

# **The TRANSCODE Initiative: A transnational, multi-stakeholder approach to the migration-development nexus:**

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WORK IN PROGRESS. NOT TO BE QUOTED WITHOUT PERMISSION OF THE AUTHORS

## **Introduction**

In June 2010 a five day workshop was held in Tagaytay City, The Philippines. In this programme 35 participants from The Philippines and from The Netherlands met for a series of intensive debates, brainstorming and field visits with which to discuss the migration-development nexus from a multi-stakeholder perspective. To this end representatives were brought together from the policy, practitioner and academic fields. Nonetheless what brought true innovation was the fact that this TRANSCODE project was not a traditional set up of partners from the global North and South. The key to this project is that it seeks to bring together actors from various global South contexts. Yet the surprise with various delegates from The Philippines was clear when they found out, at the start of the first day of the workshop, that all Dutch delegates actually had their origins in low income countries as various as Burundi, Bolivia, Ghana, Kosovo and Indonesia.

Their surprise well reflects the bias of the key players involved with the migration-development, to think in terms of bipolar engagement, i.e. between the country of origin of migrants and the country of current residence (usually in the Global North). Such conceptualisations still assume the nation-state as the default and thus only relevant frame of reference (human capital, remittances). This programme not only queries the premises on which these are based but, more fundamentally, also explores opportunities for alternative initiatives that result from cross-fertilization of experiences and ideas between migrant organizations of various geographical origins, as implemented in locations around the world.

Therein the TRANSCODE programme seeks to traverse new paths through a multi-stakeholder approach to study the role and potential of transnational initiatives in the development arena. While a multi-stakeholder approach may seem to have evident logic, current direction in international and national agendas focusing on development issues continues to see only limited and often ad hoc roles for migrants (whether as individuals or as collectives). In the migration-development field this also holds for other stakeholders, notably in so-called countries of origin. Thus this project also seeks to achieve an integral approach taking in the role of other actors such as local and international NGOs, local government, the business sector and development aid practitioners (international, local).

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The main purpose of this paper is to set out and explain the directive of the TRANSCODE programme.

### **The TRANSCODE project**

TRANSCODE stands for Transnational Synergy and Cooperation for Development. The programme aims to bring together migrant NGOs in homeland countries (countries of origin) as well as in host (or destination) countries. The former could be considered as local institutional responses to outmigration, since they facilitate processes of adaptation between people who (temporary or permanent) migrated and the families and communities left behind; the latter concern the migrants who are living in a transnational space. Hence: transnational community organisations (TCOs), which facilitate adaptation to and integration in host countries, while often maintaining relations with the localities and countries of origin. They are responses to immigration processes.

TRANSCODE is an effort to bring both the migrant home organisations and the TCOs together to further the discussion and understanding of the migration-development nexus and, at the level of implementation, to learn from each other and co-operate in programmes and projects. In this, specific features are promoting the involvement of multiple stakeholders and fostering cooperation across transnational contexts. As stated above, while in migration studies and policies transnational contexts are usually understood as bilateral and between two localities, regions or countries, TRANSCODE wants to transcend 'nationalist thinking in transnationalism' and ultimately aims to link migrant related associations from a diversity of countries together. Although TRANSCODE is a recent programme and its sustainability needs to be proven, we find it useful to introduce the initiative to a broader audience already at an early stage. In this way we hope to benefit from as many suggestions to improve the programme, ideas and other inputs as possible. In fact, this process is already taken place although at a modest scale.

The TRANSCODE Programme started in 2009 as a joint initiative of the Scalabrini Migration Center (SMC) in Manila (The Philippines), the Radboud University (RU) in Nijmegen and the Stichting Mondiale Samenleving (SMS or the Global Society Foundation) in Utrecht (both in The Netherlands). SMC is a research centre devoted to international migration and among others, the publisher of the Asian and Pacific Migration Journal. The Department of Geography of RU has a strong interest in international migration issues and cooperates with the International Development Studies (IDS) Programme of Utrecht University. SMS is a civil society organization set up by refugees from several countries some ten years ago. It focuses on integration and migration and development issues and cooperates with a large number of Dutch diaspora organizations. TRANSCODE could be realised through the support of the Dutch co-financing organization Cordaid and an anonymous funding organisation.

### **Main activities**

The objectives of the programme were achieved through intensive 'live-in' workshops. They included the sharing of experiences of participants; inputs from resource speakers; discussion groups and study tours. In TRANSCODE I (2010), two workshops were held, one in Tagaytay City (The Philippines) on June 7-12 and the second one in Soesterberg (The Netherlands) on October 24 – 29. The workshops brought together participants representing different stakeholders involved in migration and development issues in the Philippines and the Netherlands: migrant NGOs and TCOs, local and national government agencies, private companies and funding organizations. Both workshops explored the possibilities for

collaborative engagements to tap the development potentials of the participating organizations.

Following a discussion of lessons learned, and good practices shared, networks were formed during the workshop conducted in the Philippines (see *Annex 1* for an overview). Following on this project ideas on collaborative and transnational projects were prepared by participants, which were then presented at the workshop in Soesterberg (see *Annex 2* for an overview). Of the various project ideas presented, several showed potential to be realized into actual projects, once funding for these becomes available. It should, at this point, be explained that we have to make a distinction between the TRANSCODE core programme, which consisted of workshops, and the associated TRANSCODE projects. Funding for potential transnational projects was not part of the programme in 2010. Considering also that TRANSCODE I had a limited duration, it was proposed that when TRANSCODE II (2011-2012) would gain funding, its activities would include a search for funds for selected projects.

At current, the joint project of the Dutch TCO Burundi Women for Peace and Development, and the Philippine NGOs Athika and Dawn is the most promising. Three other projects are still on the drawing table and need to be worked out: Ghanaian Dutch TCO RECOGIN (the Representative Council of Ghanaians in the Netherlands, an umbrella organisation based in Amsterdam) intends to co-operate in a home country agricultural project with the Filipino development NGO PASALI with offices in the Netherlands and the Philippines and agricultural programmes in Mindanao, The Philippines; SMS wants to support water related project in the Philippine municipality of Infanta while it also aims to establish a comparative country programme on 'Families left Behind'. The delay in the working out of the projects is due to the fact that the preparatory work needs to be done voluntarily, since up to now, no seed money has been obtained for project design.

## **TRANSCODE II**

At the Soesterberg workshop, the participants unanimously recommended to continue the initiative. With value-added contributions in mind, the organizers proposed an expanded TRANSCODE II by opening up the initiative to participants from a new set of origin and destination countries (which also represent a South-North combination): Ghana and Italy. Ghana was chosen because it is an African country with an emerging migration infrastructure; it has a sizable diaspora in Europe; and there are existing links between RU and Ghana. The choice of Italy was based on several considerations – the existence of various diaspora groups; the participation of local governments in migration and development projects; and the strong links of SMC with Italy-based institutions.

The workshop in Ghana is scheduled for October 2011. SMS/RU, the Centre of Migration Studies (CMS) at the University of Ghana and RECOGIN are the main organisers. The workshop in Rome will be organised by the Scalabrini International Migration Institute (SIMI) in Rome. It should be noted that the programme should not be seen as a North-South programme, but rather as a South-North-South programme. While SMC, SIMI, SMS/RU constitute the secretariat, to underscore the interaction between South and South the office of the TRANSCODE secretariat's is located in the South, namely with SMC in Manila. The task of the secretariat is to maintain contact with the main funders of the programme and initiate and monitor all current activities.

For TRANSCODE II, the same approach will be implemented, i.e., the holding of a workshop in Ghana and another one in Italy. As new countries are added, however, new

resource persons or new insights from new member countries will be part of the knowledge and good practices that will be shared in subsequent workshops. Further on, representatives of the (intended) collaborative project will hopefully be in a position to present launch the translation of their ideas into actual projects at one of the workshops.

### **Concluding remarks from the academic heaven**

The main purpose of this paper was to describe the TRANSCODE initiative and thereby argue the rationale of (1) a multi-stakeholder approach, with which to (2) focus on transnational processes that may be considered to express the migration-development nexus. In this section we dwell further on conceptual issues that come forth out of this approach:

It should be noted that from the start, academia and research institutes constitute an integral part of the programme. They fit into a multi stakeholder approach to migration and development with the specific tasks of reflection and putting activities in a broader theoretically based framework. Nonetheless just how academic scholars fit into factual implementation of migration-development initiatives is a point of debate. In early stages of multi-stakeholder approaches to the M-D nexus as manifested through the TRANSCODE I and II initiatives, we will focus especially on critically exploring the roles and positions of the (other) actors involved. To this end we offer some reflections below:

First, taking the two rationales together, we argue that the point of departure in M-D initiatives should not be the state(s) alone. Not only would this give insufficient recognition to the roles of other actors involved, it would also misunderstand the ordering principles and dynamics in which more spontaneous, i.e. non-state led, initiatives arise. Just how easily we ourselves also succumb to the status quo in conceiving developmental initiatives involving migrants is visible in the reporting of the two workshops held under TRANSCODE I, particularly in the workshop held in The Philippines, with a distinction being made between different kinds of projects in terms of who ‘drives’ these – e.g. the state, NGOs, etc. The easy comment on this is that this still very much suggests singular approaches by various actors involved in the M-D arena, who then provide some room for collaboration at an *ad hoc* basis to other actors. The harder comment concerns a general point of critique on multi-stakeholder approaches, namely: can, or even should, these be hegemonic projects under full-on democratic principles of governance, if we also recognize that we should expect and foresee differences, some of key importance, in the objectives of the different actors involved, which cannot realistically be harnessed into one governance mode. This comment has consequences for reflections on the approaches and sustainability of projects already in progress under TRANSCODE II.

Second, the multi-stakeholder approach should not be seen as a ‘do good’ measure, as a bottom-up approach that would extend initiatives such as those under corporate social responsibility programmes or fair trade initiatives to the world of migrants and their economic impacts. Instead, the multi-stakeholder approach is here considered as an essential measure that provides for instrumentally different ways forward from many current projects, by involving all actors involved from the start (in the same manner) and by *not* taking the state as its central conceptual point of departure. The latter, for instance, provides by emphasizing South-South collaborations.

Third, migration entails highly dynamic processes, not only in terms of flows of human beings, but also the flows produced in their wake. What this means here is that objectives of

actors involved with developmental initiatives coming out as localized impacts of migration may see important shifts due to changing personal positions, ambitions and statuses of migrants. Whilst changes in livelihoods and careers are obviously not confined to migrants alone, we do argue here that their situation is more dynamic and prone to all kinds of changes in situation – physical, financial, socio-cultural and mental. What this means is that unless partnerships and governance modes developed in multi-stakeholder projects can encompass such changes, the preference may be with short(er) term projects. Moreover, changes in migrants' situation causing shifts in tools and objectives call for more interaction with the academe whose reflections may help to focus on long-term objectives.

Finally we would like to reiterate arguments made before, namely that not all kinds of development projects should attempt to span large geographical divides. I.e. some development projects may be essentially local in their conception, initiation and implementation, as is the case in most diaspora and migrant NGOs initiatives that somewhat paradoxically are also of transnational nature. Critical lessons should therefore be taken from different types of 'diaspora engagements' with their countries of origin. This holds also for South-South partnerships to which TRANSCODE II give much attention. In such projects we thus need to ask what the required conditions and modes of operation are with which such South-South engagements can provide new opportunities, taking the Migration-Development nexus to new levels.

## **Annex 1: The TRANSCODE workshop in TAGAYTAY**

PRESS RELEASE

### **OPTIMISM AND POTENTIAL PARTNERSHIPS EMERGED FROM WORKSHOP ON MIGRATION AND DEVELOPMENT**

*Prepared by Alan Feranil*

Possibilities for collaborative engagements to tap the development potentials of migration concluded the week-long workshop on Transnational Synergy for Cooperation and Development (TRANSCODE) which was held at Hotel Dominique in Tagaytay City last June 7-12, 2010. The workshop brought together participants representing different stakeholders involved in migration and development issues in the Philippines and the Netherlands. The TRANSCODE Project is a joint initiative of the Scalabrini Migration Center (SMC), a research centre devoted to international migration based in Manila, Philippines, and the Stichting Mondiale Samenleving (SMS) and Radboud University Nijmegen (RU), based in the Netherlands. The project aims to further the discussion and understanding of the migration-development nexus, with the added elements of involving the different stakeholders and highlighting the transnational context of cooperation. The support of Porticus and Cordaid made the project possible.

The workshop drew 35 participants (including the organizers) from both countries. The Philippine delegation, led by Dr. Fabio Baggio and Dr. Marla Asis of SMC, included representatives from different institutions. The Philippine delegation was composed of delegates from national agencies (National Economic and Development Authority, Philippine Overseas Employment Administration, Overseas Workers' Welfare Administration, and Commission on Filipinos Overseas); local government (Cebu City, Tarlac City and the Municipality of Infanta, Quezon); non-government organizations (Development Action for Women Network, Philippine Consortium on Migration and Development, Pasali Philippines Foundation, Inc., Unlad Kabayan, Atikha Overseas Workers and Community Initiatives Inc.(Atikha), and Gawad Kalinga Community Development Foundation, Inc.); and the private sector (Ayala Foundation Inc. and the New Rural Bank of San Leonardo Inc., Cabanatuan City). Officers from migrants' associations, academia and funding agencies constituted the Netherlands delegation headed by

Mr. Zeki Shehu and Ms. Malu Padilla of SMS and Dr. Ton van Naerssen of RU. The other members of the Dutch delegation included a representative of the municipality of Haarlemmermeer, Stichting La Sagrada Familia and Nuestra Casa, Burundian Women for Peace and Development, Stichting Transforum, Representative Council of Ghanaian Organizations in the Netherlands (RECOGIN), TitanE-Moluccan Network, Network International Cooperation with Morocco (NISM), Stichting NEDSOM, Samenwerkende Moslims Hulp Organisaties (SMHO), Pasali Netherlands, Cordaid and Oxfam Novib.

The workshop in the Philippines was organized by SMC. The workshop was the initial activity of the TRANSCODE Project which aims to provide a forum to discuss the migration-development nexus in the Philippines and the Netherlands from a multi-stakeholders' perspective; engage the different stakeholders (policy makers, academic institutions, migrants/NGO leaders, representatives of the private sector and foundations in the Netherlands and the Philippines) in realizing and unleashing the development potentials of migration; and develop a framework of cooperation and co-responsibility in migration and development (M&D) policies and programs.

Ambassador Robert G. Brinks of the Royal Embassy of the Netherlands graced the opening ceremonies of the workshop. In his message, he underscored the integration of M&D in the Netherlands' foreign policy and the country's six priority policies.

The six-day program included presentations from resource persons, study visits to selected institutions, and workshop sessions. The workshops provided delegates opportunities to share their respective experiences on M&D initiatives and learn from each other. The presentations of the resource persons started with a theoretical background for M&D. This was followed by presentations on the policy frameworks and the support given by the respective governments of the Netherlands and the Philippines to M&D.

The presentations of the Philippine participants showed national and local initiatives that cater to the needs of overseas Filipinos workers and the contributions of overseas Filipinos to development programs in the Philippines. Complementing the Philippine experience were visits to the

Commission on Filipino Overseas, a government agency that caters to Filipino emigrants and facilitates the donations of overseas Filipino for various developmental projects; the Development Action for Women Network, a non-government organization with a long running reintegration program for former entertainers and their children; the Gawad Kalinga destination site in Dr. Jose Rizal Village in Calamba, Laguna, that involves the holistic integration of poor Filipinos into society with contributions from overseas Filipino associations and business sector; and Atikha Overseas Workers and Community Initiatives, Inc., an NGO based in San Pablo City, which has programs for the families and children of migrants, livelihood and reintegration programs with contributions from the local government, private sector and overseas Filipinos

The Netherlands delegation presented examples of development projects pursued by various migrants' associations in their home countries. The Netherlands-based migrants' associations have carried out or currently supporting projects in Latin America (Colombia and Bolivia), Africa (Somalia, Ghana, and Burundi, Morocco), and Asia and the Middle East (Molucca, the Philippines and Turkey). Netherlands-based migrants' associations also pursue projects to assist fellow migrants to integrate in Dutch society. Presentations on M&D initiatives were also given by the two represented academic institutions (Radboud University Nijmegen and African Diaspora Policy Centre); by funding agencies (Cordaid and Oxfam Novib) and by representatives of the twin-city arrangement of the municipality of Haarlemmermeer and Cebu City.

The four workshop sessions provided participants from the two countries opportunities to interact and to reach a common understanding of some of

the vexing issues on M&D. The first workshop explored the fundamental principles that should rule M&D and recommendations to enhance the engagement of the various stakeholders – national and local governments, migrants and families, diaspora communities and NGOs, private sector and foundations and United Nations and international organizations – in M&D programs. The second workshop session dealt with the participants' perceptions of the critical gaps in M&D initiatives in the Philippines and the Netherlands, recommendations to address these gaps and the factors that hinder or foster the replicability of existing initiatives. The third workshop identified stakeholders in M&D who are less engaged in M&D initiatives, the reasons for their lack of involvement, their respective responsibilities and recommendations to enhance their engagement. The fourth workshop provided the opportunity for the delegates to identify several project ideas for future collaboration. The participants identified projects on livelihood and investments (focusing on food security and local development particularly farming, fisheries and livestock and use of innovative technologies); capability development and awareness (using multi-stakeholder approaches involving the next generation of migrants, and fostering South-South cooperation); and social development (involving twin-city arrangements, the families of migrants left behind, youth and first generation migrants, transfer of technology and establishment of a migrant center). These project ideas serve as stepping-stones for future collaborations between the migrant alliances based in the Netherlands and Philippine institutions. The enhancement of these project ideas will be further pursued this coming October when the second workshop will be held in the Netherlands. The follow-up workshop in the Netherlands will be organized by SMS and the Radboud University.

## **ANNEX 2: The TRANSCODE workshop in Soesterberg**

Press Release

### **MOVING FORWARD WITH TRANSCODE**

Prepared by Cecilia G. Conaco

Energized by the outputs of the initial workshop held in Tagaytay in the Philippines last June 2010, participants in the Transnational Synergy for Cooperation and Development (TRANSCODE) Project joined up again for a second round of sharing and discussions on the migration and development nexus.

#### **From Tagaytay to Soesterberg**

The second workshop was held in Soesterberg, the Netherlands last October 24 to 29, 2010, bringing together once again various stakeholders involved in migration and development issues in the Philippines and the Netherlands. The Philippine delegation, led by Dr. Marla Asis of the Scalabrini Migration Center (SMC) and Dr. Fabio Baggio of the Scalabrini International Migration Institute (SIMI), included delegates from national government agencies (National Economic and Development Authority, Philippine Overseas Employment Administration, and Overseas Workers Welfare Administration), local government units (Cebu City, Tarlac City, and the Municipality of Infanta, Quezon), non-government organizations (Philippine Consortium on Migration and Development, Gawad Kalinga Community Development Foundation Inc., Development Action for Women Network, Atikha Overseas Workers and Communities Initiatives, Inc., Pasali Philippines Foundation Inc., and United Kabayan Migrant Services Foundation), and the private sector (Ayala Foundation, Inc. and New Rural Bank of San Leonardo, Inc.).

The Netherlands delegation was headed by Mr. Zeki Shehu and Ms. Malu Padilla of the Stichting Mondiale Samenleving (SMS) and Dr. Ton van Naerssen of Radboud University Nijmegen. They were also the main organizers for this second workshop. The Dutch delegation included representatives from various organizations involved with migrant groups and projects (Network of Moroccan International Cooperation, Oxfam Novib, African Diaspora Policy Centre, Vereniging Haarlemmermeer-Cebu, Burundian Women for Peace and Development, Stichting Transforum, Titane – Moluccas organization for sustainable development and poverty alleviation, Pasali

Netherlands, Representative Council of Ghanaian Organizations in the Netherlands, Stichting Nuestra Casa, Network of Muslim Aid Organizations, and NedSom). This second workshop was envisioned to continue from the Tagaytay workshop, to work out concrete project ideas, and to share, critique and fine-tune these proposals for later funding.

#### **TRANSCODE project presentations**

The five-day program proceeded at a brisk pace, revolving mainly around the project presentations by various stakeholders and the workshop sessions to critically assess and strengthen these projects. Three criteria were used to assess each project – the extent of real change the project will generate, the extent of multi-sectorality in approach, and the mutuality/bi-directionality of benefits. “Real change” was defined in terms of choices projects would afford the migrant, whether to leave or to stay in the home country. In the receiving country, real change would be assessed in terms of empowering migrants to contribute locally and transnational. The involvement of multiple stakeholders and the sharing of benefits by both sending and receiving countries were heavily emphasized.

A total of nine project proposals was presented by the Philippine participants. Though local in scope, the first four projects were presented with the goal of identifying possible transnational components. This cluster included projects by the Development Action for Women Network (on the expansion of a capacity building project for returning Filipino migrants from Japan), Pasali Philippines (for a community building project in Mindanao, focused on water and agricultural technology resource enhancement), the National Economic and Development Authority (developing a local investment portfolio for migration and development), and the New Rural Bank of San Leonardo (for a collaboration and co-financing program for overseas Filipinos and their relatives). The second cluster of Philippine projects included transnational project proposals by the Overseas Workers’ Welfare Administration (for overseas workers and family support programs), the Philippine Consortium on Migration and Development (for a financial literacy project), the Ayala Foundation (for a skills transfer project tapping into the diaspora dividends), the Municipal government of Infanta, Quezon (for a twin city

project to help reduce the effects of global climate change), and Gawad Kalinga Community Development Foundation (for their Transcode Youth Program).

The Dutch participants presented four transnational proposals that incorporated some ideas and concepts shared by the Philippine participants at the first conference. These included projects by the Burundi Women for Peace and Development (transcontinental exchange –women for women), Pasali-Netherlands (for an agricultural project in Ghana), the Network of Muslim Aid Organizations (three projects targeting Philippine beneficiaries), and the SMS (in a replication of Philippine initiatives in other TRANSCODE countries).

#### **Study trips**

In addition to the project presentations and workshops, two imams were invited to speak on inter-religious dialogue and the current political discourse around migration and Islam and the SMS presented its voluntary remigration project. Various trips were also organized to complement the presentations and discussions and to provide opportunities for culture learning. These included a meeting with Ahmed Aboutaleb, the first migrant mayor of Rotterdam, meetings and sharing sessions with migrant organizations in the Netherlands (Stichting Nuestra Casa, SMHO, Titane), a visit to the Zaandam mosque and the Moluks Museum in Utrecht, and a trip to Zaans Schans. Representatives of the youth group of the Vereniging Haarlemmermeer - Cebu City also joined the participants one evening to share their volunteer experiences during their exchange visit to Cebu City.

#### **“Moving Forward” Public Forum – closing activity**

In a fitting closure to the intense 5-day workshop, SMS and Stichting Oikos co-organized an open forum entitled “Moving Forward – from transnational actors to global citizens in the field of migration and development.” Consul General Frank Cimafranca of the Philippine Embassy and representatives of various Dutch organizations and institutions involved in migration and development issues (Cordaid, the International Migration and Development office of the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs) joined the workshop participants. A video documentary of the TRANSCODE workshops and select TRANSCODE migration and development projects were presented followed by discussion sessions focused on clarifying further the migration and development nexus, the role of the various stakeholders, and the strengthening of the role of the Diaspora as transnational and global actors and stakeholders in the field of migration and sustainable development. Whereas the Tagaytay workshop ended with optimism and the forging of potential partnerships, the Soesterberg workshop served to consolidate all the gains and lessons from the first workshop to come up with tangible and viable transnational, multi-sectoral projects as essential steps for moving forward in TRANSCODE.