts are under-emphasized in the DFID framework. They should be taken into account, because they shape capabilities, assets and activities, as well as the context in which a livelihood is build. Because of the importance of power relations, the focus should not be so much on assets, but on the *access* to assets (e.g. Bebbington 1999, L. de Haan 2008). Whether or not people are able to employ assets, is determined by whether they have access to them in the particular power structure. Institutions are important in this critique, because they legitimize and reproduce power structures.

*“Livelihoods are not neutral social activities, but they engender processes of inclusion and exclusion. So, livelihoods are organized in arenas of conflicting or co-operating actors. The conflict is on access to livelihood assets and opportunities and this depends mainly on the performance of social relations. This means that understanding the role of institutions is crucial for livelihood studies and this goes in particular for the way institutions structure power relations.” (L. de Haan 2008:3)*

Attention thus needs to be paid to power structures which shape the access and use of assets. Assets cannot always be employed equally. However, it happens that people make deliberate decisions not to employ assets. Bebbington (1999) not only urges for more attention for access to assets, but he also emphasizes that the purpose of combining assets does not necessarily have to be to maximize material benefits. The purpose is threefold.

Assets are vehicles for instrumental action (making a living), hermeneutic action (making living meaningful) and emancipator action (challenging the structures under which one makes a living). By emphasizing this, Bebbington asks for attention for local conceptions of livelihood assets and outcomes. The cultural lens through which people see their world and value employment of assets influences the livelihood strategy. Bebbington therefore proposes an alternative livelihoods framework, which pays attention to access, has slightly different types of assets, and includes three different livelihood outcomes: material well-being, meaning, and capability (See Figure 4).

**Figure 4:** Links between assets, livelihoods and poverty (From Bebbington, 1999: 22).<sup>17</sup>



<sup>17</sup> Figure 4 is part I of Bebbington’s proposed livelihood framework. Part II deals with the way people operate in the given context of vulnerabilities and institutional structures. According to Bebbington, people operate in three so-called ‘spheres’: the market, the state, and civil society. Part II of the framework can be found in Appendix 1.

Bebbington claims that one of the five sorts of capital, should be cultural capital. Cultural capital consists of those cultural and social practices which give meaning to people's lives and in which they are therefore willing to invest, but which also enable, inspire and empower. Practices of identity maintenance and certain patterns of interaction are part of this.

*"This is a form of capital that will – clearly - never be quantified, nor should be: but making its role, importance and potential loss explicit in narrative form remains critical if our external notions of poverty are not to be too divorced from rural peoples' conceptions."* (Bebbington, 1999: 32)

'Meaning' shapes the way assets are employed, and is at the same time an outcome of a livelihood strategy.<sup>18</sup>

*"People's assets are not merely means through which they make a living: they also give meaning to a person's world. This is not to fall into the trap of voluntarism, for of course a person's assets are in large part determined by the structures and logics at work in economic and political spheres. [...] However, they are also – to some extent – both reflections and components of the meaning the person has tried to create through their livelihood strategies. This meaning will then be one of several influences in subsequent decisions people make about their livelihood strategies."* (Bebbington, 1999: 5)

In another article, Bebbington illustrates how migrants invest in their rural identity and residence. People from rural areas in the Andes invest a lot of time, material and energy (and thus assets) into practices through which they can maintain a rural identity and rural residence, even though some have migrated to other areas for reasons of employment (2000: 511). These cultural practices are practices of identity maintenance and the creation of meaning, but not only that. They are also practices of place making. Locality matters to people, yet it is not something pre-given, just like 'established livelihoods' are not. Both are continuously being (re)produced. If their essence is fluid and needs continuous reproduction, migrants have to spend time in investing in them in order to maintain them and link their identity to them.

*"Locality might also be conceptualized differently – not as a pre-given but rather as continuously produced at the intersection of livelihood practices (understood as making a living and making it meaningful), local politics, institutional interventions, and the wider political economy. Understood thus, place would be less something that people defended, and*

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<sup>18</sup> Since the framework is conceptual, the separation between input and output is somewhat artificial.

*more something whose means and practices of production they aimed to control.”*

(Bebbington, 2000: 498)

Bebbington thus challenges essential notions of place and identity, yet emphasizes the importance of both for understanding human behavior. In the Philippines, we find similar practices as in the Andes. Enormous houses are built by Filipino families who work abroad, but who invest lots of money into building residences in the Philippines. Another way in which OFWs create meaning is through spending much money on gifts for family members at home, or for occasions such as weddings or fiestas. Providing for the family is of great value to most Filipinos, and migration contributes to honoring this family value. These are all examples of how people attempt to create a meaningful life through practices of identity maintenance and place making. The practices are an attempt to belong somewhere while at the same time an affirmation of this belonging.

Bebbington's emphasis on cultural capital and meaning is an important contribution to livelihood studies, because it explains people's behavior in employing assets. Livelihood decisions are based on what is considered necessary, but also on what is considered desirable. Maximization of utility is not always the aim. Sometimes, certain assets or livelihood strategies are preferred, even though it might seem reasonable for outsiders to do things differently.

*“[O]ne may chose (or have) to live in areas of severe pollution, or violence, or anomie, in order to earn monetary income – a decision to experience environmental and social poverty in order to alleviate economic poverty. At other times – more often in rural areas – people chose to desist from migration as far as possible in order to be in a calmer, cleaner environment closer to familiar kin, community and religious institutions, but at the cost of reduced monetary income. In like vein, most livelihood decisions involve a choice to over-consume a particular capital asset at a given moment.”* (Bebbington, 1999: 30)

### **3.2.4 Criticism of livelihood approaches II: Migration in times of globalization**

Several authors argue that the way livelihoods are discussed, reflects sedentary metaphysics of mobility (A. de Haan, 2000; L. de Haan, 2008). People are supposedly naturally immobile. From a sedentary perspective, migration is often seen as functional, unnatural, a threat to established livelihoods. But people have always changed places. The negative connotation of mobility should not be taken as a given. L. de Haan (2008) considers a sedentarist approach towards migration even more problematic in times of globalization, when different parts of the world become more and more intertwined. As well economies, as social relations are less locally situated than before. According to L. de Haan, this leads to increased homogenization and interdependency all over the world in economic, political, cultural and social terms (2008: 2). Due to globalization, livelihoods also

become increasingly multi-local. It is important not to limit one's view to migration as such, when rethinking the livelihoods concept. We need to see migration as part of the process of globalization.

*[T]he relevant issue here is that we should not just talk about migration; it is the combination of individualization, diversification and mobility/migration that matters. And the question is what it means for livelihood studies in the future.” (L. de Haan 2008: 8)*

Globalization is characterized by trends towards individualization, increased multi-tasking/income diversification, and a rapid expansion of mobility and communication. These trends make the local orientation of livelihood studies outdated. Individualization challenges the idea of a harmonious, single decision-making domestic unit with common resources to draw upon and shared aspects of consumption. It is questionable whether migrants are always completely focused on the needs of the household. Persons increasingly act independently, and internal conflicts in families or households must not be neglected. Increased income diversification is another trend, which questions the tendency to define people or households as single-purpose economies. Since having diverse sources of income is increasingly the trend, it must not necessarily be taken as an indicator of a problem. Mobility become easier because of developments in communication and transport technology. These developments make it easier to constitute a multi-local livelihood.

L. de Haan puts forward the terms livelihood networks and livelihood trajectories as alternative concepts for studying livelihoods in times of globalization. Focusing on livelihood networks gives space for a multi-local approach to livelihoods.

*“Large numbers of people are no longer rooted in one place. Although they maintain relations with their home community, they are also attached to other places. As a consequence, individuals are no longer organized as co-resident groups, i.e. concentrated in space, but resemble individual nodes, connected to each other by livelihood networks, along which flow remittances, information, ideas, goods and people.” (L. de Haan, 2008: 8)*

In order to see how people's actions are unconsciously shaped by existing powers and cultural conventions, L. de Haan promotes the studying of livelihood trajectories. By studying people's livelihoods over a period of time, structures which allow and constrain actions, yet which people take for granted, are exposed.

*“Informants may report accurately on the opportunities that they have successfully or unsuccessfully exploited; however, it is much more difficult – but vital – to understand why some opportunities were not even considered. These are usually opportunities that*

*informants did not even think of for reasons of convention, that is, elements of access like social norms, institutions, power etc.” (L.de Haan, 2008:13)*

Time-space compression is one of the changes which characterize globalization. Space and time have become less determining for human behavior. Studying livelihood networks and livelihood trajectories, creates a situation in which a researcher does not limit himself to one geographical or temporal context. Yet, unlike L. de Haan states, time-space compression does not necessarily mean homogenization. Locality matters. It does matter where people are, space and place do co-define people’s identities, and distance does influence the quality of social relations. No matter where people are and how far they have traveled, their self-definition is unlikely to be unrelated to places they have resided in and cultural characteristics of these places (see Chapter 3.3.4). Yet L. de Haan is right when he claims that globalization has changed the possibilities for migration and the context in which it takes place significantly.

### **3.2.5 Valuable insights from livelihood approaches and its critiques**

Livelihood approaches and critiques thereof, teach a few valuable lessons in how to envision the role of migration in the lives of Filipinos, and its contribution to development.

Firstly, it teaches to approach people and households holistically. People derive power and capability from different sources, which are not likely to be solely economic or a result of education. Poverty OFWs try to avoid, can be seen as a result of an inability to develop or employ all assets properly in the given context. The decision to migrate, and the ability to do so, can then be the result of how assets can(not) be employed in the specific context of vulnerabilities, structures and processes. Migration can be a way to be able to invest in certain assets (e.g. investing in human capital by paying for education).

Secondly, external structures influence greatly how people comprise a livelihood. The ability to get out of poverty, depends not only on personal assets, but also on external structural factors (vulnerability context, structures and processes). Livelihood frameworks emphasize that everything is connected. Some factors can be somewhat controlled by ordinary people, others are beyond their control. In the Philippines, the vulnerability context is important for livelihoods, e.g. because of the risk of natural disasters in many areas, which create a risk of losing property and income. Structures and processes also put their mark upon people’s livelihoods. Unemployment and underemployment trends are not favorable and leave some with little hope for the future. Corruption rates are high, and trust in the government is low. A culture of migration has developed, in which migration is promoted by the government, and institutionalized by the public and private sector. This culture of

migration influences greatly why and whether people are willing to integrate migration into their livelihood strategy.

Thirdly, Bebbington's (1999) call for attention to culture and meaning, asks for a reflection on the valuation of migration in general, and the ways in which migration is part of the creation of meaning. The Philippine government tries hard to create meaning, by declaring that OFWs are the 'new heroes' of the nation. If migrants claim to migrate in order to provide for relatives, migration honors family values, and contributes to a meaningful life. Investing in meaningful activities means investing in cultural capital. This can serve the purpose of identity maintenance, building status, or of place making. All is related to creating a meaningful life.

Fourthly, L. De Haan's (2008) reflection on migration as a livelihood strategy in times of globalization urges to see increased migration as part of the process of globalization, with its trends of individualization, multi-tasking, and increased possibilities for mobility and communication. His attention for migration networks and migration trajectories, challenges livelihood approaches which are often inherently sedentarist. Falling into the trap of either considering all migration problematic, or considering all migration natural and neutral, must be avoided. If migrants have a strong desire to go back to where they once came from, mobility could be seen as a disrupter of their lives and therefore as undesirable. However, if they are just fine abroad, and those closest to them are also doing fine, there is no reason to consider their migration intrinsically problematic.

Livelihood frameworks (like Figure 2) are conceptual tools for understanding livelihoods. It is possible to use such conceptual frameworks as a starting point for the direction of research. For this research however, it was important to pay attention to well-being and personal experiences in many forms (e.g. mental and spiritual). The livelihood framework is not completely suitable to get these data, because its focus is much on what people do and achieve, and not on how they experience it. It can be used for studying the links between migration and development, but development's links with well-being are weak in this framework. Therefore no livelihood framework was used as a starting point for systematic data collection. It is however useful to reflect on livelihood approaches, and critiques thereof, in order to gain insight into the process of comprising a livelihood, and ways migration can be part of this process.

### **3. 3.1 Influence of migration upon individual migrants and their families: Introduction**

*"Impact of migration has transcended beyond the economic sphere as it affects the overall social being and the value systems of migrants, families, and communities. Changes in the income did not only bring changes in the economic status of the families, but also in their attitude and behaviors. People should consider and address the 'unquantified costs' brought*

*about by working in a foreign land, because such psychosocial problems can be painful and enduring, and have lasting effects on individuals, families and communities.” (Gocatek et al., 2008: 80)*

On the following pages some aspects of these ‘unquantified costs’ will be discussed. First the influence of migration on the social life of families will be dealt with, then the changes it can bring in the managing of finances will be touched upon, and thirdly influence of migration on identity and religiosity of migrants will be discussed.

### **3.3.2 Social life of the family**

#### ***Challenged gender roles***

*“ [G]ender roles in the family can be summarized as follows: mothers were the ones largely responsible for care giving, preparing the food, taking care of the house, helping with the children’s school work, attending programs and meetings at school, disciplining the children, teaching the children about faith, teaching them good manners, and teaching them about what is right and wrong. Fathers were largely responsible for earning money, and sharing with mothers the task of disciplining children and teaching them what is right and wrong.” (ECMI-CBCP et al., 2004: 34)*

The quote above describes the average situation of families without a migrant, as found during the research about the impact of a migrating parent upon children. Clearly there is a difference between the tasks parents take on themselves. The physical absence of one or more family members, changes roles of family members. The non-migrating spouse has a range of extra responsibilities and duties. Gender roles however remain in the minds, sometimes leading to a ‘care crisis’ (Parreñas, 2002). Research shows that mothers are often more capable of, or willing to, assuming father roles than vice versa. Men in the Philippines, are not socialized to take on the nurturing role in the family. When mothers migrate, other female relatives often take over many of the care-giving roles. (Asis, 2008: 91; ECMI-CBCP et al., 2004: 36)

Gender roles are thus challenged by migration. If women migrate, their roles in the families change. Economic power gives them more status and a bigger say in family affairs. Migration can as such lead to empowerment of women. At the same time, absence as a wife changes or even endangers the marriage, while absence as a mother has a negative impact on the development of children. Migrant women in the Philippines often have a dubious status of on one side being praised for taking care of the family by migrating, while at the same time being criticized for failing in taking care of the family because of migration. Parreñas states they suffer from a ‘stalled revolution’ (2002), or a ‘gender ideological clash’ (2007). This means that the local gender roles lack a few steps behind economic

realities. Women traditionally have a nurturing role in the family. Working as nannies overseas, they can feel guilty for taking care of someone else's children, instead of their own. Not being able to be directly involved in affairs at home, can be frustrating and painful for both male and female migrants.

When men migrate, their masculine roles are not challenged by migration. However, if they are the ones remaining at home while their wife migrates, their gender-roles can cause them stress. Men are traditionally the main breadwinners. They are assumed to be less capable of taking care of children, and have the lion share in providing the family income anymore. The fact that their wives have taken over the role of main provider, can have a negative impact on their feelings of masculinity. Gresham (2011) adds to this that addressing migrants as the heroes of the nation by the government, does no good to this. He criticizes the 'heroes' campaign of the government for being focused solely on migrants, while the others remaining at home carry a sometimes even greater burden.

In the Philippine media, the impact of migration of mothers has been a hot topic. As well Parreñas (2007), as Arguillas & Williams (2010) are critical towards the role of the press in this issue. Parreñas states that the press has made a 'pathological depiction' of migrant mothers and their families, and that public opinion has followed this pattern (2007: 46). She believes the issue is depicted one-sided and morally colored. Although she does not underestimate the impact of the absence of mothers upon the lives of children (see e.g. Parreñas 2002), she believes it is a crisis partly caused by gender expectations, and over time these expectations will evolve. The negative approach of the media makes it difficult for children to adjust to the situation, because they hear time and time again that there is something fundamentally wrong about their family arrangement (Parreñas 2002: 53).

### ***OFWs and their children in the Philippines***

Even though Parreñas criticizes negative depictions of OFW mothers, she does not downplay the impact on children and families. In her piece about the care crisis, she recalls numerous stories of children affected by their mother's absence. The pain and feelings of abandonment children experience are clear. The stories also reveal coping strategies. Many children deal with the absence by picturing the absence of their mothers as a sacrifice.

*"Children who believe that their migrant mothers are struggling for the sake of the family's collective mobility, rather than leaving to live the "good life", are less likely to feel abandoned and more likely to accept their mothers' effort to sustain close relationships from a distance."*  
(Parreñas, 2002: 47)

Many studies mention the negative impact of migrating parents on the development of children. Prolonged separation can cause disruption of family relations, loneliness, school drop outs,

unexpected pregnancies, vices and a preoccupation with showing of expensive gadgets. Young people are often insecure about defining their relationship with their parents. They experience mixed feelings of pride, pity for their sacrificing parents, longing, and doubts about the genuineness of words of love and support from abroad. Although migration of parents increases the likelihood of children to attend school, research shows that some children in the Philippines whose parents migrate have less motivation for school, because they see how much their parents earn abroad without education. A similar pattern is noticed in Mexico by McKenzie & Rapoport (2006). However, absence of parents does not necessarily lead to bad results at school or problematic behavior, as a study of the Arguillas & Williams (2010) revealed. Besides making the difference for some children by making them able to go to school in the first place, it can lead to greater ambition and better study results than their peers with non-migrant parents. Arguillas & Williams state that the influence of separation on educational attainment of children is *“either neutral or can have positive effects on schooling outcomes, at least among older children. Girls fare better in terms of educational attainment than do boys overall. Boys are often more affected by background variables, including parents’ international migration.”* (2010: 300) Good results at school can be a result of children feeling the pressure to ‘do something back’ for their parents who suffer abroad for the family’s sake. As a migrant’s daughter explains: *“The least I can give back to her is do well in school.”* (Parreñas 2002:47) The study of ECMI-CBCP et al. (2004) among elementary school children, concluded that children with a father or both parents abroad, had better results in school than children of non-migrants. However, children with only their mother abroad performed less well. This might indicate the importance of a mother’s presence for the educational development of children. (2004: 46)

The well-being of children is very much influenced by the care givers who replace parents, usually other relatives. The love, care and support of care takers influences the ability of children to cope with separation from parents, and the social costs that come with it. The age of the children when they are separated from a parent influences how and whether children cope with separation. If the age of the child is 0 to 5 when the parent leaves, bonding has not been established as firm as during the age of 6 to 16. The affection of a child of 0 to 5 years old, can be transferred to the caretaker more easily than the affection of older children. In general, the older group suffers more intensely from the separation than the former (Reyes 2008: 3). Gocatek et al. (2008) mention research of Alunan-Melgar and Borromeo<sup>19</sup>, who claim that the reaction of children to the absence of a mother when they are 0 to 5 years old, is usually indifference and withdrawal of affection, resulting in a

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<sup>19</sup> The article of Alunan-Melgar and Borromeo is part of a book which is currently unavailable. Details of the article and book are: Alunan-Melgar, G. & R. Borromeo (2002) The plight of children of OFWs. In Dizon-Anonuevo, E. & A.T. Anonuevo (Eds.) *Coming Home: Women, Migration and Reintegration*. (pp.106-114). Quezon City: Atikha, Inc and Balikabayani Foundation.

transfer of affection to another caretaker. Children 6 to 16 years old, often react confused, ambivalent, or indifferent to the mother's absence, resulting in deviant, indifferent, or responsible/resilient behavior.

Gocatek et al. consider a communication gap the root of most problems between parents and children. They state that *"about 65% of the children of OFWs who attended Atikha's workshops express different degrees of communication/relationship gap with their parents"*(2008: 62)<sup>20</sup>. They experience emotions such as shyness, confusion and anger when they communicate with their parent(s) abroad.

*"Some children were shy while talking with their parents abroad because they are not anymore familiar with their parents, because they were too young when they left them. Some were afraid because most conversations with their parents abroad often ended with them being scolded. Some were confused and insecure because they are unable to do what they want and decide for themselves, because they always have to follow their parent's wishes."*  
(Gocatek et al., 2008: 62)

Gocatek et al (2008) mention findings of Alunan-Melgar and Borromeo (see footnote 19), who state that the feelings of abandonment some OFW children experience, are comparable to the experiences of orphans and abandoned children. Based on experiences of Atikha, if a communication gap between children and the migrant parents is not eliminated within about five years, the impact on their relationship becomes irreversible.

Communication technology has advanced in such a way that dual parenting has become a possibility, even when one parent is physically absent. Yet physical absence of a father or mother challenges common notions of parenthood which presume physical presence. In order to maintain and nourish family relations, behavior which expresses commitment to the family has to be consciously created and reshaped.

### ***Separated spouses***

Ducanes and Abella (2008) mention outcomes of the Labor Force Survey from 1988 to 2004, which indicate that the share of married OFWs has been larger than the share of unmarried OFWs during that period, with a steady average of about 61%. This supports the idea that OFWs have gone abroad to support their families.

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<sup>20</sup> Gocatek et al (2008) base much of their article on experiences and information gained at the various trainings, seminars, workshops, and counseling sessions conducted by Atikha among OFWs, seafarers and their families. It is unclear whether the percentage mentioned is a result of research or an estimate.

Most of those OFWs are separated from their spouse during their migration. This separation of spouses leads to living separate lives. Regularly, marriages get under pressure and into danger. Silver (2006) states that loneliness and diminished support networks because of migration can cause depression among separated spouses in Mexico. Even though financial needs are met, emotional and moral support to the family is often lacking.

Gocatek et al. (2008:70) name common marital problems which find their roots in the physical separation migration brings about. The first marital problem is the appearance of a communication gap and an inability to nurture the relationship. Migrants and their spouses cease to talk about emotions and their personal lives. They turn to discussing financial matters or concerns regarding the children. Often they do not want to start a conflict or 'bother' others with their problems. Conversation reaches a state in which it is not a mean through which a relationship is nurtured. The second problem many spouses are confronted with, are extramarital affairs. Philippine terms such as the Department of Foreign Affairs (DFA) and 'extended family' have gained a second meaning in migration parlance, as referring to 'having affairs in a foreign country' and 'having children with someone who is not your spouse' (Gocatek et al 2008: 71). Having affairs is often 'rationalized' by referring to loneliness, homesickness, and physical needs which cannot be attend to. Gocatek et al (2008) mention stories of migrants who have accepted the fact that their spouse is having an affair, as long as there are no children born out of these extramarital affairs. Infidelity is as well an issue for migrants, as for spouses living in the Philippines. A third problem many couples are confronted with, is mismanagement of money. The hard earned remittances become the center of conflicts between spouses, or even between a couple and other family members such as parents and parents-in-law. Splurging money on luxuries or on addictions can put a strain on a marriage.

Besides putting a marriage under pressure, migration can also relieve tensions in a marriage. Research among elementary school children throughout the Philippines shows that the majority if children of OFWs and children of non-OFWs saw the relationship between their parents as good to very good. The children of OFW mothers however, indicated more often that their parents' relationship was more or less problematic. This came to the fore in earlier research also.

*"The persistence of this finding over time suggests that the cracks in the marriage in mother-absent families may have prompted the mothers' migration. Where divorce is not an option or legal separation is a long process, migration is one of the few options available to women wanting a way out of a difficult marriage." (ECMI-CBCP et al., 2004: 41)*

### 3.3.3 Managing of remittances

The income of migrants and their families changes due to migration. Wages double, triple, or grow even more. This means decisions need to be made about what will be done with the money.

The improved economic situation has many positive effects on families: it lifts up the burden of poverty, increases the social status, and creates money for education and other investments. As such it increases the quality of life. Money, however, can be a great source of tension. Migrants feel pressure to send money home, because they are the 'lucky ones', the ones who were able to go abroad. There is pressure from relatives to share the fruits of migration with the 'less fortunate', making it hard for them to save money for investments they would like to make.

Gocatek et al. note that *"despite the higher salaries and long years of work abroad, OFWs are unable to come home and reintegrate. The majority is still unable to save for their long-term goals and ends up spending all of the productive years of their life away from the family."* (2008: 75) Gocatek et al. consider three issues to be the roots of this inability to return. These are over-dependency of families on remittances, growing extravagant lifestyles, and overindulgence and consumerism of children and other family members (2008: 75).

Experiences of Atikha with migrant families teach that, when there is an OFW in the family, other family members become less economically active, or stop working completely (Gocatek et al 2008: 76). If the salary of an OFW is high, the local salary of family members seems insignificant. If OFWs are the only breadwinner, they cover all costs including hospitalization, birthdays, weddings, funerals, fiestas, and other social obligations. They often also cover costs of wider family members, for e.g. education. Besides the risks which accompany great dependency (e.g. after a job loss), Gocatek et al. (2008) note that there is also a risk that children and other family members do not develop a sense of responsibility for their own lives. Many OFWs give in to requests for money, because of feelings of guilt for their absence. However, they do often not realize, that limitless giving influences the family negatively, and eventually drags the whole family down. A result of unrestrained spending of remittances, is development of new lifestyles which provide little opportunity for future planning. If families develop extravagant lifestyles and maintain them for a while, it is hard to cut back on expenses. It also influences the behavior and attitude of children. Increased spending on luxuries, and parents who buy off guilt with material things, can lay ground for a view on the world in which material possessions constitute the highest value.

*"Children of migrants tend to splurge, become conscious of branded/imported goods and prefer for expensive gadgets, food and recreation. This is dictated by their newly-acquired*

*affluent lifestyle when their parents flooded them with material things to make up for their absence.” (Gocatek et al., 2008: 79)*

Developing well-considered strategies to handle money, which include a reflection upon the social consequences of behavior, is challenging for migrants and their families. Conflicts and distrust about financial management are stress factors in the lives of OFWs and their families. An article on the website of Atikha, refers to findings about the stress factors of female OFWs. Family ties and money are the main stress factors.

*“Family expectations, money, relationship with employers, and food and religious beliefs in host country are five of the most common causes of stress among women overseas Filipino workers.”<sup>21</sup>*

Clearly management of remittances brings along challenges which at least as much social challenges, as financial challenges.

### **3.3.4 Identity and religiosity**

Migration challenges feelings of belonging. Encountering new places, people, systems and beliefs which are at least slightly unfamiliar, make people think about where they belong or want to belong to. The meaning of geographical places in the constitution of an identity suddenly becomes a topic of reflection. Customs and beliefs that were once taken for granted, are suddenly not that logical anymore. Mobility usually creates as well feelings of freedom as feelings of estrangement.

In order to see how migration can influence how people see their identity, it is important to first look at what constitutes an identity. Jacobs and Maier (1998) believe that there are five important factors which are important to keep in mind when reflecting upon ‘identity’.

1. Identity is not static. It is dynamic, and never complete. This means one’s identity is not stable, and can change over the years.
2. Identity is integrated in a system of values, beliefs and symbols. The meaning of expressions of identity, makes people able to operate in certain fields of society, in a certain period.
3. Only the individual’s identity exists. This identity is however constructed in a social context, which therefore co-determines the individual’s identity.
4. An identity is imagined and real at the same time. Reality and imagination constitute and strengthen one another. They cannot be parted.

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<sup>21</sup> “Family, food, money cause women OFWs stress” 17 Nov 2009. <http://www.atikha.org/news/family-food-money-cause-women-ofws-stress.html> Accessed on 22 March 2012.

5. Individuals define their identity based on already existing groups and categories, although sometimes people are able to extricate themselves from these. This means individuals depend heavily on the imagination of others for the right interpretation of expressions of identity.

What becomes clear from those factors, is that the environment in which people have grown up and/or the environment in which they live, is of great importance on identity formation. Migration means the world around a migrant changes. How people present themselves, is suddenly valued differently. Some aspects of a migrants identity (e.g. social status in the home country, belonging to a sub-denominational religious group) are suddenly less important, while other parts of someone's identity are suddenly at the forefront, even though they never were (e.g. national identity, main religion of country of origin). The consequence is that some migrants experience freedom on the one hand, because they have less social control from the community. On the other hand they feel the need to defend and redefine their identity, by using or fighting stigmas and stereotypes.

Dupré (2005) describes how religion can be at the center of identity struggles. Religion has a great impact on daily lives. Habits and rules when it comes to gender relations, clothing, food, rhythm of a working day, and holidays are influenced by dominant religious beliefs. Having a common faith can make finding your way into a host society much easier. The opposite is also true. For example, being a Christian in an Islamic country, or vice versa, can give migrants a feeling of confusion and estrangement. A factor influencing this, is the role of religion in the state apparatus and the legal system. When there is a clear separation of religion and state, religious minorities have more freedom to express themselves. If however, the state is an absolute monarchy headed by a ruler led by religious convictions, there is little freedom to express any belief except the official faith as interpreted by the leader.

An example in the context of this research is Saudi Arabia. Sunni Islam is the official religion of the state. The constitution consists of the Qur'an and the Sunna (traditions and words of the prophet Muhammad). Being a Christian (like most Filipinos are) in Saudi Arabia can be dangerous. Conversion of Saudis to Christianity is punishable by death, and religious gatherings of non-Muslims are forbidden (although for foreigners they are allowed under certain conditions). Foreign Christians are allowed into the country as workers, but they have to keep their faith to themselves. Possession of Bibles is forbidden. Regularly the Commission for the Promotion of Virtue and Prevention of Vice (CPVPV) confiscates religious attributes, even though foreigners officially have the right to have some. It is not only in the field of practicing religion that the status of non-Muslims can be problematic. In court, non-Muslims have less rights than Muslims, and the chance to win a case is

thus smaller. Women have less rights than men, as well in public life as in the juridical system. The gender identity of Philippine women, i.e. how they envision and experience being a woman, is likely to be shaken up in a country like Saudi Arabia. It is not just non-Muslims and women who suffer from discriminations. Non-Sunni Muslims (like Shi'ites and Sufi Muslims) have less rights too, although not as drastically as non-Muslims.<sup>22</sup>

Migrant workers have minimal rights in Saudi Arabia in general. Low-skilled workers suffer most from this. The Committee on Overseas Workers' Affairs (COWA) reports that 70 percent of the Filipino domestic workers suffer physical and psychological violence in Saudi Arabia. There is a clear difference between the professional and skilled workers on the one hand, and the low-skilled workers on the other hand:

*“Professionals and skilled workers seem to be largely contented with their conditions while low-skilled workers, especially domestic workers [...] appear to exist in a world of permanent crisis.”* (COWA, 2011: 7)

This crisis relates to being underpaid, exploited, abused and suffering from sexual harassment or rape. In an article on Asianews, we see how abuse can relate to religion. A Philippine nurse tells how she witnessed that nurses were pushed to convert to Islam.

*“After some months, employers give you an ultimatum, telling you to become Muslim to keep your job,” she said. “For us, it is hard to make such a choice, but if we don't, we become the victims of abuse.”*<sup>23</sup>

It is however not only migration to Saudi Arabia which can challenge religious beliefs. The Philippines is one of the few Asian countries in which Christianity is the predominant faith. Therefore chances are big that OFWs end up in countries which will make them reflect on faith in a way they never did before. Singapore, a secular country which is racially and religiously diverse, for example, or Japan, a country with full religious freedom yet very few Christians and many traces of Shintoism.

Migrant churches (if allowed) can be a safe haven for migrants. For a migrant, meeting other migrants in church can feel like meeting family members, and ease feelings of loneliness. As a Filipina in Singapore expresses:

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<sup>22</sup> For an extensive analysis of religion in Saudi Arabia, see the 'International Religious Freedom Report 2011' of the Council on Foreign Relations, USA.

<sup>23</sup> Asianews.it 'Christian Filipino migrants forced to convert to Islam.' 28 January 2010. <http://www.asianews.it/news-en/Christian-Filipino-migrants-forced-to-convert-to-Islam-17478.html> Retrieved 25 March 2012 Accessed on 24 March 2012.

*“I can say that I know God well... I always go to church. And my family is there, in the Apostolic Pentecostal Church. [Interviewer: Why do you say that they are family?] You know why? Because we believe in one God. I was happy that I got to know them because if you have problems, you help each other out.” (In Asis, Huang & Yeoh 2004: 210)*

Having a day off on Sunday means OFWs can for once step out of the role of migrant worker, and be themselves in an environment where they are wanted. The teaching of Christianity, in which no one is a stranger, is important for migrant workers.

Clearly migration shakes up identity dynamics and religious convictions. As well meeting ‘fellow’ believers, as meeting ‘fellow’ Filipinos, can help Filipinos cope with changes, and contribute to developing a sense of safety and belonging abroad.

## **CHAPTER 4: Methods**

### **4.1 Introduction**

The previous chapters covered research goals, relevant theories and background information for this research. This chapter covers the strategy and methods which were chosen for conducting the research. Besides this, background information on the respondents, informants and consulted experts is presented. The chapter concludes with a reflection on the fieldwork period.

### **4.2 Outline of the process of fieldwork**

The data for this research has been gathered over a period of eight weeks in the Philippines. The first two weeks were spent in Metro Manila. During these weeks three experts from organizations (Scalabrini Migration Center (SMC); Unlad Kabayan; Atikha) were visited and spoken to. Because it was summer break, many migrants had come to the Philippines to visit family. I met them everywhere: on the streets, in stores, in busses, in taxis, and at the hostel. The encounters displayed the immensity of the phenomenon of migration from the Philippines. Even my roommate at the hostel was a girl who was in Manila to get proper documents in order to work as a nurse in Saudi Arabia. Together we went out for dinner with a recruiter from Saudi Arabia, an experience which shed new light on the migration phenomenon and the role of gender.

After these first two weeks the President of ASHTEC came to pick me up and to brought me to the school. During a 5 week stay I resided at the campus of ASHTEC. Even though it was summer break, it was never quiet at the campus. Some students were still present, and staff members of the school also lived at the campus. At the back side of the school young people were trained to become construction workers for EEI. At the front of the school site, the Jobs and Business Services (JBS) center of ASHTEC was located. It was open five days a week. Many students came to visit this center, in order to apply for enrollment in the next year's courses.

During the five weeks at ASHTEC, lot of information has been gathered during interviews, but also from simply being present, overhearing conversations, and talking to people in everyday encounters and light-hearted conversations. Seventeen interviews have been done with (former) OFWs, either face-to-face, via online chat, or by using Skype. One extra interview has been done with a permanent migrant, in order to broaden understanding of the culture of migration in which people live and operate. All migrants interviewed had studied at ASHTEC. Eight members of the ASHTEC staff and one trainer from EEI have been interviewed about their activities and their view on migration of graduates.

An online survey was launched for OFWs who had been students of ASHTEC. This survey was meant to back up the qualitative data and give a clear view about how often things happened. The ASHTEC staff initially asked me to include only OFWs in this survey, who had been enrolled in one of the longer courses (half a year to two years) of ASHTEC, and exclude OFWs who only did short courses at ASHTEC/EEI. (This was because the trainees from the short courses are not very familiar with the mission and visions of ASHTEC, and the ASHTEC staff knows them not very well personally because they have stayed at ASHTEC for only a short period.) This survey however had a low response rate, therefore after a few weeks a new survey was launched, for OFWs who had studied at ASHTEC *and* OFWs who had followed the short courses of ASHTEC/EEI. This new survey has been promoted for three months. The interviews with experts, migrants and staff have resulted in a lot of valuable information and insights. Both the surveys, unfortunately, have not resulted in an amount of responses which was substantial enough to make any conclusions concerning statistical variation.

After five weeks I returned to Manila. I stayed there for one more week, in which I visited two more experts from migrant organizations (International Organization for Migration (IOM); Philippine Overseas Employment Authority (POEA)). Those visits were meant to get a clearer view on migration procedures, and the vulnerability of migrants to fall prey to rogue recruitment agents who misinform them about realities abroad and charge large amounts of money for their services. The reason for these visits was a tragic story of one of the OFWs interviewed.

### **4.3 Research strategy**

The research goal and question of this research (see Chapter 1), ask for an in-depth understanding of the situation of the school, OFWs and the Philippine culture of migration. Therefore the case study strategy was chosen as research strategy. This strategy aims at understanding 'cases' in their given context, through mainly qualitative research methods and empirical observations.

*"As a research strategy, the distinguishing characteristic of the case study is that it attempts to examine: (a) a contemporary phenomenon in its real-life context, especially when (b) the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident."* (Yin 1981: 59)

The attention for the embeddedness of a phenomenon, which characterizes a case study strategy, usually leads to high internal validity of the research outcomes. The outcomes reflect realities on the ground and are usually recognizable for, and accepted by, the people under study. The external validity however, i.e. the possibility to generalize outcomes and make predictions about people outside the target group, is limited (Verschuren & Doorewaard, 2005: 175).

The ASHTEC, as a vocational training school, is at the center of this research. Yet in order to find out what is going on and investigate upon the role of the school, actors and sources not (anymore) related to the school had to be focused on. They consist of OFWs, experts from migrant organizations, and a wide range of documents and literature. Observing life in the Philippines, and talking to (sometimes random) Filipinos about their experiences with, and vision on migration, revealed what ideas and assumptions about migration exist in the minds of many Filipinos, as such contributing to the research. Using different sources of information such as mentioned above, also called source triangulation, helps to delve to a profound level of analysis. Source triangulation is a useful way to enhance the credibility of research (Bryman, 2008: 377), especially in this particular case study in the Philippines, a country in which migration is surrounded by so many views, ideas, and opinions, that one cannot understand a migrant's actions, or the activities of a school, if the role of migration in the society is not properly understood and the situation is not approached from different sides.

Migration literature and policies are often based on assumptions about links between human behavior and societal and economic impact. It is important to realize that many theories about migration do follow the rules of logic, yet fail to be able to capture the complexity of human behavior in the given context, while instead end up with simplistic or one-sided explanations based on grand theories (see e.g. Massey et al., 1993). By choosing to approach this research as a case study, and by differentiating the sources, an attempt is made to make the outcomes of this research rooted in factual and perceived reality on the ground.

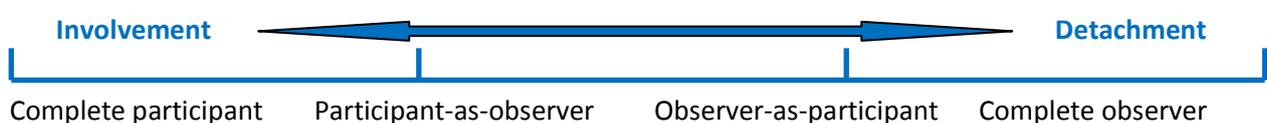
#### 4.4 Research methods

As has already become clear in the former section, source triangulation lays a foundation for understanding a situation thoroughly from different perspectives. Not only different sources were used however, methodological triangulation was also applied. Methods used were participant observation, semi-structured interviewing, and studying of literature and documents.

##### 4.4.1 Participant observation

According to Gold (1958 in Bryman 2008) there are four participant observer roles, which differ in their degree of involvement and detachment from members of the social setting (see Figure 5).

**Figure 5:** Four participant observer roles.



The complete participant is fully functioning in the social setting, while the members of the social setting do not know about the research. The participant-as-observer is also fully functioning in the social setting, yet in this case people in the social setting are aware of the research. The observer-as-participant operates in the social setting and people are aware of the research. Yet the observer-as-participant does not participate in every activity and data results mainly from interviews. The complete observer does not interact with people and people do not take the researcher into account. During this research the role taken on comes closest to the third role: observer-as-participant.

During two months in the Philippines, a lot of observations have been made. Many OFWs were met and spoken with. During the time at ASHTEC, I had a lot of contact with staff members. Some of them experienced migration of family members, and were willing to share their experiences with me. I observed how people spoke about migration, and posed questions for clarification if needed. The fact that I spent a lot of time working at the office of ASHTEC, that I visited families of staff members, and even that I went on a trip with some of them, gave me insight into how the school operated and what ideas lived among the staff members related to migration and the role of the school. Observing and participating thus increased understanding of the context of the research.

Although I was able to experience life at ASHTEC and in the Philippines, the lives of OFWs I only know from what they told me and what I heard from others. Unfortunately I was not able to see and experience how they live when at work outside of the Philippines.

#### **4.4.2 Semi-structured interviews**

The main method used for gathering information has been the interview method. Questions had been prepared for respondents and informants, but when interesting facts or insights came to the fore, those points were elaborated upon. Interviews were therefore semi-structured.

For expert interviews and staff-interviews, the questions were adapted to the person and his or her role in the context of this research. For OFWs, the same questions were used as much as possible, in order to make comparisons. The list questions and topics to direct the course of the interviews with OFWs can be found in Appendix 2. Because of technical problems with the internet connection, or because of limited time of migrants, not all topics were discussed with every OFW. (see Chapter 4.6) The length of interviews differed from about twenty minutes to three hours.

The aim of interviews with OFWs was to capture the impact of migration upon their lives. Capturing the influence of migration on someone's life is not an easy task. I was not able to find suitable tools for measuring migration's impact upon the individual or families. Models used for measuring impact

from other fields of science (from e.g. psychology or economy) fell short. Approaches from development studies, such as the livelihood approaches, also did not cover all aspects of what I wanted to study (see Chapter 3.2.5). Therefore the decision was made to divide 'life' into four fields: the economic/financial, the social, the mental and the spiritual. Distinguishing between the fields of OFWs lives was done before the start of this research. One might consider the spiritual field as being part of overall mental well-being. Although that line of reasoning is understandable, the spiritual field appears as a different area to me, and a very relevant area to discuss separately, since all respondents come from a school which is part of an organization with the mission to make students *"God-fearing, dignified, self-reliant and advancing the ministries of the gospel"*.<sup>24</sup> Dividing an OFW's life into four fields upon which influence of migration could be analyzed helped structuring interview questions.

Soon after arriving in the Philippines, it became clear that the short term impact and the long term impact of migration upon people's lives is not necessarily similar, and migrants focusing on either the long or the short term effect tend to have different ideas about what migration will bring them. Therefore I paid attention to the long and short term impact of migration upon people's lives.

#### **4.4.3 Literature and documents**

In order to establish a theoretical framework for this research, and to direct a methodological focus, literature and documents have been reviewed. They mainly consisted of academic literature, policy documents of (inter)national organizations and governmental bodies, and publications of migrant organizations. Even though sources on migration and development were available, academic literature or policy documents on how behavior of individual migrants or their families influences the outcomes of migration (as related to their well-being and development), was mainly lacking. Manuals and publications from migrant organizations filled this gap somehow, but not all were the result of academic research, even though some of the writers also publish academic articles. Caution has been exercised in using these sources. ASHTEC staff provided documents about the school, such as documents about the Moral Values Program (MVP), the Job and Business Incubation Laboratory (JBIL), and documents with general information about the school.

#### **4.5 Respondents, informants and experts**

Interviews were conducted with respondents, informants and experts. The difference between the three is that respondents are asked to report about their own experiences, informants are asked to reflect upon a situation or phenomenon they are encountered with but in which they are not necessarily personally involved, and experts are approached to share their broader knowledge and

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<sup>24</sup> Website of AMG Philippines. 'Our Vision and Mission'. <http://www.amgphils.org/about%20us.html> Accessed 10 April 2012

vision on a phenomenon (Verschuren & Doorewaard, 2005: 118). OFWs are the respondents in this research. Staff members of ASHTEC are informants, and people from migrant organizations are considered experts. The people interviewed during this research can thus be divided into three groups. OFWs, staff members of ASHTEC/EEI, and experts from organizations.

**4.5.1 OFWs**

In order to contact OFWs for interviews, I was linked to the Alumni Relations Coordinator of ASHTEC, who would contact OFWs for me. She was the one responsible for tracing students after they have finished their studies at ASHTEC. Although one might expect contacting OFWs would go smoothly because of this, it turned out to be not that easy. The system for tracing graduates had started only recently, hence it was not very advanced yet. Many OFWs were found by using the personal networks of the Alumni Relations Coordinator, such as Facebook.<sup>25</sup> Other OFWs were contacted via other members of the staff, or were approached when they visited the school without being aware of the research. Some OFWs who participated in the research, brought me into contact with new respondents. The sample is thus not random.

Interviews were conducted with seventeen OFWs. Fifteen OFWs were male, and two female.

**Table 4:** Gender of respondents

<b>Gender:</b>	<b>Amount of respondents:</b>
Male	15
Female	2

Countries in which respondents worked or had worked were: Saudi Arabia (nine OFWs had worked there), Qatar, (five OFWs had worked there), Singapore (five OFWs had worked there), Japan (one OFW had worked there), and United Arab Emirates (UAE) (one OFW had worked there). Some had worked in different countries.

**Table 5:** Countries respondents had worked or were still working

<b>Country</b>	Japan	Qatar	United Arab Emirates	Saudi Arabia	Singapore
<b>Amount of OFWs who worked there</b>	1	6	1	9	5
Note: Four OFWs went to as well Qatar, as Singapore. One OFW went to as well Qatar, as Saudi Arabia.					

<sup>25</sup> It has to be mentioned, that formal and informal networks are not necessarily separate at ASHTEC in general. To give another example of this blurring of the professional and the private, the JBIL officer mentors young entrepreneurs via Facebook messages and Facebook chat.

Fifteen OFWs, all men, worked abroad as construction workers. Fourteen of them worked for EEI. One of these construction workers from EEI had recently gotten an office job at EEI. One person, a woman, worked in the UAE at an office. Another woman worked as a housemaid in Saudi Arabia.

**Table 6:** Type of work abroad

<b>Type of work:</b>	<b>Amount of respondents:</b>
Construction worker	15
Office work	2
Housemaid	1
Note: One respondent started as a construction worker, and currently works at an office.	

Thirteen of the OFWs were still working abroad, or were on their time off and going abroad again soon. Four others had returned to the Philippines without the intention to go abroad again anytime soon.

**Table 7:** Amount of respondents working abroad and in the Philippines

<b>Status:</b>	<b>Amount of respondents:</b>
Still OFW	13
Returned to working in the Philippines	4

Eight OFWs were married, of which two were already married before they went abroad for the first time. One married OFW lives abroad with her spouse. Seven OFWs have experienced separation from their spouse. Eight OFWs were unmarried. One OFW had broken up with the spouse for a few years already, and I consider her to be a separate category. (Divorce is prohibited by Philippine law, otherwise this woman would most likely be officially divorced.)

**Table 8:** Marital status of respondents before migration and currently

	Still OFW	Returned to Philippines	Total
<b>Unmarried and still unmarried</b>	7	1	8
<b>Unmarried and married now</b>	3	1	4
<b>Married and still married</b>	2	2	4
<b>'Divorced' and still 'divorced'.</b>	1	-	1

#### 4.5.2 Staff members of ASHTEC/EEI

In order to get a clear view on the history, activities, mission and vision of ASHTEC staff, eight staff members of ASHTEC and a trainer from EEI have been interviewed. Their functions and the focus of the interviews can be found in Table 9.

**Table 9:** Functions of staff members interviewed and focus of interview

Function	Focus of interview
School President of ASHTEC	History and mission of ASHTEC, vision on migration from ASHTEC and on migration in general, cooperation with EEI
Manager of JBS	Vision on migration from ASHTEC and on migration in general, cooperation with EEI, content of the Moral Values Program
Alumni Relations Coordinator	Vision on migration from ASHTEC and on migration in general, alumni relations, experiences of OFWs
Resource Development Coordinator <sup>26</sup>	Vision on migration from ASHTEC and on migration in general, history of ASHTEC, experiences of OFWs
JBIL Coordinator	Development and aims of the Jobs and Business Incubation Laboratory, migrants and entrepreneurship
MVP Supervisor	History, aims and content of the MVP
MVP Supervisor, Chaplain and MVP Instructor	Group interview about content and development of the MVP
EEI trainer	EEI training, life as an OFW, preparation of students for life abroad

#### 4.5.3 Experts from organizations

Five expert from migrant organizations have been interviewed. The first three experts (Table 10) were chosen before the research started, based on the information and articles found when preparing the research. The last two experts were approached in the Philippines, because it turned out that one OFW interviewed was misinformed about her work abroad, and led a miserable life abroad as a consequence of this.

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<sup>26</sup> The father of the Resource Development Coordinator was the founder of Kapatid Ministry, a foundation which support OFW families in need.

**Table 10:** Experts, their functions and the focus of the interviews

<b>Organization</b>	<b>Function of interviewee</b>	<b>Focus of interview</b>
Atikha Overseas Workers and Communities Initiative, Inc (Atikha)	One of the founders of Atikha Overseas Workers and Communities Initiative, Inc; member the Board of Trustees of the Overseas Workers Welfare Administration (OWWA)	Impact of migration upon well-being and economic development, programs for OFWs, schools and migration.
Unlad Kabayan Migrant Services Foundation (Unlad Kabayan)	Program Officer	History and activities of Unlad Kabayan, migration's potential for economic development
Scalabrini Migration Center (SMC)	Director of Research and Publications	Links between migration and development in the Philippines, impact of migration upon families, schools and migration.
International Organization for Migration (IOM)	National Programme Officer Labour Migration Unit	Illegal recruitment practices, risks of exploitation, common 'Safe Migration' campaigns.
Philippine Overseas Employment Authority (POEA)	Labor and Employment Officer at the Workers Education Division (Anti-Illegal Recruitment Branch)	Aim and content of the Safe Migration Campaign of POEA.

#### **4.6 Reflection on fieldwork**

No research is complete without a reflection upon the position of the researcher. As no one can become invisible, the presence of a researcher usually influences the behavior of the people at the place of study. This is called the problem of reactivity (Bernard, 2006: 354). This influence can be minimized by choosing a research strategy by which the researcher is in the field for a longer time, and thus has time to observe what is being done and how people behave. A five week stay at ASHTEC has given me the opportunity to get to know staff members and the school affairs from close by. Sharing food, celebrating fiestas and simply spending time together with the staff, gave a very good impression about how things worked at ASHTEC and what staff members stood for. Most staff members did not seem to make much of an attempt to separate their private and professional life, or, to put it differently, to separate friends and family from colleagues. The fact that I came to the school via the donor organization Woord en Daad, did not seem to prevent open conversations and discussions. Nevertheless I kept in mind that my links with Woord en Daad might somewhat influence the way the schools activities were presented to me.

Staying in the Philippines as a woman is neither hard nor challenging. Women are very visible and active in the Philippine society and government. In the Global Gender Gap Report 2012 of the World

Economic Forum, the Philippines ranks 8th on a list of 135 countries in the world, when it comes to gender equality. (This is a higher score than the Netherlands, which ranks 10<sup>th</sup>.) This report measures the size of every nation's gender gap in four key areas: economic participation and opportunity, educational attainment, health and survival, and political empowerment. Even though some critical notes<sup>27</sup> can be made concerning the content of this report, it does show that opportunities are not necessarily very different for women and men in the Philippines. Leaving aside some minor efforts that had to be taken to forget about gender differences while interviewing some male migrants, migrants were open and willing to share experiences and views with me. The fact that I am white, blond, and blue-eyed, regularly made me a curiosity, but it never really got in the way of the research. My age, nationality, and the fact that I was a student, even opened doors, for example for interviewing the Labor and Employment Officer from POEA, who openly admitted that I reminded him of his son who was studying abroad, a son he hoped would be taken seriously and treated nicely.

Although seventeen OFWs are interviewed during the fieldwork, some interviews did not cover all topics the research aims to address. OFWs had only limited time off, and connections were sometimes slow or even disrupted several times. A share of the interviews was done through Skype or other online communication programs, because OFWs were still abroad. Many OFWs preferred to use written chat instead of voice-chat. Although written chat has advantages compared to voice chat (it is less sensitive to internet connection interruptions and bad voice connections are not a problem), it has some disadvantages too. The main one is that it takes more time to ask and answer questions, and thus it is not always possible to talk things over in-depth. Yet the amount of respondents was enough to still get an impression of what their lives were like. Besides that, resource triangulation has helped to contextualize data from personal interviews.

Something I soon realized after arriving in the Philippines, is the great importance of family ties. Having close ties with family members, supporting them monetary and non-monetary, and backing them up, is considered a virtue. This is important to realize when discussing migration. Supporting the family is an important reason for migration, but it is also the socially desirable and most acceptable reason for migration. Knowing the context and being in the field, makes a researcher aware of these kind of norms and values in a society. Opinions expressed, even though they might seem very personal, should never be analyzed without taking into account the value framework of the community in which the person operates.

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<sup>27</sup> Gender is more than the differences between men and women. It is about the construction of masculinity and femininity in a certain society, and the societal expectations which are a result of this. Even though men and women might be more or less equal in the four key areas, it does not mean that equal behavior and duties are expected from them. Masculinity in the Philippines is usually related to provider roles, while femininity is related to care roles. (see e.g. Parreñas 2002)

## CHAPTER 5: AMG Skilled Hands Technological College

### 5.1 Introduction

*"With world class training and state-of-the-art equipment and facilities, the school provides the necessary proficiency for the students to be globally competitive in the construction industry here and abroad."*<sup>28</sup>

This website statement makes clear that ASHTEC explicitly sets the agenda for migration as a post-graduation option when people enroll in the Welding Technology course. Migration does not just happen, but it can be the intended result of following training. This raises questions, such as: 'How did it come to be this way?', 'What ideas lie behind this choice to train people for migration?', and 'How do the vision, mission and activities of the school relate to migration?'

This chapter deals with such questions, by describing the history, vision and mission of ASHTEC, and the activities currently undertaken. The chapter is mainly based on interviews with eight staff-members and one interview with a trainer from EEI. Documents of the school and its programs also contributed to the content of this chapter, as did many informal conversations.

### 5.2 A short history of ASHTEC

ASHTEC is part of the umbrella organization AMG Philippines. AMG Philippines' mission is to *"develop and equip needy children, youth, adults, families and communities through holistic Christ-centered programs so that they will be God-fearing, dignified, self-reliant and advancing the ministries of the gospel."*<sup>29</sup> The ASHTEC has been set up as a school providing vocational training for the underprivileged.

It all started in 1995 in a dilapidated warehouse in Quezon City (Metro Manila), where a trainer lived with five students. The students were youngsters with little prospects in life but to stay stuck in poverty. During six months they received training to become auto mechanics. This training was already sponsored by Woord en Daad. Because of a need for technical training for underprivileged youth, AMG Philippines received support from Woord en Daad to build a training center in San Ildefonso (province of Bulacan) in 1998, called the Skilled Hands Vocational Training Center (SHVTC). This was the beginning of ASHTEC as it is now. Since then the school has expanded, as well in amounts of buildings, as in the amounts of students and staff. The first courses given were Automotive, Welding, and the Air-Con & Refrigeration Program.

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<sup>28</sup> Website AMG Skilled Hands Technological College. Courses. <http://amgskilledhands.org/index.php/courses/> Accessed 5 February 2012.

<sup>29</sup> Website AMG Philippines. About Us: Our Vision and Mission. <http://amgphils.org/about%20us.html> Accessed 5 February 2012.

Over the years new courses were introduced. In 2002 the IT program was set up. During the same year, the school was given legal status by Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC) of the Philippines, and the name changed into AMG Skilled Training Center Incorporated (AMG SHTCI). A year afterwards, the Department of Trade and Industry (DTI) issued a certificate, granting the school its legitimacy as a legally registered institution. In 2004 the school received accreditation by the Technical Education and Skills Development Authority (TESDA). This means the curriculum is according to the national standards, which results in better opportunities for graduates on the labor market and for further study.

The Job and Business Center (JBC, later named Jobs and Business Services (JBS)) opened its doors in 2003. This department of the school focuses on finding places for on-the-job training (OJT) and employment opportunities for graduates. It also keeps a close watch on fair payments for on-the-job-trainees. The legal payment of 75 percent of the minimum wage is regularly violated in the Philippines. The school advocates for fair payment for OJT, something that is not always easy, according to Companies Relations Coordinator. Since 2011, the JBS has opened the Job and Business Incubation Laboratory (JBIL). Students who have finished ICT or ECT, can enroll into a 1 year program to become entrepreneurs and start their own business. They are mainly trained by business consultants and other experts from the field. After doing research and feasibility studies they can start their own business. The school provides them with a small loan for the startup.

Over the years the school's curriculum has been adjusted. Courses like academics (e.g. English, Mathematics) and Ethics (centers around moral values and life skills) have all become part of the programs. Development of character and moral values is high on the agenda. The current courses offered are: Information and Communication Technology (ICT, 2 years), Electronics and Communication Technology (ECT, 2 years), and Welding Technology (1 year).

In 2010, the name of the school changed into AMG Skilled Hands Technological College (ASHTEC). About 200-250 students start studying at ASHTEC every year, while about 350-400 students are enrolled at all the courses and reside at the campus. Many students pay for about ten percent of the costs of their education. Woord en Daad covers the rest of the costs. Two hundred students of ASHTEC are sponsored this way, the rest of the students pay the full amount. The ten percent costs were introduced when it became clear that not charging any enrollment costs had a negative effect on the motivation of students.

In order to reach out to more people, ASHTEC has developed partnerships with several other organizations. These include ministry and development organizations. Some of those organizations support ASHTEC with the selection of potential students. ASHTEC aims to provide education for poor

people who cannot afford regular education. Yet it can be difficult for ASHTEC staff members to check the backgrounds of students wishing to enroll in the programs. Partner organizations redirect poor youngsters to ASHTEC of whom it is certain that they cannot afford regular school fees. In cooperation with partners, another school has been set up in the province of Laguna in 2010, the ASHTEC Magdalena Campus. During the summer of 2012, another location of ASHTEC has been opened in San Miguel, only a few kilometers away from the main location in San Ildefonso. This school offers short courses (3 months) for professionals, such as 3D animation courses and technical courses. All students pay the full prize of enrollment, in contrast to students at the main location of ASHTEC. A businessman invested in the school in San Miguel, a school which is meant to provide the ASHTEC with additional income, since the other schools largely depend on donor funds. In June 2013, another branch of ASHTEC will be opened in Pulilan. Short term training in hotel and restaurant services will be provided. Half the students pay the full prize, the other half is sponsored by another NGO. Four other locations are to be opened in the next three years. One in Luzon, one in Palawan, one in Cebu, and one in Mindanao. They are largely sponsored by other NGOs (not Woord en Daad). Since the Philippines is becoming a middle-income country, Woord en Daad will phase out financial support for projects in this country. This motivated the ASHTEC staff to start several income generating initiatives, of which the school in San Miguel is one of the largest. When referring to ASHTEC in this research, the main location in San Ildefonso is meant.

Among the partnerships of ASHTEC are a few that stand out in the context of this research. The first is a partnership with Kapatid Ministry Foundation. Kapatid was set up with the goal of supporting OFW families and their children when problems arise in these families. The President of ASHTEC is member of the board of directors of this foundation. People working for Kapatid recommend parents in financial difficulties to make their children apply at ASHTEC. Another partnership is with The Evangelical Church of Dubai (TECD). After ASHTEC staff visited TECD (after a trip to Saudi Arabia) and presented the ASHTEC school to OFWs there, some OFWs decided to promote ASHTEC among poor relatives and individually sponsor them when they are enrolled at ASHTEC. Skilled migrants from this church have offered to teach some specific skills they acquired abroad at ASHTEC when they return. Until now it has not happened yet, but if this would happen, it would be an example of brain circulation as described in Chapter 1.2. Even though both partnerships have something to do with migrants, there are no common activities aiming at preparing migrants-to-be, or supporting migrant families as long as there are no obvious problems. Staff members of ASHTEC noted they had never redirected one of 'their OFWs' to Kapatid.

One of the most visible partnerships of ASHTEC is the one with EEI Corporation, one of the leading construction companies in the Philippines, with many projects abroad. A training program with large

practice facilities has been set up on the site of ASHTEC. EEI trainers conduct training during the day, while the ASHTEC provides a Moral Values Program (MVP) for one hour every evening. The students of these short (54 days) courses are afterwards employed in EEI projects locally and overseas. The program is fully paid for by EEI. Students have to pack back for their education during the first three years of their contract. EEI has already expressed interest in starting a similar program at the branch of ASHTEC in Mindanao, which is to be opened in 2016.

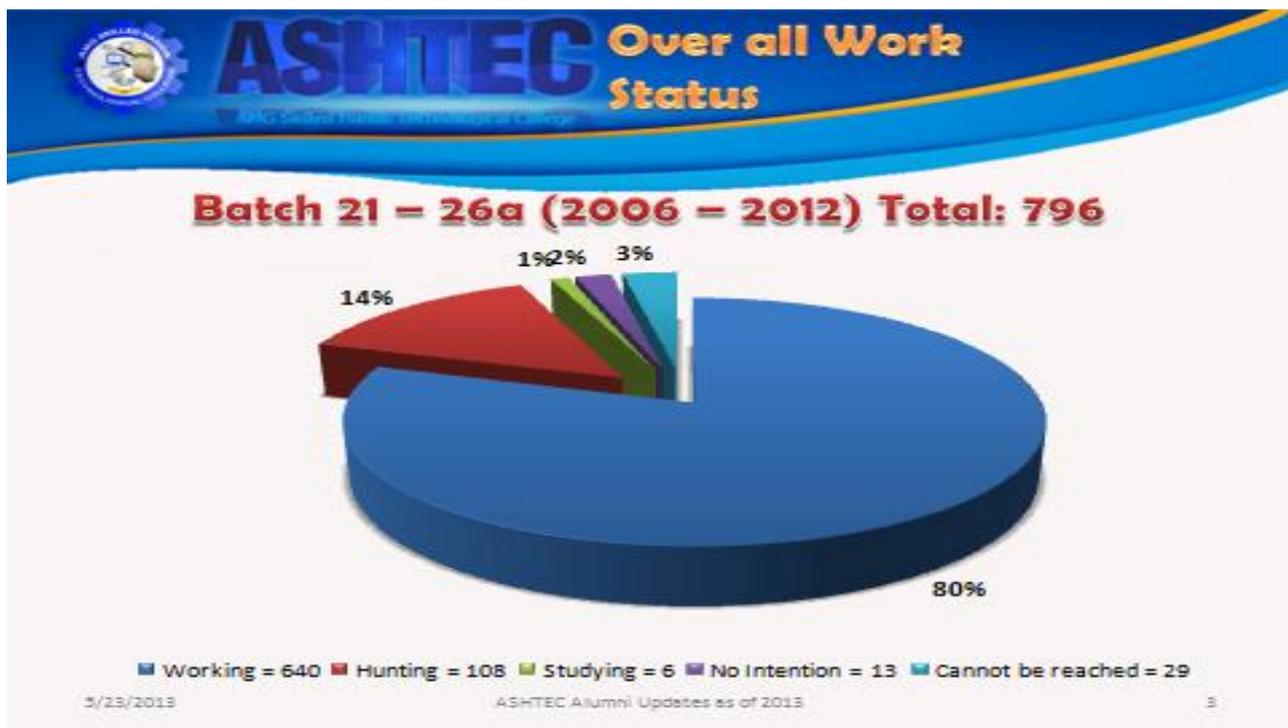
### **5.3 What ASHTEC stands for**

ASHTEC is characterized by the holistic approach it takes towards its students, and by a constant search for improvement of the relevancy of education. During a five week stay at the campus it became clear that staff members were sincerely concerned with the fate of students, and put a lot of energy into supporting and mentoring them, in order to better their future prospects and bring them closer to Jesus Christ. For many staff members, the two are closely related. Although skills development can provide opportunities in this life, faith in God will strengthen the students and give them a perspective which goes beyond this life. Concerning sharing the gospel, staff members are realistic about their abilities. As the Manager of JBS points out: *“To convert them is not our job, that is the Lord’s. Our job is to share.”* In order to have strong links to the labor market, the school has developed partnerships with several companies. These relations are not based on a common Christian ground, but on professionalism in the field. Through these relations, ASHTEC tries to arrange OJT for students, and aims at keeping up to date with developments in the field. According to the Company Relations Coordinator, IT companies are positive about OJT students from ASHTEC, because they update the knowledge of regular employees. A constant search for the best balance between general education, development of moral values, and practical skills development, has made the ASHTEC a successful school. Employment rates of graduates are high (see Figure 6).

Even though the ASHTEC is an NGO-school, there are also paying students enrolled, who are attracted by the quality of the school. By paying for their own education, they contribute to the financial sustainability of the school. The staff of the school keeps close ties to TESDA and businesses, in order to watch trends and anticipate on them. One of the results of this anticipation to the labor market, is a discontinuation of the Automotive course. Employment opportunities became too limited.

The search for relevancy and creating job opportunities is at the basis of the cooperation with EEI. This cooperation has started because of the opportunity to train people with the guarantee of having a job after training. Creating job opportunities and economic activities is also at the basis of the entrepreneurship program JBIL.

**Figure 6:** Track Record: Overall work status of graduates 2006-2012.<sup>30</sup>



The mentality of students is of major concern to the ASHTEC staff. This has two reasons. Firstly, the staff is fully convinced that living a life of dignity and with a focus on God, is the only way a human being can ever live fully. It is also the only way a student can experience a lasting transformation for the better. As the Manager of JBS said: *“We believe true transformation only comes after you have accepted the Lord Jesus Christ. Then morality improvement will come naturally.”* The second reason is very practical. Many students come from a disadvantaged background: from broken families and families struggling for survival. They often lived in slum areas or in other circumstances in which they were surrounded by poverty. Due to these circumstances, some of them face difficulties adopting a responsible attitude at work and in interpersonal contacts. Because ASHTEC needs a good reputation in order to be able to find OJT for students and jobs for graduates, development of moral values and character building is of great importance.

The core values underlying the activities of ASHTEC are:<sup>31</sup>

- Our Work is our Service to God
- Holistic Approach

<sup>30</sup> From the PowerPoint presentation of the school president of ASHTEC covering the ASHTEC Phase Out Plan. Dordrecht, The Netherlands. 30 May 2013

<sup>31</sup> From a PowerPoint presentation of ASHTEC given by the Resource Development Coordinator, 24 April 2012

- Compassion to the Poor
- Sustainability
- Competence and Excellence
- Teamwork

Translated into a mission statement, it sounds as follows:

*“ASHTEC is a non-stock, non-profit, non-government Christian organization that will develop, transform and empower youth through holistic Christ-centered programs so that they will be God fearing, self-sustaining and exhibiting distinctiveness to others.”<sup>32</sup>*

Both the core values and the mission statement give a good impression of what the school stands for and aims to achieve.

#### **5.4 EEI and the Moral Values Program**

*“If there is one thing lacking in the skilled workers, it is the moral, the attitude, the character. It is because of the nature of their work: physical, no high education nor payment.”*

(Manager of JBS)

In 2005, ASHTEC staff approached EEI Corporation to develop a partnership. A year later ASHTEC and EEI came to an agreement. EEI staff would train people to become construction workers for EEI, and they would do it on the site of the school. ASHTEC welding students can apply to be trained during this short program, and so can people from outside ASHTEC. EEI shoulders the costs of the training, on the condition that the worker will fulfill a three year contract at EEI, in which a set amount of the salary will be deducted every month to pay for the training. Workers are trained in one of the following specialties: Steel Work, Pipe Fitting, Scaffolding, Welding, Rigging or Millwright. The training takes 54 days. Trainees are trained to become construction workers either in the Philippines or abroad, depending on the needs of EEI. Many go to Saudi Arabia, Qatar, or Singapore. It is said however, that even though trainees might be enrolled in batches in which they are prepared for working in the Philippines, most of them enroll because they want to work abroad sooner or later.

Soon after EEI and ASHTEC came to an agreement for cooperation, the Manager of JBS realized that one of the core values of the school is an holistic approach towards students, and this aspect was receiving too little attention in the joint initiative with EEI. He approached EEI to see if they would agree on the start of a MVP for the trainees. The company would also benefit from this program.

*“Part of MVP is teaching about how to be...what the Bible says about loyalty, honesty, and*

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<sup>32</sup> From a PowerPoint presentation of ASHTEC given by the Resource Development Coordinator, 24 April 2012

*everything. Loyalty to the company, honesty in work. So it would have a big benefit for the company.”* (Manager of JBS) EEI approved on the MVP. They even discussed with ASHTEC whether there would be a possibility for giving this program to all employees of EEI. Unfortunately the ASHTEC staff did not have the time nor capacity to arrange this program for over 7000 employees of EEI, so they only started the MVP for trainees on the site of the school. EEI trains students in the technical aspects, while ASHTEC provides the MVP one hour a day, from Monday to Friday. EEI does not pay ASHTEC staff for teaching the MVP.

The topics addressed during the MVP are ideas of the staff members of ASHTEC. Every staff member was asked to think about what would be important to teach the trainees, and those interested in teaching could hand in a topic at the Manager of JBS. A chaplain related to the school also became involved. From all topics a module was created. The MVP includes topics such as family life, love, personal growth, cooperation with coworkers, conflict management, homesickness, or specific topics from the bible.<sup>33</sup> Teachers try to make the program relevant for the trainees, through sharing experiences of migrants who encountered challenges abroad. The Manager of JBS noted he presented cases of migrants with bad spending habits to the trainees, so they could discuss financial management and make trainees prepare for decisions they will have to make in the future.<sup>34</sup> He also discusses how one can handle loneliness.

*“They will be apart from their family for eighteen months. So there will be homesickness. How to relieve stress? Stress from work or more related to the mind. Just thinking about your family in the Philippines. How to relieve stress, how do you find rest in God when you are alone abroad or somewhere in the Philippines.”*

According to him, addressing these topics is very helpful.

*“If you have already thought about a situation, you will know what to do”.*

Although certain topics related to migration are consciously addressed (e.g. homesickness and financial management.), the MVP was not set up to address management of migration and its impact specifically. The ones mainly responsible for the MVP do however indicate to be very interested in knowing more about the impact of migration and how to address it in a more coherent manner.

Trainees are not always enthusiastic about the MVP at the moment it is given, since they have long and intensive training days which include physical work and sports. However, the ASHTEC staff

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<sup>33</sup> The full list of topics can be found in Appendix 3.

<sup>34</sup> Even though the topic of financial management is not present at the list, it is being addressed according to the staff.

receives a lot of positive feedback from trainees, project managers and EEI in general. The Manager of JBS mentioned that he was approached by a father of one of the trainees, who wanted to thank him for the change the MVP brought in the life of his son.

EEI has partnership trainings with about ten schools, of which ASHTEC is only one. At a certain point, EEI expressed interest in expanding the MVP to other locations. The Manager of JBS describes:

*“[D]uring that time they opened many partnership trainings. Almost 10 schools. Only one with ASHTEC. Then they train welders there, and we train welders here. Then they [the welders] come together in one project. And the result of this center became notable not only in skills, but also in attitude. They are very good in skills, and also in attitude. So they [EEI] became curious: what is it in the training of AMG that their trainees are very good holistically? Then that is the time we discussed the MVP. Then they requested me to teach also in the other training centers. I did that in two centers only, because it is very time consuming and also expensive because I had to travel. So then I just gave them examples of how to do it.”*

However, EEI did not succeed in expanding the MVP.

*“[A]fter one or two years, their decision was they could not duplicate the program. Because it is not merely on the way you teach, but if you teach true to yourself. What morals can they teach if deep inside they are not...you know? We believe transformation is through Jesus Christ. Even if you are a very good teacher, it is superficial to the student if they [the teachers] do not really believe it themselves.”*

This was however not the end of the attempt to expand the program.

*“So what they did is: OK, the last part of the training, at other training centers, all of you go to AMG. Right now we have thirty-one people here for six days. They do a skills module, and we give them a part of the MVP.”*

The modules of the MVP have been adjusted over the years, partly in an attempt to make the program suitable for the amount of hours available, and for the specific audience. The trainees have different backgrounds and are trained with different purposes. In 2007 for example, a group of engineers was welcomed. Because of the different educational background and focus in the work of these people compared to the skilled workers, the MVP was adjusted for this group. The focus of the adjusted program switched to teamwork and leadership. The MVP is thus a diverse program which has been adjusted over the years according to the needs of trainees. Although the program is loosely

organized in terms of content, it bears fruit, which seems to be largely due to the fact that the teachers believe in what they teach and teach what they believe in.

ASHTEC does not receive money from EEI for the trainings, and neither do they have enough budget to pay the teachers sufficiently. Teachers receive a small consideration, but not enough to fully compensate for the effort put into the program.

*“I make it a point that those who teach are not after the money. [...] If you want to teach, if you want to be a part, do your share of the transformation of these skilled workers. Because they will go out, most will go abroad. No Christians there, very difficult situation. If you want to do your share for them, it is a love gift. And it is quite successful.”* (Manager of JBS)

## **5.5 Job and Business Incubation Laboratory**

The Job and Business Incubation Laboratory (JBIL) has been set up to teach and mentor students in how to become entrepreneurs and start their own business. It is a recent initiative. In 2010, a research was done by two Dutch students and some members of the JBS staff, to investigate upon possibilities of business incubation for the ASHTEC. In the Philippines, no exemplary model was found of the structure of such a program and how it could be integrated into the school system. Therefore possibilities were examined to use a Dutch model in the Philippine context. This resulted in the JBIL. In 2011 the JBIL was launched, and the first fifteen students enrolled in the one-year course. At the time the fieldwork of this research was being done, they had just finished the program and some had launched a business. The businesses students start, are incubated in the school’s JBS for one year.

Not everyone can enroll in the JBIL-program. Students who have finished ICT or ECT, are the only ones who can apply. In order to get accepted they have to go through recruitment and screening procedures, of which the most important aspects are an entrepreneurial examination and a personality interview. During the first five years the program runs, and when it is still taking shape, only ICT and ECT students from ASHTEC are allowed to enroll in the program. After these first five years, another five years will follow in which people from outside can also apply to enroll. Once the program runs smoothly, the idea is to get it more broadly recognized and registered. It is already registered at the Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC), which makes it operate legally.

Many trainers and teachers of the JBIL program are not part of the ASHTEC team. In a search for the best and most relevant education, ASHTEC staff chose to invite business experts and consultants to teach a large share of the program. According to the JBIL coordinator, it has not always been easy to find these people.

*“During the first three months of operation, it was hard to get business experts, because it takes time. I did not want to get an ordinary teacher. I needed a business professional. So that takes time, effort, money. Meeting with them, presenting the business incubation program.. But thanks to God, He helps us. You need a big network to approach people. Thanks God they [the experts] gave us their time to teach.”*

Besides from training students during courses about the secrets of running a successful business, there are many other activities included in the program. Students need to choose what business they would like to start, and conduct feasibility studies. This means visiting and looking specifically at the location where they want to open the business, the customers, the market, the competition. They also visit business exhibits to meet other business (wo)men, and experts relevant for their own business. If the initial business plan turns out to be not feasible, they come up with another idea. JBS staff tries to link the students to a professional in their specific field of interest, e.g. food service. Students are coached virtually and actually with the startup.

The Christian mission of ASHTEC is also reflected in the curriculum of this program. Part of the JBIL program exists of business ethics, a variety of the MVP. The aim is to deliver ‘Christian business professionals’. The JBIL coordinator explains what this means in practice:

*“Here in the Philippines you need all kinds of permits. A police clearance, a barangay<sup>35</sup> clearance, all kinds of clearances. Because we are Christians, we need to obey the law. So that is what we teach the students. We need to be different from other businessmen. [Researcher: Are many businesses doing this differently?] Yes! They are successful, but do not register. There is much hocus-pocus. The government allows them not to register if they give money. You know, under the table. [...] We teach them not only business skills, but also to do it honestly. So, [e.g.] how do you apply money management? Here you can sometimes easily become successful if you cheat.”*

Students are generally unable to get loans from lending institutions, because they come from poor families and have no collateral. ASHTEC provides them with small loans. Half of the startup capital of the fresh entrepreneur has to be self-generated, half of it will be provided by ASHTEC. The maximum amount for the loan given by ASHTEC is Php 30.000<sup>36</sup>. The interest rate is five percent per year. Unfortunately, in many cases the amount of money does not suffice to start a business. The JBIL coordinator explained the number one difficulty encountered during the program is the monetary

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<sup>35</sup> Cities and municipalities in the Philippines are composed of barangays. They could be described as neighborhoods headed by elected officials.

<sup>36</sup> About 550 Euro

one. *"It limits our services. Like Master Prints [one of the businesses started by two students], they need another printer, but we cannot give a loan."* Some students who have finished the JBIL program have not started a business, but instead started working as an employee. This is not necessarily a bad thing. These people can gain experience and save money for a startup. *"Then we can try to work it out."* ASHTEC staff members have been working hard to find other ways of financing the program. It is difficult to take a loan at microfinance organizations (MFIs), because the students still need to meet requirements they cannot meet (collateral), and besides this, MFIs give out limited credit. Membership of some MFIs (e.g. ASKI) costs students money, while the credit for the first loan is usually limited (e.g. Php5000<sup>37</sup> at ASKI).

Other possibilities to give students access to more money are also given a try. These include approaching more institutions which might give out loans, including financial institutions and organizations more oriented at development, like Woord en Daad. Companies and businessmen are asked to invest in one of the startups. Another way of finding investors is challenging the ASHTEC staff to make an investment in a startup. The amount of students for the first batch of the JBIL program was fifteen, in the second batch this will be ten, in order to be able to give students more time and money. The last way in which an attempt is made to increase money, is through starting a business at the school. The JBIL coordinator explains: *"[N]ext year we are planning to have our own business here at ASHTEC. So that our students can practice. Then we will earn from them also. We will include that into the curriculum."*

On the question whether the JBIL staff ever thought about including returned OFWs into the program, the answer is that they are not to be excluded from the program. The JBIL staff considers designing different kinds of programs in the future, different in duration and content. Then it would be possible to offer also shorter programs, e.g. of one month or even one week, which suit the needs and/or skills of those willing to participate.

*"Now we have not only the one year program, but also a business seminar which takes three days. All alumni who want to attend, they can come here. It is also a bridging program. Others [students who recently finished the one year JBIL course] also did this before their real program started. You know, the two year courses are only skills training and academics. So they will be surprised when entering this program. That is why we did the bridging program."*  
(JBIL coordinator)

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<sup>37</sup> About 90 Euro

The JBIL coordinator explains that on the long run, the JBIL program must become accessible for people with different backgrounds and working experience.

*“We plan to serve, after the first phase of JBIL, even non-Christians, Christians, OFWs, non-OFWs, parents. We look to serve the whole community. We will divide courses into those for professionals and those for non-professionals. After the first phasing. But now we develop the program first.”*

## **5.6 Migration from the perspective of ASHTEC staff members**

In 2002, the first student of ASHTEC became employed abroad. This was a ECT student, who left the country to work in Japan. Later on, other students also left the country, temporarily or permanently. ASHTEC did not play an active role in their decision to go abroad. The school only started to facilitate migration through the EEI program from 2006 on. This cooperation was meant to train more people in order to create employment opportunities and to give people a chance to get rid of the burden of poverty through earning relatively much money. These are the reasons why the cooperation with EEI started, and it are the first factors named when staff members of ASHTEC start reflecting upon the migration of trainees: it creates employment opportunities and good salaries. Some note more positive aspects of the migration of trainees. Their experiences and responsibility to provide for their relatives, matures their personality. It also makes them proud and confident. Being abroad in an Islamic country among other OFWs of which many struggle, gives Christian OFWs the chance to talk about God and the gospel with others, or to give a testimony of faith through attitude and behavior. The President of ASHTEC notes that EEI is a valuable partner to ASHTEC, and the company offers good working conditions for employees. The company has a good reputation, and as such it can have a positive influence on workers further careers. This is one way in which the staff looks at migration of trainees: with pride and satisfaction.

On the other hand, most Filipinos are aware of the ugly face migration can have. So are the staff members of ASHTEC. All of them know people who have experience as a migrant. The son of ASHTEC's president works as an OFW in Singapore. Besides this the president himself is member of the board of trustees of Kapatid Ministry. The daughter of the founder of Kapatid Ministry is also a staff member of the school. The Manager of JBS, who also takes the final responsibility of the MVP, has all his brothers and sisters living in the USA. The boyfriend of the secretary of the JBS works as OFW at one of the EEI projects in Saudi Arabia. The Companies Relations Coordinator is the son of an OFW seafarer. The trainer from EEI worked abroad as an OFW for 15 years. This list can go on and on.

The awareness of the negative influence migration can have, makes the staff members reflect on the question whether they carry a responsibility when it comes to the welfare of 'their OFWs' and their

families. In order to get a better view on the situation of the workers abroad, and in order to see whether the conditions of workers overseas were really the way EEI presented it to ASHTEC, the President of ASHTEC and the Manager of JBS visited some projects of EEI in Saudi Arabia and Dubai in 2010. They talked to employees trained at ASHTEC/EEI and visited the working sites. Although the personal situation of OFWs was not always easy, the overall situation turned out to be workable and like EEI had presented it to the ASHTEC staff. Unfortunately the staff cannot go visit all the sites were workers go, because of financial constraints. Through the Alumni Relations Coordinator, an eye is kept on the OFWs. She tries to talk to returned OFWs when they show up at the school. Other staff members are aware of this task of the Alumni Relations Coordinator, and therefore send the returned OFWs to her office when they see them show up at the site of the school.

Staff members can name a lot of stories in which migration had a negative to devastating impact on migrants' lives. They also recall stories of OFWs who seem to do very well. Below are listed some positive and negative effects on the lives of OFWs and their relatives , as mentioned by staff members and the trainer from EEI. They vary from very general to quite specific, and some were mentioned several times, while other were mentioned only once. The lists represent factors mentioned, but the fact that the list of negative impacts in longer, does not mean migration is mainly envisioned negatively. Most staff members were not very outspoken in either judging migration positively or negatively.

**Table 11:** Positive influence of migration on the lives of OFWs and their relatives

- |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Relatives of OFWs can go to school.</li> <li>• OFWs build houses for themselves or relatives.</li> <li>• OFWs provide in basic needs of relatives (food, clothing, medicines, etc.)</li> <li>• Relatives of OFWs can move out of poverty.</li> <li>• Most OFW families maintain their improvement in living situation, this change is being sustained when the OFW keeps working abroad.</li> <li>• OFWs do not have to work and struggle for hardly any salary.</li> <li>• The character of OFWs mature because of the experiences abroad and the responsibilities they have for relatives.</li> <li>• Being able to provide for relatives and to have a good salary makes an OFW proud.</li> <li>• OFWs grow stronger in faith.</li> <li>• OFWs give testimony of their faith among other OFWs by talking to them and helping them.</li> <li>• OFWs give testimony of their faith by the way they treat others and their general attitude at the workplace.</li> </ul> |
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**Table 12:** Negative influence of migration on the lives of OFWs and their relatives

- OFWs spend all money right after the return to the Philippines, and are thus broke after only one or two months.
- OFWs often have a lack of financial planning.
- OFWs find it hard to find a job in the Philippines, because they want to keep a relatively high salary even though they are not abroad anymore.
- The family of an OFW assumes the money will naturally keep coming.
- The family of an OFW spends all the money.
- OFWs go home 'full of jewelry' and try to uphold a millionaire image.
- Family members are not aware of the hard work of the OFW.
- Most money is spend on consumer items.
- Family members lie to the migrant to get more money. (e.g. instead of buying medicines they buy luxuries)
- The center of family life is dislocated. The wife of the OFW becomes very close to her parents or parents-in-law. There is no father for the child(ren) physically present, and no husband for the wife, so they cling to other relatives.
- Children have no father figure.
- There is often a lack of good communication between the OFWs and their family members.
- Migration leads to marital problems.
- OFWs or their spouses commit adultery.
- OFWs find it hard to adjust to another culture (esp. Middle East).
- OFWs have a hard time adjusting to the climate in the new country (esp. Middle East).
- OFWs suffer from loneliness.
- OFWs suffer from boredom.
- OFWs suffer from homesickness.
- OFWs have difficulties relieving stress.
- OFWs suffer from separation from the family.

The extended lists above shows that there is awareness of impacts migration can have. Some of the issues above are touched upon during the MVP.

The extended lists leave us with the question: If there is already this much knowledge about the influence of migration, and some issues are already covered during the MVP, what is the need for further research?

## **5.7 Discussion**

ASHTEC staff members are obviously concerned with the fate of migrants and their families, and many of them are aware of challenges and benefits migration can have. Some content of the MVP aims at teaching trainees life lessons which prepare them to handle their migration well. However, two core values of ASHTEC are under pressure by the way migration is envisioned and dealt with at the moment. Those are the core values of 'holistic approach' and 'sustainability'.

### 5.7.1 Holistic Approach

There is not enough information about the lives of OFWs available to know exactly what migrants-to-be should be prepared for. Perhaps as a result of this, ASHTEC staff members experience difficulties in understanding how certain situations or incidents are symptoms of bigger processes. This results in an approach towards trainees and their relatives which is fragmentary. Facts and stories are shared. Those are however of limited use for a program, when it is not fully understood how they are part of larger processes. The fragmented approach, puts the core value of an 'holistic approach' under pressure, leading to a general unease about the whole situation. The unease is reflected in the question from the Manager of JBS: *"Maybe you can tell us, based on the people you have interviewed: are we on the balance, or more on the gain, or more on the loss?"*

He seems well-aware of the fact that migration puts the core value of 'holistic approach' under pressure, and that coherency in the current approach is lacking.

*"[W]e don't have a concrete plan on really how to help the families of OFWs. Because our work really here is to give the worker a chance. To have work, either local or abroad. But we knew the other side of that..if you work abroad or work far away from your family. But we don't have a concrete strategy for that. [...]We really do not have a program right now for them. We just involve in some activities, but I know it is very little. Unlike Kapatid, it is their main purpose. But for us it is not. But again, to be holistic, we need to cater also. If you really want to balance the gain and the loss. "*

Others already have some ideas about improving the program. The ideas mainly address financial aspects of migration and improving the understanding of the situation abroad relatives have.

*"[I]f there's a graduation day for the trainees, they must request all the wives, or family members, to just come over for that. [To learn]on what to do with the money. 60/40 percent, 40/60 percent. One part can be saved." (Chaplain)*

*"I was thinking we could do some seminars when they come back to the Philippines, or before they go out. Just some seminars about management of money, or giving them a bigger picture of what happens." (Alumni Relations Coordinator)*

The ideas above are certainly good for consideration. However, a more coherent knowledge of the realities and influence of migration, and linking this knowledge to the goals and core values of ASHTEC, needs to be worked on first, before designing and revising programs.

### 5.7.2 Sustainability

The links between the (sustainable) development goals of the school and the migration of trainees are not consciously laid out. At the heart of thinking about sustainability lies the question whether long term and short term needs are both taken into account and whether they are balanced. When the impact of migration of trainees is discussed at ASHTEC, the long term influence on the lives of migrants and their families gains little attention. If this is mentioned, no attention is paid to ways to making economic improvement more solid and less dependent on having an OFW in the family. The core value of 'sustainability' is thus under pressure.

Even though there are sincere worries about the effect of migration on the family members (especially related to marriages), return of OFWs to the Philippines is not being addressed. This is somewhat surprising, since family values are clearly important to the staff. The family value of 'doing one's best to provide', outweighs the value of 'being present'. Migration is considered sustainable in the sense that it brings and sustains economic improvement, yet the possibility for return is not taken into account when discussing sustainability. One of the conversations with the Manager of JBS exemplifies this:

[question: *"What do you think about the sustainability of the changes which are brought by migration?"*]

*"Most of them sustain the improvement, financially, but also their personality grows. Up to now, they have been helping families, siblings to go to school, building houses for parents. There are some who return to their previous status, but that is a small amount."*

[question: *"Those who are abroad now, what will their life be like ten years from now?"*]

*"There is a saying in the Philippines: once you become an OFW, you will forever become an OFW."*

The positive influence OFWs could have on regional development, is a topic also in need for more attention. The creation of job opportunities abroad is considered an answer to the lack of job opportunities in the Philippines. The ASHTEC does aim at creating economic activity, e.g. through the JBIL program, yet does not include OFWs into such initiatives. OFWs could play a more active role in regional development because of their access to more capital (as well directly from their increase in salary, as through their increased capacity to loan). Possibilities for investments, starting businesses, or other ways which stimulate the economy should be investigated upon. There is a need for a coherent vision on migration which includes an exploration of potential links to regional economic development.

## CHAPTER 6: Experiences of Overseas Filipino Workers

### 6.1 Introduction

*“You know, being a migrant is not just a job, it’s a learning experience. You’re not there to learn only the job, but to experience what is life as a migrant, and what are the things that are affecting you, affecting your family.”<sup>38</sup>*

Being a migrant is not only a job, it is a way of life. A way of life which brings along its own specific challenges and opportunities. In the former chapter, the way ASHTEC envisions and facilitates socioeconomic and geographical mobility of students is presented. In this chapter, the experiences of OFWs who have been students of ASHTEC are laid out. Their reasons for migration, their handling of changes due to migration in four domains (mental, spiritual, social and regarding finances), and their future plans come to the fore.

Even though a migrant’s life abroad has been divided into four domains, it is obvious that those domains are somewhat artificial. They influence each other in major ways.

### 6.2 Reasons for migration

The absolute number one reason for migrants to start working abroad is to support their family. The OFWs spoken to are all from a relatively poor background, and feel the responsibility to contribute to the family income. Most relatives supported their decision to become an OFW from the start. Other families found it a painful decision yet agreed with it. Only the housemaid in Saudi Arabia indicates her parents tried to discourage her migration plans.

Although a desire to provide for the family is the dominant reason to decide to become an OFW, some other factors also made it an attractive option. Some indicate that curiosity and the excitement of trying something new and gaining new experiences made them positive towards the option to work abroad. The lure of luxuries is also influencing the decision, as is the unwillingness to struggle hard in the Philippines to barely make ends meet. Some found it hard to find a job in the Philippines, let alone a job which covers all costs of living. A large share of the migrants spoken to studied Automotive at ASHTEC, could not find a satisfying job afterwards, and after a few years decided to follow the EEI training and start working as an OFW. The programs ASHTEC offered again determined the course of the lives of these people.

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<sup>38</sup> Marlon, OFW with experience as a construction worker in Saudi Arabia. All names used are fictive names, in order to protect anonymity of respondents as much as possible.

### 6.3 Leaving the Philippines, entering another country

The Pre-Departure Orientation Seminar (PDOS) is obligated for anyone leaving the country as OFW. It is considered a valuable course by the migrants. It was useful for them because they learned about legal and behavioral rules in the new country. This was especially useful for the Middle Eastern countries Saudi Arabia and Qatar. Both Islamic countries pose many restriction on anyone living on their soil. Behavior towards women, religious practices, entertainment, all are subdued to clear rules. Violation of these rules can get migrants into serious trouble. Although not all consider the laws in Saudi Arabia a problem for them as a worker, Jayson clearly felt threatened by them:

*“Saudi is dangerous. Do not commit big mistakes, the country rules are strict. For some things they’ll behead you.”*

The way social life is organized in all destination countries surprised the Filipinos. Separation of men and women in public life is something unfamiliar for Filipinos, yet a reality in many Middle Eastern countries. Traffic rules in many countries are much more strict than in the Philippines. Joseph, working in Japan, noted he had to get used to the mentality abroad. Japanese people are very organized, and he had to consciously adjust to their schedules and structures.

The first months abroad are usually hard. Stress over leaving one’s family and longing for beloved ones, goes hand in hand with struggles to adjust to a new (in the Middle East often a very hot) climate, new duties at work, communication problems due to limited knowledge of the dominant language at the job or due to cultural differences, and being immersed in an unfamiliar culture. Some migrants note that most new OFWs are ill prepared for what awaits them, and have wrong expectations about the situation abroad. As Marlon explains:

*“Some Filipinos, especially the new ones, when we ask them: ‘do you know what to expect when you get there?’ I can say that about 90-95% they say: ‘no’. They do not know what to expect. Only the weather, yeah, they can expect the weather. But all the other aspects, no. They know that they will work as skilled-worker, that they will do this job. But they don’t know the emotional and spiritual aspects of the job. So when they get to the point of making big decisions, they don’t know what to do.”*

Janice explained she was scared to go out on the streets in Dubai and face people the first months abroad. She felt sorry for herself and insecure of what would become of her. Separation of men and women in public life, and dealing with a lot of nationalities at work, were things she was not used to. She had to push herself to adjust and to be flexible, to get control over her own life, to overcome her fears, and to face challenges. When she did this consciously, things got better with her.

Workers of EEI who cannot get used to the situation abroad can return to the Philippines. None of the migrants had chosen this option, but most of them knew people who had returned before the end of their contract. EEI makes it possible to return, and to continue working for the company in the Philippines.

Rowena, working as a housemaid in Saudi Arabia, did not have the opportunity to go back to the Philippines. When she approached the agency that got her a job in Saudi Arabia to inform about possibilities for return, they told her violating her contract was punishable, and the authorities would not grant her an exit visa. In Saudi Arabia exit visas are required to leave the country, which keeps OFWs in dependent positions.

After a few months, OFWs usually find a way to handle the changes and some come to like their new life. Only two migrants (of which one was still working abroad) claimed it never got any better. Eric struggled to get through his period abroad in Saudi Arabia, until finally his contract ended and he could return to his wife in the Philippines. Jonathan is still working in Singapore, but feels very burdened by homesickness, and would like to go back. Yet he thinks this will not be possible until perhaps 10 years from now, because first he wants to support his wife, child, parents and siblings financially.

#### **6.4 Dealing with migration mentally**

*“It is not easy being there. You come back from work, you go to your room. There are six other men in the room. You are surrounded by people you don’t really have relations with. When you are tired you miss the days that your wife gives you a massage, that the kids play games with you. Those are the times you feel lonely. You’re tired, you have a hectic schedule. You go home alone and sit on your bed and start thinking.” (Marlon)*

Even though OFWs usually find ways to handle their strong emotions after about three months, some struggles remain. Common psychological struggles of OFWs at EEI projects are: loneliness, homesickness, boredom, worries about the fidelity of a spouse or lover, or worries about the wishes of relatives. Having a spouse or lover in the Philippines, makes the balancing of a life on two shores especially challenging.

OFWs working for EEI stated that many OFWs spend a lot of time worrying about the faithfulness of their wives. Those worries are considered justified, because adultery is no exception in OFW families. But not only spouses of OFWs commit adultery. Among OFWs this is also not uncommon. According to Marlon, loneliness, boredom and adultery are closely related.

*“Some of them, they told me: ‘we get lonely, we get bored, we try to have some other activities, some distraction’. And then I tell them: ‘That is wrong. Why are you working here, you work hard for your family, so having some other affairs is really not good.’”*

The fact that some are trained at ASHTEC, does not mean they never have affairs.

*“Yes [,there are also cases of ASHTEC students having affairs], we try our best to tell them: we know you are lonely, but that is not an excuse to have an affair.”*

Yet some also worry about themselves, and how they can uphold their morals. Especially men at EEI projects in Singapore have a hard time resisting temptations of women, alcohol, and other habits labeled as vices, such as smoking. Saudi Arabia and Qatar have stricter rules about contact between men and women, and about the use of alcohol (although this does not mean women and alcohol are out of the picture, as can be read further in this chapter). This is the reason Albert - who had experience in working in Qatar and in Singapore - expressed he preferred working in Qatar instead of Singapore. In Qatar he spends less of his time resisting temptations, especially the temptation of women.

Psychological distress is not only present in the lives of OFWs working for EEI. Rowena in Saudi Arabia also has a hard time as a housemaid in Saudi Arabia. Her boss and his wife never talk to her about personal things. She states they treat her like a machine. Her working hours are many (12 hours a day, with only a few hours less on Friday), she is not allowed to have a phone (although she held one in secret with the risk of being deported back to the Philippines), and cannot leave the house without a male accompanying her. She only goes out on Friday afternoon, while her boss accompanies her. During this walk outside, they sometimes go to a palace, where she can meet other Filipinas with whom she can talk. She heard many stories of housemaids who are abused or even raped. Even a friend of her got raped, and fortunately got help from the embassy to get back to the Philippines. Rowena is thankful to have a boss who leaves her alone, even though for a while she felt upset and lured into a horrible situation. At some point she came to the conclusion that it would simply be best to accept the situation as it was and wait for her contract to end. She kept herself strong with the thought that she was lucky because her boss did not abuse her. Clearly the situation she is in, puts great psychological pressure on her.

There are situations in which migrants feel especially burdened by separation from people in the Philippines: when they have a conflict or argument with their beloved ones, when there are conflicts at work, or when they are sick. John, working in Saudi Arabia, notes that sickness makes migrants homesick more than ever. When he is sick, it makes him very aware of the fact that he is out there

alone: no family member to take care of him when he is vulnerable. Conflicts at work also make him just want to go home and be with his wife and children. Marlon also states that being sick makes life abroad very hard, as so do problems between him and his wife:

*“When I’m sick I want to go home, she can be there, cook for me. When you work your mind is busy, but when you’re sick... Also when there is a problem between us, I have a hard time concentrating.”*

Yet migration does not bring migrants only challenges and difficulties. Some are fine abroad. Janice in Dubai, and Joseph in Japan miss their relatives sometimes, yet they do not suffer from it very much and are satisfied with their life and work. This might have to do with the fact that they did not have spouses or lovers in the Philippines, and they are relatively free in living their life the way they please. They live in central areas, not in remote places. Some OFW at the EEI projects are also doing fine. As Michael, working in Singapore stated:

*“I’m used to being away from my family, that’s why I prefer working abroad. And besides that, I can’t find a job in the Philippines which can bring this income I have abroad.”*

Rey, who worked in Saudi Arabia, states his migration period has made him grow in character and made him stronger.

*“I feel much better when I’m working in Saudi Arabia. Because it has a big impact on myself. [...] Not only for the value of money but the most important thing, because I develop and motivate myself as a strong human being.”*

Being a migrant gives a Filipino status, and families of migrants are also generally considered ‘better off’. OFWs are therefore often proud of their achievement, and proud of the fact that they can provide a good income.

Yet loneliness and the pain of separation can drive OFWs into negative thinking patterns and tempt them to let go of principles they used to stand for. OFWs interviewed noticed that many migrant workers abroad seek distraction in building relationships with women. Many tried to avoid this themselves, and developed other coping strategies to deal with loneliness. They e.g. sought contact with ‘home’ by texting or calling when they were in distress. The coping strategy of many however circles not solely around relatives/lovers. Focusing on God instead of on oneself is what many try to do in the first place. This can mean praying to God, doing bible study with fellow Christians, or just talk to fellow Christians about the problem and pray together. The mental well-being of most of the

OFWs can hardly be seen separately from their faith. This leads us to the topic of living faith life abroad.

## 6.5 Faith life abroad

*“The first thing I did [when I started to feel down] was find a church. There are many churches there. Not the kind you see here. House churches: worship and bible-study. [...] Other nationalities also have churches. Although it is strictly forbidden. But, you know, you cannot stop the word of God. We tried to conceal churches from other nationalities. Also to some – also Filipinos - who had converted to Islam. If they would find out, they would report it. So we tried to get together but keep it a secret. Although it is OK to worship in private, it is forbidden to gather.” (Marlon)*

Most OFWs interviewed fall under the category of – as one migrant labeled - ‘Christians by heart, not just by word’. It is therefore no surprise that faith plays an important role in how they live their life abroad. For many spoken to their faith has become stronger during their time abroad. John explained his faith strengthened in Saudi Arabia. He realized he did not have many people to turn to, and he turned more to God and some fellow ASHTEC students. Together they formed a strong group of Christians. They prayed for each other and held fellowships often. They were even given a room by EEI, so they could worship God and hold fellowship with other born-again Christians.

Many migrants stated they regularly felt like God was all they could really rely upon when they were abroad. Almost all of them turn to pray to God when they face difficulties or feel homesick, and it is their faith which keeps them going.

*“I have faith in the Lord. This is the best [part of migration]. You find strength in the Lord. God is all you have, God gives you strength.” (Ronald)*

*“I learned that, when I went there, if you have Christ in your heart, every time you pray, then you can work well.[...]Every Friday we had prayer meetings. With all the Christians there.[...] My faith it became stronger, because like in my company there, every Friday we came together. We explained to each other what we were doing, what our problems were. We shared our problems.” (Eric)*

Most EEI OFWs have contact with other Christians, and hold fellowships together. In Saudi Arabia and Qatar this is not always easy, as in both countries it is forbidden to gather as Christians for fellowship. Qatar officially recognizes Christianity as a religion, yet worshipping is only allowed in designated religious complexes, of which there are few. Having a bible is allowed in Qatar as long as bibles are not distributed. In Saudi Arabia Christianity is not recognized as a religion, and possession

of a Bible is usually not permitted. In both countries spreading the gospel is strictly forbidden and punishable. Muslims who convert to Christianity can face death penalty in as well Saudi Arabia, as in Qatar.

OFWs who hold fellowship are thus breaking the law. Many OFWs are aware of this, and try not to be too open about their meetings to other migrants workers. Yet their situation is not as severe as it might seem when only the laws of the countries are taken into account. EEI usually turns a blind eye to gatherings of OFW Christians. The migrant mentioned above even stated they were given a room so they could gather with Christians. Yet they have to be careful about practicing their faith out in the open, because they do not live a life separated from Muslims.

*“The first thing you will notice there, especially in Saudi Arabia, is the Muslim evangelists. They try to convince you to their faith. [...] They even bribe you to go with them to the mosque. They offer money, food. [...] To go to the mosque and educate you and so....”*(Marlon)

These Islamic missionary workers are active at the EEI projects in Saudi Arabia. Several OFWs indicate to have been approached by Muslims who wanted to convert them to Islam. Money and food are not the only things offered to migrants.

*“They try to convince me by giving assurance that I can get a big amount of money.”* (Dennis)

*“Some Filipinos, especially Catholics, tend to go to the Muslim faith. Because they are promised good compensations, especially during Ramadan: work about five hours, get paid eight hours. And secondly, the benefits they receive from the government. So various things they can promise so that other Filipinos get convinced.”* (Marlon)

Rey notes the missionaries tried to convert him to Islam by giving him tracts, pamphlets and pocket books about this religion.

The missionaries thus have different strategies to convince OFWs to convert to Islam. Some of the migrants interviewed tried to counteract their efforts. As Marlon explains:

*“ They always talk about Jesus Christ. And Christians, they say bad things about Christians. That the bible is wrong, the bible is not the word of God. So these are the things they are saying to other Filipinos. And we, as Christians, try to talk to them before they proceed. We try to tell them: ‘they are saying that the bible is wrong, but did you ever read the bible? From Genesis to Revelation?’ In our experience, some converted Muslims did not exactly read the bible from cover to cover. So in our own way we ask them: read the bible first, from Genesis*

*to Revelation. Then say to yourself if it is wrong or not. It is not only the Saudi nationals battling for this, it is also converted Filipinos, that also evangelize other people.”*

On the question how to react to Islamic missionaries, Dennis explains how he usually reacts.

*“I just smile and say that I’m happy with Christ.”*

Although it might seem like Islamic missionaries are a very common phenomenon, some OFWs, also from EEI projects in Saudi Arabia, stated they had never met these people during their time abroad. Based on the interviews with migrants, no conclusions can be drawn about how well organized these Islamic missionaries are.<sup>39</sup>

Those who stayed in countries where they could practice their faith freely, also held meetings. In Singapore the migrant church was visited regularly, although not on a weekly basis. Jonathan explains that he would like to go to church on a more regular basis, yet he cannot go there often, because it is far away and transport costs are high in Singapore:

*“Here in Singapore, like others say, there are so much temptations, and so many donomitions exist. [...]It is very important [for me to meet with Christians], but is too far from here, and sometimes I don't have much money for transportation or food.”*

Christians in Singapore state their life is hard, mainly due to the fact that they are surrounded by temptations they do not want to give in to.

*“[H]ere are many temptations. Women.. adultery is common sin here.” (Albert)*

*“Women [are a temptation], ‘cause I’m too far away from my wife, but I’m still fighting it. And vices as drinking liquor.” (Jonathan)*

Some, like Michael, have experienced being an OFW in as well Qatar, as in Singapore:

*“There’s a very big difference in terms of their culture, their government, especially their beliefs and their laws. [...]This is actually the difficulty of any foreign worker in general..we have to adopt and adjust in a new environment, regardless what their culture and existing laws are. It’s a must for us to adjust and follow according to their existing laws ,cultures and tradition. [...]In terms of their culture there’s a very big difference. Singapore is an open city whereas Qatar is a Muslim country. We all know that Muslims are very conservative, in terms*

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<sup>39</sup> Because this phenomenon of Islamic missionaries abroad was something that did not come to the fore during the first interviews, and I was unaware of the phenomenon as a researcher, I was not able to discuss this matter with all migrants. Research or other literature on this matter appears to be unavailable.

*of their beliefs and traditions, unlike Singapore, it is a mixed culture. I think their similarity is that they are both small countries yet very progressive. [...] Here in Singapore we can do whatever we want as long as it's not against the law. For example we can eat pork here, unlike in Qatar we only eat chicken, beef and seafood, but here all is allowed. Honestly, drinking is also allowed here unlike in Qatar."*

Migrants differed in which country they preferred.

*"The big difference is the many temptations in Singapore.[...] I felt my spiritual life, that I was growing then [in Qatar]. In Singapore also, but not like in Qatar."* (Albert)

*"[Q]atar is not good because it's just like..they have a king and the laws are strict. [...] [You have to be] more patient, focus on work, no more going outside."* (Alvin)

In Japan, there are few churches. Most Japanese people are not religiously affiliated. Joseph explained there was one catholic church he knew of. *"I went there once, but I need a real church."* Partly due to challenges regarding time management, and to the absence of other Christians who stimulated him to be more active in practicing his faith, his faith watered down a bit, as he did not regularly read his bible or attend bible study or fellowship anymore.

Dubai is the place where one can find several churches. Janice had visited one of them several times. She did not go there every week, yet stated she is definitely a believer and committed to staying close to God. Being a Christian in Dubai is not a problem for OFWs, according to her.

The housemaid Rowena has the hardest time in many respects. At the airport in Saudi Arabia her bible was taken away from her. She never really talked about God, let alone do bible-study or meet fellow Christians. From stories she heard some other housemaids became Muslim to please their employer. But that was a decision she would never make. She often felt like God was all she had.

*"I hold on to God, He is the only one I got. [...] If I feel bad, I pray. He is the only one I got. He is the only one I can talk to, the only one who knows what I see."*

## **6.6 Social lives of migrants**

It has become clear that many OFWs turn to God or fellow Christians when they face problems or when they battle loneliness. Since loneliness means suffering from isolation or feeling disconnected from other beings, it is relevant to see how OFWs experience the contact with other human beings. This includes as well people they encounter abroad, as people 'back home' in the Philippines. For

practical reasons people abroad are divided into several categories<sup>40</sup>: fellow OFWs at the work site, fellow workers of other nationalities, employers or supervisors, locals in the destination country, and people of the opposite sex. People at home are divided into relatives, and wives/lovers.

### **6.6.1 People encountered abroad**

Most OFWs indicate to be happy about the fact that Filipinos are widely present abroad. They prefer to work with other Filipinos, because of the bond they naturally feel because of linguistic and cultural similarities. Marlon recalls the majority of migrant workers were Filipino during his first time abroad.

*“Except from the opportunity to work abroad that was the next blessing I received. I could work easily. The communication was good, even in Tagalog. Also you tend to have some mutual feelings for them because they are also Filipino. The same culture, same language, so it gave me some ease.”*

Migrant workers everywhere tend to group based on their nationality. Janice notes that in Dubai migrant workers from different nationalities have segregated social lives. Except from Rowena, who hardly met other OFWs due to her restricted freedom, all migrants interviewed lived with other Filipinos and socialized with them on a regular basis. During their lives as a migrant worker, they however met many other nationalities. Indian, Nepalese, Bangladeshi, Sri Lankan, and Chinese migrant workers are often fellow workers at EEI projects. They do not mix with Filipinos well. Many migrant workers at EEI projects do not know English very well (also some Filipinos). This, combined with different cultural backgrounds, hampers good communication. Marlon noted that at EEI projects, groups of a certain nationality often have a foreman of their nationality. This foreman translates and communicates what the duties and tasks at work are. Communication with other nationalities is considered a challenge by all OFWs, and most of them do not feel much of a bond with migrant workers from other countries.

None of the OFWs claims to have been in serious trouble with their employer or supervisor. It is however considered important to be a good worker, and to make sure you do not get into trouble with your boss. Not only because your career is at stake, and your legal position as a migrant worker weak, but also because trouble at work gets you to worry while doing your job, and life as an OFW is already hard enough. Janice notes that she appreciates the European and American bosses she has in Dubai, because they openly appreciate and praise their personnel for their hard work. This motivates her to work hard. Rowena in Saudi Arabia also appreciates her boss, however for different reasons. Simply because he leaves her alone.

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<sup>40</sup> Strictly speaking, the categories are not mutually exclusive. E.g. a supervisor could possibly also be an OFW. Yet in general, they represent distinct groups with which OFWs deal in different ways.

OFWs are usually suspicious towards locals in the Middle East. Before they leave the Philippines for the first time, this suspicion is already present. Stories of sexual abuse of women, and severe governmental penalties on violation of laws circulate in the Philippines. This is especially the case when it comes to Saudi Arabia. Once abroad many OFWs do not get into close contact with locals, which makes it difficult to change perception. Some even tried to avoid getting into contact with locals in Saudi Arabia.

*"I tried not to mingle with nationals. Tried not to talk to them, not to contact them. Why? I heard lots and lots of stories about Saudi men: raping Filipino women... in courts they speak bad. Overall they are bad, that's what they told me. Very bad. [...] Later on I had some friends among Saudi nationals. Especially the ones who had some education, college graduates, who are more civilized. They are easy to talk to and disciplined. Other nationals who did not go to college, they had issues...difficult. But Saudis in the company were mostly professionals."*

(Marlon)

Locals represent a system of legal and behavioral rules which many OFWs do not fully understand nor support. OFWs are also aware of their weak legal position in Middle Eastern countries, in case things go wrong. OFWs working in Singapore are not negative towards locals, even though they usually do not mingle. At work they experience the same struggles communicating with other nationalities. Different nationalities only mingle in churches. These churches are present in Asian countries, but in Middle Eastern countries churches are not widely present, at least not in the open. In Qatar and Saudi Arabia OFWs hold religious meetings in small groups in the dormitories with Christians of their own nationality.

Women abroad play an interesting role in the life of male OFWs. For the OFWs at the construction sites of EEI they usually represent temptation. When asked how OFW men can meet women in countries as strict as Saudi Arabia or Qatar, one of the migrants explains the women they meet are not prostitutes, neither are they local women. The women they meet are actually female OFWs. Hundreds of thousands of Philippine nurses work in the Middle East. OFWs from EEI projects in Saudi Arabia can meet Philippine nurses every Friday. Telephone numbers are exchanged between nurses and construction workers, and even though the Saudi law forbids interaction between men and women when they are not married, the local authorities condone this. These are the moments (sexual) relationships start:

*"Every Friday it is resting day. We can go to the city. And the nurses from the hospital go there too. That's how we meet women. And the police from our province is not very strict."*

*'Cause it's officially forbidden to get together as men and women. [...] These Filipinas also have husbands. But they say: 'it's lonely here'.*" (Marlon)

In Singapore women can be met more directly and openly. One OFW admits he got into relationships with some Filipinas abroad, while also having a lover in the Philippines. Alvin explain the temptation of women is hard to resist:

*"In a time that there are many women in my life, [it is hard to concentrate]. It's wrong, I know, but I'm a man. I have a girlfriend in the Philippines, and I got two here before."*

Janice in Dubai notes hectic working schedules make it hard to build relationships. For her this is not a problem, because she lives with her husband. A friend of hers however, who was a single lady in her mid-twenties, sometimes complained to her that the long working hours prevented her from meeting and socializing with people from the opposite sex. Many OFWs in Dubai worked ten hours a day, six days a week. Investing in social relations is not easy when time is limited.

### **6.6.2 People from 'back home'**

The most important contacts OFWs had with people in the Philippines are those with family members and lovers. It is for them OFWs had gone abroad in the first place, it is by referring to them that they legitimized the decision they made.

The great value OFWs put on good relations with 'home' became visible again and again. When asked what factors can make migration unsuccessful, deteriorating relationships with relatives in the Philippines was often mentioned. When asked what the secret is to keeping up your spirit abroad, good relations and communication with the relatives or lovers in the Philippines is again on top of the list. When talking about struggles encountered during lives abroad, stories of miscommunication and quarrels with family members or lovers come to the fore. When asked about common problems of OFWs, problems resulting from the separation of spouses or lovers scores high. All these examples show how fundamental good communication with 'home' is. Some explain trouble with the family or with a lover in the Philippines is that one thing which puts a shadow over the whole migration. Yet every OFW struggles to keep good relations with home.

*"Many OFWs in Dubai struggle. I have heard heart-breaking stories. Mothers struggling for their families. Most Filipinos are like that. They are not coming home. They are just here fighting for their families. To pay for studies, housing, basic needs."* (Janice)

The stress of separation is different for those who have a lover/spouse in the Philippines, and those who have not. Those with lovers or spouses, tend to worry about keeping this person and themselves

committed to the relationship they are in. Marlon explained he and his wife have been struggling to make it work.

*“You know, our relationship is...we much more often argue than just speak to each other. We argue about a lot of things. About not texting for example. So when I get up from bed I text ‘good morning’, ‘hello’, ‘did you eat?’ Sometimes, you know, other people they don’t have anything to do. Some girl in the Philippines, she texts her, telling her that she is my girlfriend, that she is pregnant and that I am the father. Yeah, a lot of those things happen, especially when I am away.[...] I try to tell her I love her, I am a Christian, I cannot do that.”*

All recall stories of others who are having affairs, or whose wives/lovers are having affairs. Yet most married OFWs try to avoid starting an affair, and stay in close contact with their wife/lover in the Philippines in several ways. Daily contact with someone in the Philippines is usual for OFWs with a spouse or lover there. The phone is the main mean of communication, for both texting and calling. Some migrants explain why it so important to stay in touch.

*“[A common problem OFWs have is] lack of attention from their family. Many of coworkers are worried about the situation of their wife in the Philippines. Some others don’t communicate. So communication is important. To know others.” (Albert)*

*“Communication is a very effective way to have a good relationship with your loved ones. When there is a problem, inform them. When they have a problem, let them inform you. Try to talk about it. Sometimes the wife can get really lonely and when you don’t communicate she might do things which are not so good. So share things.” (Marlon)*

Some OFWs without lover/spouse in the Philippines, also have contact with relatives on a daily basis. Yet for most this happens less often, usually once a week. The phone is for almost all OFWs the main mean of communication, because access to a computer with internet is not always possible, especially not for those at EEI projects in remote areas. During a day off, some go to places where they can access a computer with internet, so they can use Skype or Facebook to communicate. Those who have a job which requires them to use a computer, or who have access to internet themselves, tend to use that more often. Almost all migrants consider themselves to be open to those ‘back home’ about their life abroad and how they experience it. Yet most consider it not necessarily desirable to share everything. Making people in the Philippines worry about you is something migrants try hard to avoid. Especially when the other cannot do anything about the situation.

*“If we had a problem between us we tried to talk about it. But if the problem is about work, especially when I was sick, I tried not to tell her. I don’t want her to get worried too much.”*

*Epecially not her: when she knows I'm sick, she worries a lot. She would cry sometimes, because she worried no one would care for me. She wanted to take care of me. But sometimes, I was thinking: I should tell her, I don't want her .. you know .. if something would happen to me they wouldn't know. So I tell her: I'm sick, but I'm OK. Even though she tends to get worried. It's hard. Also for me." (Marlon)*

*"I do not always share difficulties with my parents. I do not want them to worry about me. Especially my mum, she worries about me." (Joseph)*

Some simply do not have very good contacts with home. Ronald, an OFW who worked in Qatar, explained he did not share much of his life abroad with his relatives, and they hardly ever appreciated what he was doing. His father had died some time ago. He felt like he was the father of the family because he was the breadwinner, yet they saw him as solely as a provider of income.

*"I give the money to my brother and sister..[they are]happy. But when I received a call from my brother or sister, it is only money they want. 'Give money, give money'. But never do they call 'You are my brother, it everything OK?' No! Only money. They don't talk to me or call me 'are you OK? Are you alright?' No."*

Only once his mother said something supportive.

*"My mother and sister were crying. My mother said: 'My son, I'm sorry for your hard work in Qatar. I'm sorry for your responsibilities for your brother."*

This migrant did however call with his aunt and uncle sometimes. Unlike his parents, they asked about his whereabouts abroad, and he felt supported because of that.

Eric had some advice for those who experience problems with their wife in the Philippines: think about who in the Philippines can help her with it, and in that way make sure you do not worry too much about things you cannot do much about.

*"Leave problems to parents or brothers to fix it. Otherwise you'll start to worry."*

There is another practical reason for not discussing problems: the time to communicate is limited. Since time is already limited, migrants and their spouses/lovers do not always want to spend it on quarreling or solving problems. A result of this is, that little time is spend on really working things out.

*"[W]hen I'm abroad, when we have a problem we can't talk about it for a long time. If I'm here, we can speak all day. But abroad I work. There is no time to talk much. The problem*

*gets bigger, worse. But we try to talk about it, in the simplest way we can. So the problem will be solved that day.” (Marlon)*

Not only are some things barely or not discussed with spouses or lovers, other relatives are also not fully informed about what is going on. When asked whether relatives and lovers in the Philippines understand the situation of the migrant, answers are mixed. Some are clear in the fact that they share everything, and relatives know all about their situation. Others admit that people in the Philippines do not always understand their situation and the hard work that is done in order to earn the salary. Ronald felt like his family was exploiting him, only wanting his money. Some families put their own material wishes before the wishes of the migrant, giving the migrant the feeling to have little other options than to keep working abroad. The link between the social and the economic life of a migrant and those (s)he cares about in the Philippines, becomes clear in the next part.

### **6.7 What happens with the money**

It has become clear that communication with relatives or lovers can influence greatly how a migrant experiences migration. It however also influence the length and benefits of migration on the long term in a major way, as is illustrated by the story of John.

John is already working abroad for EEI in Saudi Arabia for five years. Before he started working abroad, he and many of his family members had jobs, therefore the family did not rely on him too much for income. Yet in his opinion it was not enough. He wanted to better the living conditions of the family, by providing more money for schooling and housing. His family was very supportive of his migration plans, because their living standard would increase. John started saving from the first time he went abroad. Unfortunately, his wife kept spending all his savings. At a certain point he made up his mind, and started keeping money away from her. Conflicts over money arose. His wife accused him of not trusting her enough. After a while, and after explaining his reasons to her, she accepted the fact that she could not access part of the money. John calls with his wife every day. Yet his experiences taught him not to share all his plans and ideas with her and the rest of the family. According to John, they sabotage his future plans by demanding too much, so he prefers to start carrying out his plans without them knowing. John is saving money to start a business. He estimates that about 50 percent of his family members have a more or less realistic view about his situation abroad. The rest thinks his life is easy there, that he is just picking money off money trees.

John is not the only one who had trouble getting his finances in order. Almost all OFWs admit they have had quarrels about money with their relatives. When abroad for the first time, the lure of

luxuries is hard to resist for as well migrants, as their relatives. While some migrants turn to buying luxuries, families also spend money on more than basic needs.

*“Before, I was a big spender. The first two years of my OFW life. It was the first time I had money. I bought a lot of gadgets and food. I misused my money for two years. [...] I’m happy, but maybe I regret this sometimes. [...] If I could have saved a small amount a month...now I have no money for emergencies.” (Janice)*

While this increase in spending and the acquiring of luxuries is somehow understandable, it can lead to developing spending habits which cannot be changed overnight. For some this has more consequences than for others. Janice admitted she was not proud of her spending habits during the first years, yet she did not regret it. She wants to learn from her mistakes, but does not want to be too hard on herself. This might be due to the fact that it did not have many consequences for her personally.

For others, not having clear ideas about where they want their money to go, can change their life course. Marlon spoke about his managing of finances lightly, yet the decisions he and his family had made concerning the money, caused him to be a migrant for many more years than initially thought:

*“I know where the money goes, so it is OK. I don’t have regrets. [...] First when I left I said I’d be there for three years. Because my contract was three years. After that I had a choice. After that I said to myself, after that I will stop, I will not go abroad anymore. But then, I got married, have a child, and I said to myself: no, as long as I’m seeing that we will be having a hard time if I stop, I will not stop. [...] First next time I will save money for a house. Next, I’ll save money for a business. And then, when the business is going well, I will stop.”*

He was already working abroad for six years and had no savings whatsoever.

Two returned migrants had had clear goals with their migration, and they had stuck to their plan. Eric had agreed with his wife he would go abroad for three years, so they could buy a house and a lot. He went abroad to Saudi Arabia, they saved for it, he returned to the Philippines, they bought the property. Now he works in the Philippines. Daniel also went to Saudi Arabia. He wanted to save money for a business. It is almost the same story. He agreed with his wife on the plan, he went abroad for three years, saved money for the startup, he returned to the Philippines, started the business. Unfortunately his businesses failed. Regardless of this failure, the two cases show that some migrants and their families did set clear goals for their migration, and realized these goals. A few migrants also note they are saving money for a business, although it is not clear when they will have enough capital for a startup. Alvin invested in the business of his brothers, and wanted to join

them in business one day, when he will return. Janice is the only migrant who invested in a more complicated manner. She had just become involved in investments in stock via Friend Provident. This was her way of saving.

Migrants and their families certainly do not spend all their money on luxury or consumer items. All provide in the daily needs of relatives, and without their help families would be worse off in material terms. Due to OFWs' remittances, basic needs are covered; siblings or children are able to go to school; relatives receive medication; and houses and lots are built or renovated.

Even though money might be spend on good causes, the majority of migrants does either not save at all, or saves a different amount every month (depending on the needs and wants of themselves and the receivers of remittances). Lack of long-term financial planning is a general problem migrants encounter, and a problem many admit. This became fully clear when migrants were asked what they would have done differently if they could start their migration period all over again. Saving from the start of their OFW life, or saving on a more regular basis was the answer given by many.

The reason why it is hard to save for many of them, is because they are in the role of provider. This is a role which migrants take on themselves, but which is also forced upon them by usually relatives. Nearly all migrants have had quarrels about money with their family at some point. Jonathan indicated his family tended to become unreasonable in the amount of money they ask of him.

*"Sometimes [I have conflicts with my family], because sometimes they ask money, when I don't have money, and my salary has not come yet."*

The lifestyle of families who receive remittances adjusts to the income they receive. This can be the start of what Atikha labels 'the dependency issue': families change their lifestyle using the income of a migrant, then become dependent upon the migrant's salary for maintaining their new lifestyle. As the story of John at the beginning of this section shows, it might take strong measures to change such a situation. If it is not changed, migrants who want to return to the Philippines get stuck between their own aspirations and the wishes of their family. Some of the OFWs spoken to see this happen, but do not know how to turn it around. Others are not aware of the fact that they facilitate this process of making their families dependent on their salary.

Yet it is not always the OFW's family who makes it hard to save for the future. Sometimes it is the migrant himself who does not manage the money well, and the family who jumps in to set things straight. Janice explained how her mother saved behind her back from the remittances she sent, because the mother was afraid she spent too much and saved nothing. Her mother is also the one

who encouraged her to start saving again and again. Not only for the future, but also because until very recently she did not have any savings for calamities.

### **6.8 Aspirations for return**

All migrants currently working for EEI abroad wanted to return to the Philippines. Most of them did not have a clear date or year in mind. One indicated he wished to return to his family when he turns forty. Rowena, the housemaid in Saudi Arabia, wished to return after finishing her contract. Joseph in Japan and Janice in Dubai are the only ones who do not have any ideas about whether or when they would like to return to the Philippines for good. Their social life is mainly abroad, and the working conditions are not that difficult that they would like to return to the Philippines. The migrants working for EEI however do wish to return.

When asked what migrants would like to do for work once they would return, most migrants reply they would like to start their own business. Some have clear ideas about the nature of this business.

*“I would like to make a shop, like welding shop, metal fabrication.”* (Jonathan)

*“I want to manage my own business. Fruits and rice. It’s my dream. I have only one hectare of land. I’ll buy more land after coming back to the Philippines.”* (Ronald)

Some have clear ideas about the nature of the business they would like to run, yet do not have much hope they can ever realize their ideas.

*“I want to have taxi or a chain of taxis but with my salary here it’s impossible to reach that goal. If it’s possible it will take years.”* (Michael)

The fact that many want to start a business, matches with the experiences of Atikha, who find that migrants often express a wish to start a business after return. Running your own business can bring you a higher salary than working for an employer in the Philippines, which makes it an attractive option.

Even though some OFWs abroad have clear ideas about the nature of the business they would like to run, none have taken concrete steps to work out any (financial) possibilities.

Although most OFWs who are still abroad wish to return to the Philippines someday, most do not have a clear idea of when they wish to return and what they will do for living once they return. This might not always have dramatic consequences, but, especially for those who have a lover/spouse in the Philippines, the consequences of the absence of a plan should not be underestimated. It tends to prolong the migration period. What seems to be missing, is what could be labeled an ‘exit strategy’.

An exit strategy is a strategy for withdrawal once 'the job is done' while not damaging what has been build so far.

## **6.9 Summary**

The number one reason to go abroad is to support needs of relatives. And that is what OFWs do: relatives go to school; parents receive medication; houses are built or renovated; and luxuries are bought. Those who were married often send money to as well their spouse (and children), as to other relatives such as their parents and siblings. Those who have a lover in the Philippines also support this lover financially.

The first months abroad are usually hard for OFWs. Stress over leaving relatives or lovers behind, adjustment problems to another climate and another culture, and working in a multicultural and multilingual work place cause stress among migrants. Homesickness is usually severe during the first months.

After a few months OFWs are usually able to handle the changes. Some struggles however remain. Common struggles of OFWs are: loneliness; boredom; worries about the fidelity of a lover, spouse or of themselves; and material wishes of relatives. When they are sick, OFW suffer especially from homesickness. Yet pride of having a high income and being able to provide for the family is also present in the minds of OFWs. Some note the migration period made them grow in character.

Nearly all OFWs find great strength in God when they are abroad. They pray, do bible study, talk to fellow Christians, or hold prayer meetings abroad. Even though Christians were not allowed to gather in Saudi Arabia and Qatar, many OFWs who worked there held fellowship every week. Many stated their faith got stronger during their time abroad. They felt like God was their stronghold in struggles. In Saudi Arabia, OFWs encountered Islamic missionaries who tried to convert Filipinos to Islam. The missionaries talked to them about Allah, and offered them monetary benefits. Although the temptations of starting an extramarital relationship is also present in Middle Eastern countries, they are more severe in Singapore. In Singapore, OFWs' faith and moral standards are challenged by women, alcohol, and cigarettes. It is tempting to let go of moral standards in such an open environment.

The social lives of OFW consist of contact with people abroad, and contact with people in the Philippines. OFWs enjoy the company of other OFWs abroad, as it makes communication easier and gives a common ground to start from. Migrants from different nationalities do usually not mingle in the social arena, but instead live separate social lives. OFWs try to avoid getting into trouble with supervisors, as that causes them a lot of stress, and they are in a weak (legal) position. Women

mainly represent temptation for male OFWs. It is not difficult to meet women abroad, even in Saudi Arabia female OFWs are met. OFWs who start a relationship with a women to ease loneliness are widely present abroad. Most OFWs spoken to tried to turn to God, fellow Christians, or their relatives when they were feeling lonely or faced other difficulties.

Communication with relatives or spouses/lovers in the Philippines is considered very important to make migration successful. Deteriorating family relations are the cause of stress and have the potential to make the whole migration period a failure. Most OFWs state they shared everything with 'home'. Yet when asked whether difficulties were also shared, some were reluctant. Making beloved ones worry about you, is something OFWs try to avoid. Limited time makes it hard to work through problems. Some migrants claim they do not have good relationship with those 'back home'. This is due to the fact that some family members place more value on the money the migrant can provide them with, than about the well-being of the migrant.

The length and benefits of migration are influenced by the relationship with relatives, and agreements about the spending of money. When OFWs went abroad for the first time, the lure of luxuries was for some hard to resist. And so was the lure of luxuries for family members. For most this changes after a few years, yet it can be hard to change spending habits of all people involved. Although most OFWs indicate they wish to return to the Philippines someday, few have clear plans for their return. Many indicate they would like to start their own business after return, some already know what the nature of this business should be. Yet few OFWs save money for their return. Those who do save money, usually save on an irregular basis. Even though some have goals with their savings, they do not have a time span in mind. The absence of concrete plans enlarges the chances of having a migration period which is much longer than initially thought.

## **CHAPTER 7: Theorizing up**

### **7.1 Introduction**

Causal links between geographical mobility (migration) and economic mobility (part of development) are often suggested. Migrants suggest the links, academic publications or publications from (n)go's explain the links (see Chapter 2), and the culture of migration in the Philippines normalizes migration as a way to increase income. Supposedly migration leads to a better life. Yet stories of migrants and experiences of experts, show a closer look needs to be taken at the links between geographic mobility and economic mobility. Inabilities to return to the Philippines, because of fears of falling back into poverty questions the conditions under which migration leads to economic mobility. If a precondition for economic mobility is that an OFW never returns to his or her family, perhaps the economic mobility comes at severe non-monetary costs, and its sustainability is fragile. In this chapter the complicated relationship between migration and economic mobility will first be analyzed, by critically reflecting upon migration as a livelihood strategy. Secondly, the question why so few people have a clear plan behind their migration will be discussed. Thirdly, the problem of considering migration a solely economic activity will be laid out. Fourthly, insights from phenomenological geography will be introduced in order to reflect upon the importance of routines in creating a meaningful life and meaningful social relations, and what this means for OFWs and their families. The chapter ends with a summary.

### **7.2 How strategic is a livelihood strategy?**

It is tempting to explain the situation of OFWs by taking a livelihood approach. The links OFWs had to ASHTEC (social capital), the knowledge and skills they acquired at ASHTEC (human capital), and the structures surrounding them facilitating migration (institutional and hermeneutic), lead to an improvement of the livelihood of their families in terms of human capital (education for children), physical capital (some bought a house or lot), and financial capital (more options to buy or invest). If we put it like this, migration is part of their livelihood strategy, enhancing the livelihood, leading to development.

Yet, when the migration of OFWs and its contribution to development is explained this way, a few important things are overlooked. When talking about a 'strategy', there is a supposed logic and purposefulness in human actions. The stories of OFWs in this thesis show that this is not necessarily the case. Behavior is not always very logical and thought-out. In the former chapter it has been described that many OFWs spoken to did not have a clear purpose with their migration, nor did they stick to a plan. If we use the word strategy at all, we could best describe the migration of those OFWs as a 'survival strategy' (Bebbington, 1999: 18). As a survival strategy, the main purpose of migration

is to make ends meet at the very moment of migration. The migrant is able to achieve economic mobility as long as migration takes. It is a strategy with little or no long-term perspective. Besides migration as a survival strategy, there are those who use migration as an 'accumulation strategy'. Those for whom migration is an accumulation strategy, are able to make migration contribute to a structural step out of poverty, even after they return.

*"Migration is often, of course, merely a survival strategy – in many contexts families scarcely scrape by, and the cost to the migrant is enormous. [...] But in some cases migration has allowed significant family accumulation. [...] It is therefore informative to look at cases where migration has gone beyond a survival strategy and has become part of an accumulation strategy, in order to understand how this has been possible."* (Bebbington, 1999: 18)

Some OFWs have gone somewhat beyond a survival strategy, by investing in education, housing or land. Investments in education and children's health, can prevent intergenerational transmission of poverty. Yet these investments, and also the investments in housing and land, do usually not lay ground for a structural step out of poverty for the generation of the OFW. This is because it is not part of a coherent accumulation strategy which includes a long term perspective. Most OFWs simply fail to make migration contribute to a structural step out of poverty, a structural step which becomes independent of remittances. Instead they keep migrating, and live with a so-called *return illusion* (Düvell & Vogel, 2006). The idea to return is there, yet it is always postponed. In the end they might never return. The question is whether it is a problem when migrants use migration merely for survival. The answer is simple: yes. It is a problem because almost all OFWs indicate they wish to return to the Philippines sooner or later. Yet they cannot return without harsh consequences for their financial situation. The saying 'once an OFW, always an OFW' indicates that many are not able to take the structural step out of poverty. Migration is a medicine many will take forever. A sustainable improvement of a livelihood is apparently not a natural consequence of migration .

There is another critical note that needs to be made when migration is merely a survival strategy: its contribution to regional economic development is minimal. If people are able to accumulate significantly, they have opportunities to start new economic activities or invest in existing ones. It is only through input in economic activities that regional development is sustainably boosted.

### **7.3 A culture of non-reflectiveness**

With so many people migrating, and so few people having a clear strategy behind migration, the question arises: why do so few people have a plan with their migration? Apparently, considering all decisions regarding a livelihood 'strategic' goes too far, yet it seems that for some the opposite is true: nothing strategic is found in their actions. The culture of migration is likely to be the cause of

this. It has led to a normalization of migration as a livelihood option. When so many Filipinos migrate, and so many ideas surround migration, fundamental questions fade away. Why am I actually doing this? What do I wish to achieve with it? Is it worth the hardship I and my relatives will have to bear? Such questions are not asked, or not often enough. People jump into the adventure of migration with vague ideas of what migration will bring them. The normalization of migration causes a non-reflectiveness on the practice. The normalization takes place as well at the household level as at the level of 'structures and processes' (institutionalization and promotion of migration). Little differences seem to be made between the benefits an individual can have from migration, and the benefits a country can have. If OFWs are addressed as 'heroes of the nation', one might wonder whether this is because of what they do for their families, or for the fact that they contribute to the available foreign exchange income for the Philippine government, which stabilizes the economy. What is really heroic about what OFWs do? This type of question loses its urgency because of the normalization of migration.

Local conceptions of migration as being an efficient way of enhancing a livelihood, can thus result in a non-reflectiveness on the practice. Bebbington (1999) pays attention to the local embeddedness of livelihood choices in general. He claims choices and behavior, can be a way to create a meaningful life. If we relate this argument to what is just said about the culture of migration, then migration can be considered a meaningful cultural activity in itself, and as such it is not questioned thoroughly anymore. L. de Haan's (2008) emphasizes that migration is part of the trend of the times: globalization. Recognizing this, means recognizing that livelihoods are increasingly multi-local. The tendency to become mobile is not only a Philippine one. Yet in the Philippines the culture of migration has its own specific features, because of its institutionalization and promotion by the government.

One might say it is all just a matter of perspective. A matter of mobility metaphysics (Cresswell 2006). Filipinos simply reason from a nomadic perspective, i.e. mobility is a normal aspect of human behavior, even a sign of progress, freedom and change. When in some other contexts migration might be considered a threat towards stability and the usual moral order (sedentarist perspective), in the Philippines it is an accepted and common practice. It might be true that migration is an accepted and common practice, but this neutral approach does no justice to the complexity of the situation. Many OFWs do wish to return to the Philippines someday. They just do not see how they could. Either considering all migration natural (based on a nomadic perspective), or considering all migration inherently problematic (based on sedentarist reasoning), tends to reflect ideological or cultural considerations, instead of pragmatic ones. If OFWs have a strong desire to go back to the Philippines, mobility could be seen as undesirable, at least on the long term. However, if OFWs feel

just fine abroad, and those closest to them are also doing fine, there may be no reasons to consider their migration intrinsically problematic.

One of the founders of Atikha made the crucial point during the interview, when she stated she firmly believed in the right to move elsewhere, that she even considers this a natural phenomenon, yet what Atikha aims to achieve is that migrants have the choice to return. Now many OFWs feel returning is simply not an option.

The influence of a culture of migration upon the choices people make surrounding migration should not be underestimated. Migration is embedded in social structures, and the way people do (not) reflect on migration is a reflection of these structures.

#### **7.4 The problem with regarding migration a purely economic activity**

Most migrants go abroad because they want to earn (more) money. The stories and experiences described in Chapter 6 make clear that labor migration however affects people holistically, not only economically. Even though most migrants go abroad to earn money, they do not only develop new ways of dealing with money, but also new ways of dealing with relatives, cultural differences, their own mental well-being and their faith. One can study all these aspects separately, yet it is clear that all aspects are related. The story of John in Chapter 6.7 for example, shows that contacts with relatives greatly influence economic possibilities. They also affect his mental health, which affects his behavior. The point is that even though initial reasons for migration might be economic, the process and outcomes are certainly more than economic. It is not the money in itself that makes migrant families rich or that creates opportunities. It is what the money is used for that creates change. Choices about the use of money are not the result of economic calculations. To assume that all actions regarding money are rational and aim at maximizing utility reflects a poor understanding of human behavior. Spending and saving habits are embedded in cultural and social contexts, and are influenced by personal wishes and abilities to exercise decision making powers. Besides this, willingness to reflect upon practices and the ability to see or predict consequences of spending habits on the long term, also affects how money is being used. The mental state migrants are in, their religious convictions, their knowledge, and the contacts with people encountered and contacted, all influence their behavior, including spending behavior. In the end, it is thus human behavior with regards to money management which is at the foundation of economic (non-)development, not solely increases of income.

#### **7.5 Routines and meaning**

Migration is often taken as meaning 'to change places'. 'Place' is understood mathematically, as absolute, geographical space. In human geography, different types of spaces are distinguished. Social

space, is something different than geographical space. When one migrates while keeping close bonds with people 'left behind', a disruption of social and geographical space occurs. Social life takes place at one level, often transnational, while physical life takes place at another level because it is still limited by geographical factors. This change needs adaptations from people involved.

In the former chapters it can be read that adapting to changes brought about by migration is not always easy. In order to understand why it can be hard for OFWs and their families to adapt to changes in their financial, social, psychological and spiritual lives in a constructive way, insights from phenomenological geography are helpful. Phenomenological geographers aim to understand essential structures of human experience (phenomenological) in their spatial context (geographical).

Seamon (1980) claims that peoples everyday lives exist for a large part out of routines. He states that people usually do not reflect on their everyday life-situation, because it is taken for granted. A 'natural attitude' is common, in which things and experiences go unnoticed and unquestioned. The world which people experience and in which they operate, is called their 'lifeworld'. *"Immersed in the natural attitude, people do not normally examine the lifeworld or even recognize its existence; it is concealed as a phenomenon."* (Seamon, 1980: 149) People are able to take on a natural attitude, partly because the body directs a lot of movements without people being consciously aware of it. The body is involved in routines, which create continuity, familiarity, and stability in people's lifeworld. As such routines attribute meaning to a lifeworld. Many of the routines take place in one geographical space. Seamon distinguishes three 'types' of routines. Body-ballets, time-space routines, and place-ballets. Small sets of habitual behaviors, like bathroom routines, are called body-ballets (Seamon 1980: 157). Sets of habitual bodily behaviors which fuse into routines which extend through a considerable portion of time are called 'time-space routines' (Seamon 1980: 158). Morning routines are examples of this. In certain places, body-ballets and time-space routines of different people are interwoven on a regular basis. This interwovenness can bring a certain dynamic to places (cafes, market places, certain streets), which creates a strong sense of place, and can fuel a sense of belonging. Seamon calls this a 'place-ballet' (1980: 159) Changes in routines can cause stress or irritation.

Life thus largely exists out of routines, those routines create stability and meaning, and of many routines we are not consciously aware of how they shape our lives. What is routinized is not only our bodily behavior, but also our understanding of the world and the things we do and see. The routines Seamon talks about, are by others referred to as social practices. A social practice can be defined as follows:

*“a routinized type of behaviour which consists of several elements, interconnected to one another: forms of bodily activities, forms of mental activities, ‘things’ and their use, a background knowledge in the form of understanding, know-how, states of emotion and motivational knowledge. A practice – a way of cooking, of consuming, of working, of investigating, of taking care of oneself or of others, etc. – forms so to speak a ‘block’ whose existence necessarily depends on the existence and specific interconnectedness of these elements, and which cannot be reduced to any of these single elements.” (Reckwitz 2002: 249)*

Social practices thus exist out of bodily routines, mental routines of understanding and knowing, and the use of objects. If routines are such important building blocks for a person’s life, and attribute meaning to it, it is relevant to see what happens to routines in the lives of OFWs and their families. At the moment an OFW goes abroad, many routines are discontinued. Routines in a marriage, in family life, routines of practicing one’s faith, routines of handling money, routines of understanding a person’s role in the world around him or her, and so on. This discontinuation of routines can lead to a crisis of meaning, because regular ways in which people creating a meaningful life and meaningful relationships are discontinued.

Let us start with envisioning marriage and family-life in the light of the theories mentioned. Both can also be seen as at least largely constituted by bundles of social practices such as body-ballets or time-space routines. The body is involved in ‘practices of being married’. Acceptation, affection, love, appreciation, being together, but also in struggles and disagreements. It is the body which tends to send stronger signals than words, and these actions are often routinized. Couples *are* not only married, they also *practice* being-married. These acts of being a married couple give the world its orderliness, and for a married couple it affirms that they are really together and married. Expressions of love or being-married, are interpreted in a certain way because of conditioned interpretation and routinization of practices. How married couples live, becomes part of a lifeworld. As such it can be somewhat taken for granted, and not an object of conscious attention. Couples might not reflect upon basic conditions constituting a marriage, because it is taken with a natural attitude. Material things also play their part in social practices, and thus also in the ‘act’ of being married. Staying under one roof, buying foods someone likes, are ways in which materiality is involved in the act of being married. But also living in the same environment creates a sense of togetherness, order and familiarity. When a family member migrates, lifeworlds become more separated than before, and many social practices which reaffirm belonging or create a sense of home become impossible.

Marriage has clear spatial and temporal dimensions. As many marriage vows state: I will stay *with* you (space), *forever* (time). Being *with* each other, obviously becomes problematic for a considerable period of *time* during migration of one of the spouses. Relationships between parents and children also take shape in social practices, which reaffirm the importance of the relationship. Examples of such routines are bedtime rituals, or family eating rituals. If families experience separation due to migration, their notions of what it means to be a family can be challenged. Disruption of time-space routines, or separation of lifeworlds, can cause severe stress because it challenges the way life is understood. For single OFWs migration can also mean a disruption of family-routines, yet their role as an adult son/daughter assumes that they do not emotionally commit to the family as much as married OFWs do. Still any relationship can get under pressure when routines are discontinued. One migrant noted she felt like her friendships with friends in the Philippines had deteriorated since she left the country, because spending time with them and having contact with them became a lot less easy.

Not only relations with family members in the Philippines consist largely out of routinized practices. Expressions of identity and religious practices also, such as certain ways of spending time off, visiting a church, praying. As social practices include a way of understanding (Reckwitz, 2002: 249), and understanding is contextual (see Chapter 3.3.4) apparently mental and spiritual well-being are expressed in social practices of which the spatial dimension (location) is likely to influence how its meaning is experienced. What we see among OFWs is that what they believe to be right or to be true (like faithfulness to a spouse or believe in God) can become under pressure when contexts change and regular practices through which believes are expressed are disrupted. Interesting is, that some are willing to give up comfort and pleasures for a structure in which they cannot develop habits (routines) which reflect a lifestyle they do not want to adopt. For example, one migrant stated he would rather work in Qatar than in Singapore, because even though the laws in Qatar are much stricter than in Singapore, at least he is better able to hold on to his faith and to stay faithful to his wife (see Chapter 6.4). Many OFWs started new routines abroad, through which their lives become meaningful for them and through which they can cling to their values and to the identity they create and maintain. These routines are e.g. regular contact and bible-studies with other Christians, and regular contact with people in the Philippines. In Chapter 6.6.2, it can be read how OFWs value regular contact with their spouse, in order to maintain good relations. Although routines are disrupted by migration, new routines are thus developed.

The fact that much behavior and understanding is routinized, can even be related to the management of finances. In Chapter 7.2, it has been explained that money OFWs make is more often used as part of a survival strategy, than as part of an accumulation strategy. OFWs stick to the

ways they handled money and envisioned the role of money before they migrated, because their way of thinking about money is conditioned, a way of thinking which includes little future planning. Besides that, OFWs understand the routinized sending of remittances as a meaningful social activity, even though spending habits/routines may not be beneficial in the long term. Yet many continue to send money home so relatives are happy, and as such their spending routines contribute to having a meaningful relationship with 'home'. If OFWs and their families wish to come to use migration as an accumulation strategy, routinized spending habits and understanding of the benefits of migration needs to change. This might however be hard because the meaning OFWs create by sending remittances will then change too. It is therefore valuable that OFWs attend financial literacy programs *with* a family member (like Atikha promotes).

Ideas from phenomenological geography are helpful to understand how bodily routines and spatial activities attribute to creating meaningful social relations and a meaningful life, and provide an explanation of how life can get strained when routines are discontinued. The discontinuation can of course also create opportunities to make changes for the better. Routinized behavior and understanding is not always positive, and when people move away from their regular environment, it can shake things up, expose what values they hold high, and give time to reassess what is truly important for them in life. ASHTEC can play a role in helping OFWs understand the importance of routines, and thinking with them about developing new routines in order to maintain meaningful relationships, cling to values and plan for the future.

## **7.6 Summary**

The links between migration and development are not causal or one-dimensional. It could be suggested that migration is part of a livelihood strategy, and as such contributes to development. Yet the lack of a coherent plan behind migration, suggests that migration is often merely a survival strategy, and not an accumulation strategy. Migration helps people to get by at the moment of migration, but it does not help them in taking a structural step out of poverty which eventually becomes independent of remittances. Livelihoods can only contribute to sustainable development when migrants and their families are able to use migration as part of an accumulation strategy. This gives migrants the option to return to the Philippines, without falling back into poverty. It is also the most sustainable way to contribute to regional economic development, because sustainable economic development means more than increased cash inflows, it means the creation of economic activities and job opportunities.

Why do so few OFWs have a strategy behind their migration? The culture of migration in the Philippines is likely to be of influence on this. It has led to normalization of migration as an option to

enhance a livelihood. This normalization causes a non-reflectiveness on the practice, which is visible in the lack of coherent strategies behind migration. Migration turns into a cultural practice, which is locally embedded, even though it is part of the trend of globalization. The influence of a culture of migration upon the choices people make surrounding migration should not be underestimated. Migration is embedded in social structures, and the way people do (not) reflect on migration is a reflection of these structures.

Considering migration a rational economic activity, displays a poor understanding of human behavior. Even though initial reasons for migration might be economic, the process and outcomes are certainly more than economic. Spending and saving habits are embedded in cultural and social contexts, and are influenced by personal wishes and abilities to exercise decision making powers. It is not the money in itself that makes migrant families rich or that creates opportunities. It is what the money is used for that creates change. And making decisions about money, is much more than an economic process.

Insights for phenomenological geography are helpful in understanding how large parts of people's lives exist out of routinized behavior and routinized understanding. These routines create meaning and stability. When an OFW migrates, meaningful activities and ways of understanding can become distorted because of the fact that routines are often spatially bound. This leads to stress. Family routines, routines between spouses, routines of practicing one's faith, routines of expressing one's values, and routinized understanding of one's role in the world are often discontinued. For many OFWs, developing new routines through which meaning is reaffirmed, can help them creating meaningful relationships and a meaningful life. Of some routinized ways of understanding, it might however be useful to change them, in order to plan for the future. This is e.g. routinized understanding of the role of money in family life. This has to change in order to come to use migration as part of an accumulation strategy instead of a survival strategy. ASHTEC can play a role in helping OFWs understand the importance of routines, and thinking with them about developing new routines in order to maintain meaningful relationships, cling to values and plan for the future. After all, the fact that life can get strained due to migration, is something ASHTEC staff cannot just put aside, because they are the co-providers of the opportunity to migrate through the education offered.



## **CHAPTER 8: Recommendations**

### **8.1 Introduction**

Two things have become clear in this thesis. The first is that envisioning migration of OFWs as a purely economic process, and as such considering decisions regarding migration as being rational and aiming at maximizing utility, does no justice to the situation many migrants are in. Migration affects migrants and their families in many ways, not only economically. Social relations influence greatly the course of migrants' lives, as well as the possibilities migration brings them. At the same time migration shakes up identity processes and religious convictions, and influences mental well-being of migrants and their relatives.

Secondly, it has become clear, that migration does not naturally lead to 'a better life'. The lack of planning and the absence of a long-term vision lead to a situation in which many migrants can only maintain the economic progress they have created by continuing to migrate. Yet considering the fact that most wish to return to the Philippines sooner or later, it is desirable that OFWs and their families come to use migration as an accumulation strategy, not merely a survival strategy. This offers migrants a possibility for return which will not make all progress undone. This also creates opportunities to link migration to regional economic development, since sustainable economic development means more than increased cash inflows from abroad, it means the creation of economic activities and job opportunities.

In this final chapter an answer to the main research question is formulated. The research question is: *How can the vocational training school ASHTEC improve the role it plays in making migration contribute to well-being of students and graduates, and to regional economic development, while at the same time trying to minimize the social costs of migration for migrants and their families?* In the past seven chapters various aspects of how the school operates, what the lives of migrants look like, and how this all relates to well-being and development, have been discussed. In this chapter most important insights will be related to the role ASHTEC can play.

### **8.2 Understanding opportunities and challenges migration brings along**

ASHTEC is a school which facilitates migration by co-providing training for construction workers who want to work abroad. In Chapter 5, it has been described that ASHTEC staff members are obviously concerned with the fate of migrants and their families, and many of them are aware of various challenges and benefits migration can have. Some activities of the school, help migrants to prepare for their migration. This includes a part of the Moral Values Program (MVP), which includes topics

such as conflict management, homesickness, and management of finances (see Appendix 3<sup>41</sup>) There is however a need for a vision on migration which reflects a thorough understanding of three things.

The first is understanding of the realities of migration. What happens to migrants abroad, and how do they deal with changes. This also includes how they manage their social lives, how they experience their time abroad overall (including faith life), and what their future plans are. Chapter 6 is a start in developing this understanding.

The second thing that needs to be understood is the potential of migration for achieving and maintaining economic development of migrants and their families. Or the non-potential, for that matter. It seems that many migrants are in need for reflecting upon their situation and possibilities. Migration has development potentials, but they need to be employed, and they are not limitless. So the question is, what can be achieved for specific migrants, with a specific salary, with specific social duties and people to provide for, in a specific period of time. Some migrants may have more abilities and a more suitable mindset for achieving sustainable development than others, yet all of them can set small or big goals and achieve them. A realistic view on possibilities will benefit all.

Thirdly, the regional development potential of migrants and their families needs to be explored. The creation of job opportunities abroad is considered an answer to the lack of job opportunities in the Philippines. But as such the contribution to local development is limited, because the contribution to economic activities and thus job growth is limited. OFWs could play a more active role in regional development because of their access to more capital (as well directly from their increase in salary, as through their increased capacity to loan). Possibilities for investments, starting businesses, or other ways which stimulate the economy should be investigated upon.

### **8.3 Developing a coherent vision on migration**

As is already said, the ASHTEC staff has knowledge about a lot of challenges and opportunities migration brings about (see Chapter 5.6). Yet the position of the school as an institution, seems to be that migration creates employment, and therefore it is facilitated through the common program of ASHTEC and EEI. Many staff members feel unease about the current approach, and have already started to discuss some migration related topics during the MVP. There is however a need to bring insights about migration realities and the position of the school together in a coherent vision and program. Leaders of ASHTEC will have to ask themselves, what exactly they educate people for. Is migration the goal of education or is migration part of building a career? What does the current

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<sup>41</sup> Even though the topic of financial management is not present at the list in Appendix 3 , it is being addressed according to the staff.

approach towards migration educate people for? How does migration relate to career opportunities, and how does it relate to the Christian mission of ASHTEC?

At the moment, some core values of ASHTEC are under pressure. Those core values are 'holistic approach' and 'sustainability'.<sup>42</sup>

Holistic approach: There is too little knowledge about the realities of migration and the development potentials it has, to know exactly what migrants-to-be should be prepared for and how they should be prepared. This results in an approach towards future migrants and their relatives which is fragmentary. Facts and stories are shared, yet there is no clear view of how they are part of larger processes. The current fragmented approach, puts the core value of an 'holistic approach' under pressure, because it does not address all aspects in which migration affects OFWs as human beings, and it does not address development potentials of migration.

Sustainability: The links between the (sustainable) development goals of the school and the migration of trainees are not very clear. When discussing sustainability, the long and short term should be taken into account. More attention should be paid to migration's long term influence on well-being and economic development, and how this relates to the possibility of the OFW to return to the Philippines. Even though there are sincere worries about the effect of migration on the family members (especially related to marriages), possibilities for return of OFWs to the Philippines is not given attention, nor the economic opportunities that could come with this. This is somewhat surprising, since family values are clearly important to the staff. The family value of 'doing one's best to provide', seems to outweigh the value of 'being present'. The time dimension is thus important to bring in. The question should be asked whether it is desirable to train people to become migrants for a lifetime. If this is not the case, but a likely consequence of going abroad, the school should take measures to prevent indefinite migration.

A vision on migration should include why it is relevant for ASHTEC to facilitate migration, and how it relates to what ASHTEC stands for as defined in the vision statement, mission statement, and core values.

#### **8.4 Translate the vision into concrete actions**

Some concrete recommendations will be done now in order for ASHTEC to translate insights from this research into practice.

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<sup>42</sup> For all core values of ASHTEC, see Chapter 5.3.

1. Adjust the MVP given to EEI trainees. This can be done in several ways.

- Include topics in the program which specifically address issues which have come to the fore during this research. Examples are given in Table 13. Some things mentioned might need more attention than others.
- Increase knowledge of teachers about the realities of migration, and challenges and opportunities it brings. Some migrant organizations, e.g. Atikha, provide workshops to train teachers how to address relevant issues concerning migration. There are also sources available which are insightful (Villalba, 2011; Atikha Overseas Workers and Communities Initiative, Inc. 2008a & 2008b).
- Seek for possibilities to involve experienced OFWs in the program. One respondent has already expressed interest in contributing to the program, by either telling about his own experiences, or by talking to staff about his experiences, especially concerning faith life abroad. (A topic which seems to be gaining little attention from scholars or organizations.)

**Table 13:** Examples of topics which can be included in the MVP

<p><b>Psychological/mental:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Loneliness and homesickness</li> <li>• Temptations: e.g. women and alcohol</li> </ul>	<p><b>Spiritual:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Background on Islam</li> <li>• Pressure to change religion</li> <li>• Faith life abroad</li> <li>• Temptations</li> </ul>
<p><b>Social:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Quality of communication</li> <li>• Family pressure to send money</li> <li>• Loving from a distance</li> <li>• Sexual needs</li> </ul>	<p><b>Economic/financial:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Financial literacy</li> <li>• Planning your future</li> <li>• Dependency issue/family dependency</li> <li>• Avoiding 'scams'. (Get rich quick)</li> <li>• Saving mechanisms</li> <li>• Insurances</li> </ul>

2. Link up with other organizations to provide goal setting and financial literacy workshops to OFWs and their family members.

- It has become clear from this research that many OFWs have no clear goals with their migration, yet they have some ideas about what they would like to achieve. The idea to start a business in the Philippines has popped up regularly. It has also become clear that relationships with family members are usually of influence on how remittances are spent. In order to set future goals, family members should be part of planning. Many trainees however come from parts of the Philippines which are not close to the location of the school (some

from Mindanao or Cebu), which makes it hard to get family members over to the school in order to organize workshops. Therefore it will be useful to join forces with other migrant organizations, so OFWs and their families can follow workshops in their home area. Atikha is an organization which provides a family value formation & family goal setting workshop all over the Philippines. Atikha can also train ASHTEC staff in different regions to provide the workshops. A well Atikha, as Unlad Kabayan, provide workshop and services related to saving, investing, and starting entrepreneurial activities.

### 3. Promote investments in entrepreneurship and business activities among OFWs.

- ASHTEC's entrepreneurship program JBIL has started only recently (2011). As can be read in Chapter 5.5, the content and form of the program is still developing. OFWs currently have no access to the program. It would be useful however, to give them access to such a program. Especially because many state they would like to start a business, and because they can save capital for a startup. At this moment, the JBIL program can only give out small loans, because of a lack of funds. This limited the possibilities of starting entrepreneurs up to the point that some decided to start working as an employee in an existing business. OFWs can develop funds themselves. Because OFWs might not have the time to spend a whole year at ASHTEC to follow entrepreneurship training, it might be useful to create shorter programs tailored to OFWs needs. Since OFWs from EEI are a specific group, they can be targeted specifically.
- Some migrant organizations promote investments in existing business and joining cooperatives among OFWs, because the risks of failure of startups is high. Atikha promotes common savings and investment programs. They consider it too risky to use lifesavings for a startup, because it is something that is for most not an expertise. They prefer promoting investments in existing, successful running enterprises. For example, in a fish farm investment in the agri-based cooperative of Atikha. The return on this investment is 2,5 years. Unlad Kabayan also promotes investments in social enterprises and cooperatives. Besides this, Unlad Kabayan supports startups, even though the Program Officer admitted that the return on investments is often only after 5-10 years.
- During the interview about the activities of Atikha, the idea popped up that it might be interesting to explore the possibilities for a local migration-development corridor from a group of migrants abroad, to the region where ASHTEC is situated. Atikha has established such corridors in other areas. They brought together all kinds of stakeholders involved: government agencies, local government and the private sector, and packaged regional investment opportunities and enterprises available. The idea is to get a clear view on

investment possibilities in the region, and to present investment opportunities to OFWs. In the case of ASHTEC, groups of migrants abroad could be supported by Atikha (who has a local branch in e.g. Saudi Arabia), while they invest in local economic activities through ASHTEC.

4. Raise awareness about (il)legal recruitment procedures.
  - Many Filipinos are not well-aware of official procedures and the rights they have, and are therefore vulnerable for exploitation. Exploitation ranges from being charged high placement fees, to being trafficked. POEA's Anti-Illegal Recruitment branch works hard to inform Filipinos about the official procedures of migration. Once an OFW is out of the country, they fall under foreign laws, and it is not always possible to reach them or get them out of the situation. The story of Rowena (Chapter 6) exemplifies how OFWs can end up in a very difficult and even dangerous situation abroad. A situation they would never have chosen if they would have had more knowledge about how to find a good and safe job abroad. Since the percentage of Filipinos who migrates is high, it would be good to raise awareness about legal and safe migration procedures during the studies ECT, ICT and Welding Technology (1-2 years courses). This awareness raising does not have to take long. Material from the IOM, but especially from POEA, can be useful for spending an hour or two on the topic. POEA also provides workshops on this. During these workshops it is explained how it can be checked whether an agency is legally operating, whether job orders are really existing, and what costs have to be borne by the OFW and the employer. The website of POEA ([www.poea.gov.ph](http://www.poea.gov.ph)) also contains information on migration procedures. POEA has released a few movies which address issues of safe migration, which can be ordered. Even though migrants other than Rowena were doing fine abroad, risks cannot really be taken. Rowena was stuck in a house in Saudi Arabia for three years, a terrible situation many housemaids in Saudi Arabia are in. Although her situation was legal according to Saudi law, in many other countries her situation would fall into the category of slavery.

## **8.5 Limitations of the research**

Some quantitative studies on the influence of migration upon families are available (see e.g. ECMI-CBCP et al., 2004 on the impact upon children of OFWs) but no quantitative, holistic study on the long term effect of changes brought about by migration seems available. It goes without saying that such research would have provided useful data for this research. But not only for this research. The lack of such data limits even the power of Atikha to lobby for their case. Governments want to see clear numbers and causal relations. The fact that during this research it was not possible to combine

qualitative methods with quantitative methods, means the power to generalize based on this study is also limited.

The fact that the ASHTEC is a Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) school with many graduates of ASHTEC being male construction workers like welders and pipe-fitters, has certain implications for the outcomes of this research. Construction workers abroad typically have different living conditions than other skilled workers, for example nurses. Construction workers are often concentrated in relatively remote areas, e.g. on large construction sites well outside existing cities. They have little time off. Therefore the challenges and opportunities they face might be of a different kind than those of OFWs in other occupations or of female OFWs. Nevertheless, many aspects of being an OFW are less related to the working environment abroad. Examples are changing family relations due to distance, or management of growing finances. Besides that, although one might do more or less the same work as OFW, the cultures of the countries in which OFWs work can be very different (e.g. Saudi Arabia vs. Singapore).

## **8.6 Discussion and suggestions for further research**

Throughout this thesis, a few insights and notable points have come to the fore, which ask for closer attention or even further research.

The first thing I would like to mention is a very practical recommendation for further research. Chapter 8.5 (point 3) mentions possibilities of involving OFWs in activities through which more solid economic development of their families and home region can be achieved. Further research will have to be done on exact possibilities for starting enterprises, investing in enterprises, or starting a so-called corridor between a group of OFWs trained at ASHTEC abroad, and the region where ASHTEC is located.

The next two issues worth mentioning relate to the way the migration-development nexus is studied and discussed. The first is the fact that livelihood frameworks (like the DFID framework in Figure 2) seem to be holistic in their approach, yet are unable to capture human behavior properly. According to many livelihood approaches, human behavior is supposed to be rational and fusing together into a strategy, in which employing and combining assets is purposefully done. If we place this in the development context (for that is where the framework originated), purposeful actions aim at making the most out of the given circumstances, development wise. Decisions to migrate and migrants' behavior during migration, show that there is not necessarily much logic in people's decisions regarding the employment of assets, which makes it hard to talk about a 'strategy'. Livelihood approaches therefore tend to overrationalize people's decisions.

The next notable point is that, when evaluating the migration-development nexus, the dimension of time (temporality), is often missing. How long will migration continue, of as well individuals as nationwide? What will come next? When will individuals be able to gain from migration in a sustainable manner? Temporality of migration needs more attention in the whole discussion, as well at the macro (national), meso (organizations like ASHTEC), as micro (individual migrants and their families) level. If the Philippines 'produces' migrants and a country with 10% of its population working abroad is a desirable situation, it might not be a problem to have a bias in offered education and societal needs. If however migration is seen as something temporary, schools have the task to pay attention to post-migration career opportunities during their programs. This could be a topic for further research.

The last research suggestion I would like to make is born out of curiosity and the need felt to contribute to the discussion about inter-European migration in a constructive manner. It would be interesting to see in how far the findings from this research, and the issues Philippine NGOs address, are relevant in the context of inter-European labor migration. European migrants usually work abroad for shorter periods of time, with more rights and freedom as workers, while they work in countries with a similar culture as their home country. Yet the reason they work abroad might be similar to those of Filipinos: wage differences and lack of employment opportunities in the home country. It would be interesting to see whether they encounter similar challenges as OFWs, and how their migration relates to the development of their home countries using the insights from this research.

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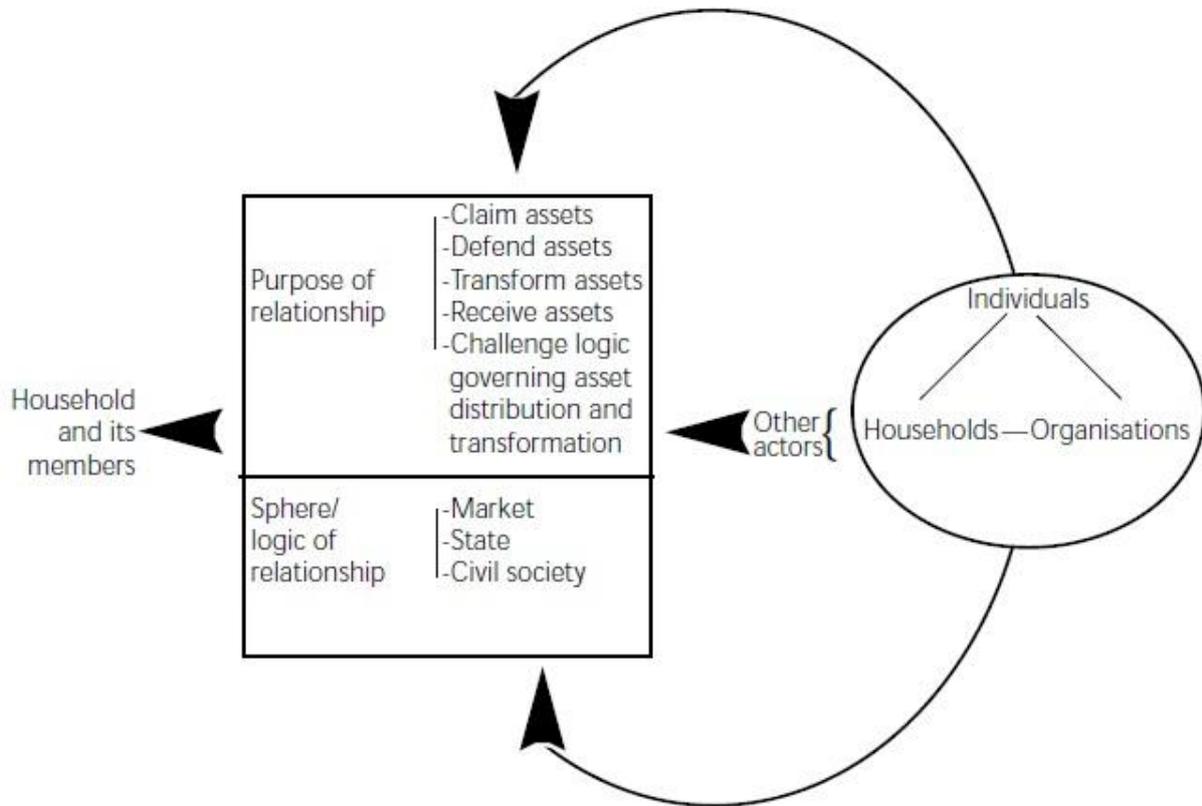
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## Appendices

**Appendix 1:** Relationships of access, use and transformation (Bebbington, 1999: 37)



**Appendix 2:** Questions and topics to direct the course of the interviews with OFWs.

1. Background: Age / Gender / Family background / Year finished ASHTEC and course followed / Marital status when first migrated / Marital status now
2. In which countries did you work? How long where you abroad?
3. Why did you go abroad?
4. How did others react to your migration plans?
5. What was your first impression abroad?
6. Did you have contact with others abroad? (Filipinos, other nationalities, employer)
7. Did you have contact with people in the Philippines when you were abroad? How often, how, with whom?
8. What did you talk about with them?
9. Where you open to them? Where they open to you? Did you share difficulties encountered?
10. Did you talk about money with them?
11. Did you send money home? For what was it used? Are you happy about how it is used?
12. Did you save money. What for? How often?
13. Do you feel responsible for providing for the family. How does that feel?
14. Did you experience loneliness abroad? How did you deal with that?
15. Did you meet (other) Christians abroad?
16. How is faith life lived abroad?
17. Was faith and God important for you? Did it change because of migration?
18. What are common problems among migrants?
19. How did you prepare yourself for migration? PDOS? Other ways?
20. Did ASHTEC and EEI prepare you well?
21. Looking back, what were the good things about your migration period?
22. What were bad things or what was difficult about it?
23. If you could start your migration period again, what would you have done differently?
24. If you are still abroad, how long to you plan to be a migrant?
25. Are you planning your return?
26. What would you like to do for work when you return?
27. What is the secret to successful migration?
28. What makes migration unsuccessful?

### Appendix 3: Topics of the Moral Values Program

1. Friendship
2. Gift
3. Spiritual maturity
4. The thrill of trusting God
5. What do employers really want?
6. Be thankful
7. Failing forward
8. Failure gets you one step closer
9. Positive thinking
10. Attitude
11. Personality
12. Success
13. The purpose of your life
14. Principle about work
15. The Christian worker of AMG-EEI
16. Steps to a victorious Christian worker life
17. The Christian motto
18. Patience; Reconciled living
19. Kindness: Sensitive living
20. Faithfulness: Immutable living
21. Meekness: Self-controlled living
22. Love: complete living
23. The acrostic of believe
24. Blasphemy
25. Hope
26. Tithe
27. The Miracles of Christ
28. Sin
29. Thee
30. False prophets
31. Forgiveness of injuries
32. Idolatry
33. Husbands
34. Titles and names of the devil
35. Creation
36. Drunkenness
37. Repentance
38. Smoking
39. Conflict management
40. Integrity at work
41. Love at work from the book of Proverbs
42. Marks of a confident person
43. Succeeding through self-discipline
44. Habit
45. The 5 love languages
46. How God's word came to us
47. How we benefit from God's word
48. What God's word does
49. Faith in Him
50. Life in Him
51. Obligation in Christ
53. Our motto
54. God's solution to man's problem
55. Managing crisis
56. How to overcome homesickness