

专题论文: 多元族群与多元文化

Feature Articles: Multi-ethnic and Multicultural

# EMPOWERMENT THROUGH COLLABORATION: MIGRANT WORKERS IN ALTERNATIVE NONFORMAL EDUCATION\*

在互助中培力: 移工的非正式教育参与

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## Abstract

Migrant workers are often negatively stereotyped by the media and Malaysian public. They are seen as *pendatang pekerja* or sometimes called *pendatang haram* who take away jobs intended for local people. And because they come from less developed economies in the region, they are seen as poor and marginalized. Using this as a backdrop, this article examines how the so-called marginalized group of people is able to negotiate their position in the community through the formation of a Migrants' Capability Enhancement Program (CAPE). Practices like self-sufficiency, volunteerism and empowerment are key points in how migrants provide a model for collaboration at the level of the local community. This particular study pertains to the community-based

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\* I would like to express my gratitude to the members of St John's Cathedral Filipino Community and the members of CAPE Malaysia facilitators for their sharing. The volunteers freely gave their critical insights on the workings of the program and I immensely benefited from it.

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or faith-based organization whose members are active volunteers of the CAPe program in Kuala Lumpur. Both qualitative using participant observation and quantitative method using survey were adopted. This study observes that marginalization and discrimination has in effect emboldened certain groups of migrants to help each other and maintain a very high degree of self-sufficiency and volunteerism. In return, they empower other migrants by sharing their knowledge and skills by organizing a non-formal type of education to enhance their skills, build small communities and strengthen their collaborative effort in the local church and the wider Malaysian society.

**Keywords:** Empowerment, Collaboration, Migrant workers, Nonformal Education

## 摘要

媒体与民众经常对移工存有着负面印象，视他们为抢走原属本地人工作的外来劳动者（*pendatang pekerja*），或非法外来者（*pendatang haram*）。由于他们多来自经济发展迟缓的后进区域，因此也常被视为是贫穷、被边缘化。以此为背景，本文试图探讨这些所谓的边缘化群体如何透过“移民能力提升计划”（CAPe）来转换他们在社区中的地位。自力救济、志愿服务以及培力训练等，是移民群体得以为在地社群提供协力的关键。本研究涉及以社区为基础或以信念为基础的组织，其成员是吉隆坡CAPe计划的积极志愿者，并结合参与观察及定量的调查。本文将指出，主流社会对移民的边缘化与歧视，实际上强化了部分移工社群之间的互助，令他们高度参与自力救济与志愿服务。受到培力的移工又对其他移工进行培力，这包括透过组织非正式的教育来传授知识与技术、建立小型社群，在当地教会以至马来西亚社会中，深化这种协同式合作。

**关键词：**培力、合作、移工、非正式教育

## Introduction

More often we assume that marginalized communities do not have the capability to empower themselves because of structural constraints such as culture, ethnicity, gender and religion (William and Labonte 2007). We also know that this assumption does not quite reflect some undocumented or understudied areas of concern where marginalized and poor communities demonstrate a high sense of resilience in the midst of the structural problems they encounter on a daily basis (Burton 2012) as

found on the multi-dimensional nature of people's collective efficacy (Sampson et al. 1997).

In here, we examine how migrant communities exude a certain degree of collaborative spirit at all levels of their everyday lives in a transnational social space. The main objective of this paper is to examine the phenomenon of collaboration - and empowerment - "within" the marginalized community of migrants and how this social action has found meaning in the wider context of community participation, volunteerism and empowerment. It is argued in this paper that collaboration does not exist in a vacuum. It is rather situated in a space where there are motivations and justifications for why collaboration is necessary.

In sociological parlance, collaboration is often seen as the process of cooperation with the view of helping each other to achieve an end. Collaboration is a social construction which means that arrangements can depend on contextual circumstances. Conventionally, collaboration involves at least a "meeting" of two parties who are of equal social footing, power relations and share common interest towards something. But one interesting idea to pursue is: Can there be collaboration in an unequal power relationship? Can collaboration emerge in an unequal power terrain where two collaborating parties hold varying degrees of power? And if so, are both collaborating parties, at the end of mutual cooperation, become empowered? Or is the empowerment ideal only "felt" within one party in the collaborating exercise and this party is usually the socially and economically disadvantaged?

I argue that collaboration does happen in an unequal power relationship. It happens when both parties are able to identify social capitals in the perceived collaboration such that the one holding higher power can also gain in collaborating, such as the perceived better "treatment" from other migrants and the attendant positive account of being able to network with other types of people in Malaysia. One of the perceived incentives is access to higher social circle or networks.



## Methodology

This research is a product of a year-long participant observation study where I myself am involved as a counselor for Filipino migrant workers in the Klang Valley in Malaysia. Having lived in Malaysia for several years, I have found the community of migrants my “home away from home”. Filipinos from all walks of life come and casually interact with one another. Specific to the location of this study is the St John’s *Tahanang Pilipino* (Filipino Home). I frequent this place almost every Sunday to do my community service as a volunteer. In this home, I find Filipinos who come to Malaysia as domestic workers, engineers, IT specialists, nurses, educators, religious lay persons etc. In this particular study, I look at the thirty four (34) Filipino migrant worker-volunteers who spend at least three hours every Sunday to teach various courses offered by the Migrants Capability Enhancement Program (CAPE Malaysia). These courses range from Basic Computer to Baking and Pastry to Ballroom Dancing. There are more than 10 domestic workers who volunteer for this program while the rest come from the engineering, IT, construction, travel, and education sector. Sunday meeting and conversation with the volunteers provides a platform for sharing their thoughts and experiences not just about their working life in Malaysia. The volunteers seem to now indulge themselves in helping one another to making sure that CAPE Malaysia continues to operate without problems. Sunday encounters mean talking to them directly, observing and listening from a distance as well as coming together in social functions and parties in the Filipino Home. This process of getting information is far richer than observing and participating within a short period. I maintain a Sunday journal to record what every Sunday I would have with the volunteers. Sometimes a Sunday encounter can be “empty” in a sense volunteers come to teach in class and nothing extra special happens. An eventful Sunday encounter means there is a list of activities for volunteers to participate and this involves essentially their classes. In some instances, two volunteers, together with the student-participants visit an Old Folks Home to provide free services such as conduct blood pressure reading, first aid, and other forms of care-giving. At another



time, volunteers need to facilitate the festival preparation in food, decoration, cultural show etc. So, almost all volunteers extend free service to the migrants' community. Whenever possible, I participate in most of the activities of the *Tahanang Pilipino* and this is the best time I do my observation as well. At the same time, I conduct a social survey to evaluate the effectiveness of volunteers in CAPE Malaysia, however, in this paper there is least discussion on this.

## Findings and Discussion

### Structure of CAPE Malaysia

CAPE Malaysia runs for 16 weeks, meeting every Sunday. Each student in a particular course meets twice a month for two hours per meeting. The old parish building at the Cathedral was once the beehive of activities on Sundays, with temporary partitions installed every time. On ordinary Sundays where there are no activities other than attending classes, classes begin at 10 in the morning and ends at five in the afternoon. Classes are held either in the old parish house or in St. John's School. For three years now, the CAPE executive committee has received support from the St John's School by opening its classrooms for a minimal rent of RM200 a month. This support has boosted the operation of CAPE as its participants are increasing every year. CAPE is able to optimize spatial use in and around the cathedral every Sunday from 10am to 5pm. The four different classes of Internet are held in a nondescript internet café in the old KL town. CAPE does not own a computer lab to cater to the growing demand of migrant workers. In order to offset this, CAPE rents an internet café and participants pay their actual time spent at the café. The two volunteers also pay the charge per hour, at the same time, provide instruction to the participants. It is not actually the best way to do but given the serious problem of lack of access to a real computer lab, CAPE feels that is far better than with no service.

The driving class is one of the better popular courses that CAPE runs. It is noteworthy, how some Malaysian employers, upon knowing that CAPE is offering

a course on driving, request their domestic workers to register in the course and the employers are actually the ones paying of the registration fee of RM35 per course. Now, with the current problem of space and a proper venue to hold practical sessions with the students, participants have been urging the CAPE executive committee to find a better driving school compound to maximize learning. Facilitators are professional automotive instructors teaching in Kuala Lumpur.

One of the best features in the skills enhancement program is the idea that everybody will pass the course. It is different from a formal school system in a sense that nobody fails if one wants to learn. All of those who register for the course, for as long as they come regularly, join the projects as expected of them as student-participants, and show their newly-acquired skills through organized exhibitions – then, students will be able to graduate.

The culminating ceremony or the awarding of certificates is done after 16 weeks. Most often participants anticipate this activity. Especially for those participants who did not have any opportunity to attend college education in the Philippines, the CAPE ceremony is a platform where they can show off to their family and friends back in the Philippines that they now have acquired a new skill.

Table 1 shows the status of CAPE Malaysia by looking at the courses offered, the employment background of volunteers and their length of stay in Malaysia.

Table 1: List of Courses Offered, Type of Work of Volunteers, Number of years in Malaysia, 2012

No. of volunteer	Courses Offered	Work status in Kuala Lumpur	Visa held	No of years in M'sia	Level of education
3	Aerobics	Domestic work (full time)	Employment visa, dependent visa	6, 10, 11	Undergraduate
2	Bahasa Malaysia	Bank executive Tour operator	Malaysian, employment pass	-, 7	Both Finished university
2	Basic Computer Business Application	Domestic work (full time)	Employment pass	8	Undergraduate

2	Basic Computer Business Application	Domestic work (part time)	Employment pass	16, 17	Undergraduate
2	Baking & Pastry	Domestic work	Employment pass, dependent pass	15, 19	Undergraduate
2	Caregiver 1-A Caregiver 1-C	Domestic work	Employment pass	9	Undergraduate
2	Caregiver 1-B	Domestic work	Employment pass	9	Undergraduate
2	Caregiver 2	Domestic work	Employment pass	7	Undergraduate
3	Defensive Driving 1	Lecturers (technical education)	Employment pass	12	Finished University
1	Defensive Driving 2 –Electrical/ Mechanical	Civil Engineering	Employment pass	10	Licensed Engineer
2	Ballroom Dancing	Domestic Work	Employment pass	13	
1	Guitar-1 (Basic)	Hotel and Restaurant work	Employment pass	5	Finished university
1	Guitar-2 (Intermediate)	Domestic work Hotel and Restaurant work	Employment pass	18	Undergraduate
2	Hair & Beauty Culture	Domestic work	Employment pass	15	Undergraduate
2	Internet-A	Domestic work	Dependent pass	13	Undergraduate
2	Internet-B	Domestic work Civil Engineering	Employment pass	20, 10	Undergraduate, Licensed engineer
1	Photography	IT specialist	Employment pass	4	Finished university
1	Sewing 1 / Dressmaking	Domestic work	Employment pass	12	Secondary education
1	Sewing 2 / Tailoring	Domestic work	Employment pass	18	Secondary education
2	Voice Lesson	Entertainment Special Needs teacher	Employment pass	10, 3	Both Finished university
1	Western Cuisine	Domestic work	Employment pass	16	Undergraduate
Total number of class groups: 34					



CAPe stands for capability enhancement program and it is a program fully run by migrants from the Philippines. Founded in 2007, it is an attempt at ensuring that migrants workers who frequent the cathedral in Kuala Lumpur is given a place where they can utilise their time than to mill aimlessly in shopping complexes and other uncalled for areas. The gestation process of CAPe took more than 10 years. Initially, a group of Malaysian and Filipino friends who belonged to the Catholic faith was exploring the possibility of a program to help Filipino Catholics in KL, some of whom have had brushes with their employers, runaways or distressed Filipino domestic workers (FDWs). The organizing was stalled as those thought could run the program on voluntary basis either left the country or found employment somewhere. It was only in 2007, when a group of determined FDWs and a few Filipino professionals offered to give it a try. Armed with enthusiasm and willing hands to plan, organize and implement the program, 20 volunteers, mostly domestic workers who have been working in KL for several years, started the program with the assistance of at least three Filipino professionals and one Malaysian religious person. It started with 10 courses, mostly on food art, beauty culture, and technical skills, especially basic driving. As CAPe progresses, more courses are offered based on the needs of the community as well as availability of volunteers on Sundays.

### **Courses and Participants' Interests**

The different courses that CAPe offers this year are varied. Yet, it caters to the basic needs of migrants who wish to enhance their skills while working in Malaysia. The 17 courses are classified into music and art (5), language (1), food art (2), ICT (1), beauty culture (2), technical skills (4) and care-giving (2). Usually, the average class size is 25 participants. Most of the participants take two courses in any given semester, and most of these courses do not have pre-requisites.

Table 2: Classification of Courses offered

<b>Courses</b>	<b>Number of courses offered</b>
Music and Art	5
Language	1
Food art	2
ICT	1
Beauty culture	2
Technical skills	4
Caregiving	2
<b>Total</b>	<b>17</b>

If we look at Table 2, we find that at least five courses offered are categorized in music and art while four of the courses offered are within the domain of technical skills. This is important to know as student-participants do not simply register for the sake of registering, they do come for varied reasons, firstly, “to learn something new” as their Sundays are pretty much very predictable or without any event at all. So, in a way students use CAPE Malaysia as an escape route after six days of routine work, especially in isolated, unorganized Malaysian households.

### **CAPE Volunteer Facilitators – Who They Are**

More than half of the volunteer facilitators are domestic workers. What motivates them to take part in the program and what role does this participation have in the promotion of the development of the self? Table 1 shows the categories of volunteers and their level of education. The domestic workers’ highest qualification is “undergraduate”, while two have finished secondary education, which means that they do have certain number of years spent in a university and they are functionally literate. Given this background, how do domestic workers consider the presence of other migrant workers who are considered professionals? Could there be some form of envy, animosity or sometimes tension in the process of doing about their work?

Since its operation, CAPE program has been managed by at least two undergraduate female domestic workers, two male an engineer and male polytechnic graduate.

I should say that managing and organizing the group of facilitators is indeed challenging when issues such as envy and “power struggle” arise. These issues are always there and members seem to acknowledge that. In reflection, when people understand the inner workings of managing and leading an organization, it is easier to fend off serious challengers, the ones who would like to see the program fail. At least in CAPE, past and current leadership see the positive contribution of the program in the migrant community and because of this ideal, “power struggle” is contained within the small group. Power struggle is made manifest in situations where one wants to show which decision or idea is more credible or legitimate to be carried out. When a claimed idea or plan becomes unpopular, challengers engage in “behind-the-back” battle until the issue becomes “stale” and the group recoups from this short interlude.

An annual dinner is one of those activities organised by the CAPE management to honour the selfless services of the volunteers and facilitators. The pool of facilitators is now predominantly Filipino workers living in the Klang Valley and Kuala Lumpur, with an exception of at least two (2) Malaysians who served as advisers. It is interesting to note that with the pool of willing hands, these volunteers are able to provide a meaningful space for migrant workers who never dreamed of taking courses in Malaysia. A participant in an Internet class said that “instead of spending money in McDonald’s, I’d rather spend my time learning something new. Now at least I know how to send email to my children, or open a Facebook account to keep track of my friends as well.”

### **Non-Filipino Migrants’ Participation**

A few number of participants come from Indonesia, Myanmar and Vietnam. (As of this writing the 2013 registration has already commenced and in my observation there is a constant flow of registrants coming from Indonesia). If this will continue,



I would surmise that not only would this program hasten empowerment, it would in fact be a site to share ethnic understanding at the level of migrants. An Indonesian domestic worker took at least three courses: caregiving, aerobics, and cuisine. During the graduation day, I saw her in her nice formal dress and participated in the dance presentation with great pride and joy in her face.

In 2011, I was asked to attend their graduation exercise which was held at one of the good hotels in Kuala Lumpur. I noted that there were a number of employers who witnessed their domestic workers receiving the “scroll” from CAPE. I would also imagine that this program ushers in a new sense of understanding and perspective of how migrant workers have enabled to exercise a degree of persuasion (and power) since their employers accede to watch the graduation ceremony. In one particular occasion, both the husband and wife employers paid the graduation fees for their domestic worker and joined the high tea at the end of the session. To observe a scenario like this in a Malaysian setting seems improbable, but it did happen.

### **Church as a Unifying Ground for Collaboration**

CAPE is basically a faith-based program that operates within the domain of the local Catholic church in Kuala Lumpur. The local church leadership plays a minor role in the sense that it can only lend support to the migrant workers who seem to be organized and committed to pull the skills enhancement program through.

Since the 1980s the Church has been in the forefront in promoting the idea that Catholic migrant workers from other countries are the “guests” of the Church, and therefore they should be welcomed by the local church/community. The “welcome” sign to the migrant workers as guests was never an easy task, however. Difficulties lie in whether, at the macro structural level, the Church leadership is willing to protect the migrants’ legal and socio-religious rights in the context of multi-ethnic and multi-religious Malaysia and, at the micro level, whether the leadership of the local church “facilitates” the socio-religious participation of migrants in the community and how this participation will bring about synergism within its following.

This study is cognizant of the fact that the role of the Church is significant in integrating Christian migrants in Malaysia. The Catholic Church plays an active involvement in setting up migrant ministries all over Malaysia and assigned priests or counsellors to assist migrant workers in their local churches. Several years ago, the St. Francis Xavier's parish church, for example, created a Filipina Service Committee as part of the parish coordinating council. It is represented by an adviser-cum-counsellor at the parish level and is given a measly annual budget for its formation, training and fellowship programmes. The Church, in her effort to educate the faithful about the status of migrants in the country and in the world, sends out the Papal message every September as part of the advocacy programme carried out in Malaysia. Papal messages are translated into Bahasa Malaysia, Tamil, Myanmarese and Filipino and are distributed to all the accessible channels of information, usually the local parish churches. Papal messages reiterate the need for the host countries to "welcome" the migrants with respect and understanding rather than to be viewed as commodities in the widening disparity between nations and cultures. In the 2003 papal message to the Catholic community in Malaysia, the Pope exhorts everyone, saying,

In a world that is undergoing such radical transformation as a result of the process of globalisation, one of the major concerns of the Church is migrants and refugees – People on the Move. When people are forced to move, for various reasons, they have to face a new land, new people and new environments. They end up somewhere, as strangers and foreigners. This is where the Church opens its doors to welcome them, because we are a people who care.  
(Summary Message of Holy Father Pope John Paul II for Migration Sunday, September 2003)

The role of the Church in providing legal, social and spiritual assistance is a welcome move considering the problems of isolation, rejection (National Office for Human Development 2003) and discrimination among migrant workers. As a matter of advocacy, Church reminds Catholics to respect the rights of migrants especially the domestic workers who are more vulnerable to abuses and harassment. The now-defunct National Office for Human Development is tasked at the national level to

look into the problems of migrant workers apart from the local migrant ministries that are created in various parishes. It is safe to say that the Filipino domestic workers' group is the most vibrant ministry within the migrant community. Domestic workers who help form and manage the groups could only say that the Church is the place they call "home away from home." In Saint Francis Xavier's and St John's parishes, the Filipino groups are provided with their own rooms to cook, watch TV or to relax. There are those domestic maids who go straight to their "home" as soon as they take their day off, rather than going out to places where they need to spend money for food, transport fare and other expenses.

In here we find that the Church has a crucial role to play in ensuring that migrant workers, especially those who are Catholic will find refuge in the new homeland they call Malaysia.

### **Cultural Values as Empowering the Marginalized and Powerless**

In this section, I would like to highlight the value system of the Filipino workers and how these "active" values, though may be viewed by outsiders with negativism, can sometimes be an empowering element in their marginal position in Malaysia. Values are traits that consciously and unconsciously direct a person or group that socially and psychologically adopted them as part of the person's or group's social processes. Values maintain their "influence" through the constant gaze of the members of the group or society; and non-adherence of the social processes could mean deviations from the socially accepted norms of the society. Various portrayals of being powerless are observed in expressions such as, *walang kakayahan* (no capability), *walang magagawa* (nothing can be done), *suwerte* (luck), *palad* (fate), *bahala na* (come what may), *pagtiyagaan* (make use of), *tiyaga* (patience), *tiis* (sacrifice) and *hiya* (shame). All of these verbal expressions are so common among Filipinos who, when faced with difficult situations or problems, succumb to adopting the above expressions. Anthropologists and sociologists label these as expressions of fatalism and dependence on the forces of nature. F. L. Jocano (1997), a known Filipino



anthropologist, asserts that fatalism of Filipinos means relying on the “unseen” forces that partly govern a person’s destiny. But reliance to these “unseen” forces does not mean hopelessness in such situations for it is in “the moment” of hopelessness that “strength from within” emerges. It is in the way that the Filipino, as a people imbued with a deep sense of faith, allows this hopelessness or helplessness to be overridden by it. Manifestations of positive Filipino values are expressed in *bahala na* [come what may], *tiyaga* [patience] and *suwerte* [luck]. These value expressions, whether directly or indirectly, form part of the Filipino migrants’ psyche and in situations where there seems to be no letup, the value of fatalism crops up. In another perspective, fatalism encourages passivity and indifference in the midst of abuses and exploitation of labour as when domestic workers rely on their “deep sense of faith,” which means without doing anything to counter an abusive condition. Similar to Scott’s (1985) observation as well as Gaventa’s (1980), *pagtiyagaan* is likened to a tactical prudence, a calculated accommodation if only to strike or take what they envisioned in the long term. While this can be observed in some Filipino workers to remain patient until the right time comes, other Filipino workers would entirely rely on “patience” without understanding or knowing that a necessary intervention is significant in order to diminish, if not eliminate, certain abusive situations. In a way, this goes back again to the main point of this section: that Filipino workers’ extent of practicing active values in marginal situation will indicate to what extent they can empower themselves.

### **Community Service, Volunteerism and Empowerment**

Now, with their values attuned to “patience” and “sacrifice”, volunteer workers optimize and use their resilient character to a higher calling and that is to offer free service of their skills, resources and time to a more marginalized sector within the migrants community. This form of collaboration, no doubt, is unequal. It is unequal considering that volunteer workers have an edge in terms of skills and experience, while the participants-cum-students, mostly from the domestic work sector learn

from the more experienced domestic workers. This process of empowering each other is amazingly fraught with challenges. I would like to argue that empowerment has its many dimensions, not only the ability to exercise their basic rights as migrant workers, but more so in people's ability to create a community in spite of the prevailing structural and legal constraints that Malaysian multi-ethnic communities are experiencing. In the process of volunteering, the other collaborating party is empowered. Volunteering to make substantive changes in one's life by helping others at the same time to share their knowledge and skills to others is essentially the moral ground that volunteers put their foot in. If our history tells us, human civilization is rooted on the idea and practice of helping one another. In tribal, pre-capitalist societies, "working as one" community is the backdrop upon which inhabitants are able to sustain its physical and social life in relation to their ecological environment. Modernisation, as part and parcel of the growth of capitalist orientation in our market economy, has somehow changed all that. The traditional practice of helping has been threatened by stresses and strains of putting a cash value to almost everything that we do. For instance, in a modern-day concept of work, when we are employed in a factory, we are paid on the basis of how much time we spend and how much we produce. This orientation has seeped in and in real sense has affected in the way we live, more specifically when we view other people. How is it that international migrant workers, a product of capitalist initiatives, are able to forge cooperation and mutual helpfulness at the micro level, i.e. in the community? It is reckoned that migrants regardless of their position in the host country are discriminated against and occupy a marginalised position in the skewed structure of Malaysia's multi-ethnic society. Within the migrant community, the idea of volunteerism or extending help to someone is often thought of as a "natural" course of things. The common notion that migrant workers are victims and do not have agency to decide for themselves need to be critically understood. While some migrants are thought to experience some form of victimization and disempowerment, it does not mean that they remain victimized all the time.

When CAPE first started, it had about 20 volunteers from the Philippines,

majority were working as domestic workers. In 2012, there are close to 40 volunteers who work in various industries in Malaysia but more than 10 of these volunteers are non-domestics.

Creating and sustaining a community of migrants that understands each other's needs and aspirations, and experience the same treatment from the host country are the rallying points why CAPE grows into a community of empowered migrants. Their Sunday activities in the CAPE program and their regular participation in classes, joint field trips and social events have allowed them opportunity to mingle with each other, share their narratives of marginalization as well as empower people they meet on Sundays. Crafted on the idea that overseas workers (OCWs) from the Philippines are mostly women, CAPE's main intent was to respond to the increasing number of Filipino domestics in Malaysia who were largely unorganized and fragmented. This sense of service to the community is translated in community work they themselves initiate without the imposition from the local church. For instance, the Caregiver class went to two old folks homes to do some basic blood pressure check and other related exercises that CAPE participants are expected to show what they have learned in class. The visit was also coupled with giving flowers, fruits and rice and the singing of songs to share joy with the elderly. This Caregiver class has in a way established a genuine bond with the elderly home in the sense that the participants even visit the elderly during their free time outside the control of the volunteer facilitator or the requirement of the course. Then, a question needs to be raised at this point. A lot of these domestic workers had experienced sad memories within the confines of Malaysian employers' homes. Stories can be threaded into issues on discrimination, bias and prejudice against foreign domestic workers in the country. So, how then can we display a sense of community service and volunteerism to the host country when they have actually suffered so much?



## **Closing Words: Relooking at the Role of Skills Programme for the Empowerment of Migrants**

There is a dearth of information available whether micro programs intended for migrant communities are indeed successful, effective or, at best empower the powerless lot in our society. This gap encourages the search for answers. With the current situation where there are many existing migrant/immigrant communities in Malaysia, the state machinery cannot possibly monitor various programs that migrant communities enforce to their own communities and to what extent these programs have actually created a new healthy environment necessary to continue living in a foreign land. One of the examples is the Filipino migrant community.

The social conditions of Filipino migrants in Malaysia are a product of collaborative spirit. Collaboration and mutual helpfulness is demonstrated in almost all levels especially in relation to sustaining a learning and empowering environment upon which they are able to learn new ways while working in Malaysia. In this particular study, we are looking at how Filipino workers who are differentiated by type of employment and are able to forge a productive relationship in order to exercise a social action as a collective. Within the prism of collaboration at the level of migrant workers, unifying elements are reflected in their common identity as Filipino overseas workers, in their religious orientation as Catholics, and share common cultural practices and traditions. Collaboration of migrant workers with the local church is an interesting observation. This kind of collaboration is interesting in a sense that the local church provides both social and religious space for migrants to work out a program they think could foster camaraderie, involvement and most importantly, empowerment.

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