Empowering Returned Filipino Women Migrants and their Children: The Batis Center for Women Experience

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The Philippine experience of sending Filipino women to Japan as entertainers for nearly three decades beginning in the late 1970s has etched a migration route between the Philippines and Japan that is characterized by women’s vulnerabilities to institutionalized labor and sexual abuse and exploitation in Japan’s adult entertainment industry and the consequent issues and concerns emerging out of this phenomenon. While lives have been changed – economically, culturally, and socially at the individual, family and community levels - many for the better, quite a number found themselves confronting daunting challenges, roadblocks, and experiences of violence in the course of their work as entertainers in Japan, and later on as wives or partners of Japanese men.

These experiences led some of the women on a path that runs alongside the stream of assistance, services, and hope extended by Batis Center for Women for returned distressed women migrant workers.

Since its establishment in 1988 in response to the growing number of Filipino women migrant workers coming home from Japan in distressed conditions, Batis has extended assistance to over 2,500 women returnees mostly from Japan and other members of their families including their children. The women with their children sought the assistance of Batis for the problems they encountered while working in Japan as entertainers such as illegal recruitment, labor contract violations, trafficking, sexual abuse and exploitation, as well as domestic violence and abandonment within the context of the intimate relations the women have with the Japanese men they encounter in their work who later on became their husbands or partners.

From a sea of physical, sexual, psychological, and economic despair, Batis Center for Women extended immediate psycho-social and welfare services to the women in the early years of its existence such as counseling, airport assistance, provision of temporary shelter, medical and legal assistance through the Social Case Management program. The work of Batis later on evolved to include the realization of women’s empowerment under the guidance of the Women Empowerment Program through organizing, education and training, social enterprise development, and advocacy.

Batis Center for Women

The women’s life path intersect with Batis Center for Women’s institutional path because of their negative migration experiences and Batis’ mission to “respond to the needs of distressed women migrant workers and their families including Japanese-Filipino Children (JFC) to enable them to rebuild/regain their sense of dignity and self-worth.”
In the course of the helping relationships that Batis established with the women, they have allowed us to get a glimpse, and in many cases, shared fully with us their experiences in Japan. Initially, the experiences that the women shared came in trickles. They only allowed the service providers of Batis access to information that will help us manage their cases. But as the helping relationships evolved and the women gradually learned that they could share their life experiences with people who empathized, withheld judgement, and offered a lifeline of assistance and support services, stories poured out from the women that revealed their desires, sense of responsibility, courage, uncertainties, coping, fears, regrets, resilience, continuing struggles, discoveries, failures, disappointments, strength, resolve, and passion. Sharing their experiences was not easy for the women. But the act of sharing is akin to owning the experiences and this acceptance paves the way for the coming to terms with these experiences which is the first step (even if these were reluctant steps) towards healing.

As the earlier generation women clients of Batis came to accept and learn from their experiences (either willingly or reluctantly, and at their own pace and readiness), Batis was able to work with the women to facilitate the rebuilding of their lives through continued individual and group interventions. Batis Center for Women also saw the opportunity and potential to foster a shared identity as survivors to enable the women to see the connections in their own experiences. In order to facilitate the transformation of their status from victims to empowered individuals, Batis Center also provided venues for the women to raise their awareness on women, migration, and related issues; acquire, build and strengthen the skills and opportunities in helping and providing support to one another; in getting the messages of their shared experiences across; and in, building a collective identity in order to address and work towards transformation of social conditions that perpetuate the continued migration of Filipinos for overseas work and the increasing feminization of Philippine labor migration.

From an institution that initially provided direct welfare assistance to returned distressed women migrant workers and members of their families in order to help them in the process of rebuilding their lives, the scope of work of Batis Center for Women has evolved and expanded to include working with the women migrants and their families to achieve empowerment. In over two decades of working for the promotion and protection of the rights and welfare of Filipino women migrant workers, Batis has evolved a rights-based framework of empowerment ("Self Help, Help Others, Help Community/Society") which has guided our work in providing services to the women and their children and in creating an environment for them to realize, achieve and actualize their empowerment.

A testament to this is the formation of the Batis AWARE Women’s Association (the self-help organization of Filipino women returnees from Japan) in 1996 and Batis – YOGHI (composed of children of the women returnees) in 2000 through the effort of Batis in organizing the women and children, to provide them with a means to extend support to one another as
well as to address the issues confronting them as migrant workers and as children of migrant workers.

Another facet of women returnees’ empowerment that Batis Center for Women focused its attention to is their expressed need for economic empowerment.

From initially providing welfare and psycho-social services, Batis Center for Women in the mid-1990s ventured into various alternative livelihood projects as part of its strategy to facilitate women’s healing and recovery (with their involvement in the economic activity serving as therapy) and rebuilding of their lives through the income they earned from the livelihood projects. The women clients, then being organized into a core group that served as the precursor of Batis AWARE, could devote more of their time to the activities of Batis Center for Women to help them come to terms with their negative migration experiences.

Getting women involved in economic activities as they undertake a journey towards healing and rebuilding often makes it possible for them to overcome the difficult transition from their failed experiences overseas to a more hopeful life back home, thus enabling Batis to continue journeying with the women towards transformation and empowerment.

**Japanese-Filipino Children**

Among the thousands of Filipino women working in Japan, many had relationships with Japanese men, mostly their customers, and bore Japanese – Filipino children. Unfortunately, some of these Japanese men had families of their own while others were unwilling to commit themselves. Some of the marriages between the Filipino women and Japanese men ended in divorce or abandonment of the Filipino wives and their children.

One by one they came to Batis Center to ask for assistance in looking for the Japanese fathers of their children to seek for legal recognition and child support. Thus, in 1992, Batis has formally started its JAPINO (short for Japanese-Filipino) Program to focus on the increasing incidence of returning women who bring their children with them – with most of these children born without seeing their fathers. Having come from their failed labor migration experiences and personal relationships, most of the mothers were poor and uneducated and the children suffering from malnutrition and other sickness.

Under the JAPINO Program, the children were given immediate assistance in the form of food, shelter, clothing, medical assistance and referrals to charitable institutions. Through the network of both private and government organizations in Japan, the immediate search for the father or parents, for children who were abandoned by mother and father, were facilitated. Search services, counseling and legal assistance were also provided to the clients. Educational assistance was also rendered with the help of private individuals and institutions. All the cases were documented.
for monitoring by the social worker and there was continuous campaign to advocate for the children and women’s rights and welfare.

Most of the children clients under the JAPINO Program at that time were still in the formative age, thus the very high dependency rate. Many of them were abandoned by their fathers long before they were born. They were left to the care of their Filipino mothers who were unemployed single parents or aging grandparents who have barely enough to support their basic needs.

The children were inquisitive and sensitive especially towards other kids. For some kids, the alienation they felt from other kids created some insecurities about their personal identity.

With their distinctive Japanese features and names, the gap between the public’s expectation that Japanese people are rich and the realities of many Japanese – Filipino children and the financial difficulties that they have become used to in the Philippines bears down heavily on them. Japanese – Filipino children living in the Philippines also face discrimination and ridicule stemming from the public’s negative perception of their mother’s work in Japan and for being different from other children. And for the Japanese – Filipino children themselves, questions on their identity rankle as they try to deal with the myriad of challenges faced by children and adolescents going through the process of establishing their own identities.

Many of the JFC are now entering the workforce. Their priorities are changing. They now share the responsibility of providing for their family’s needs. Much as they want to finish their education but due to financial constraints, some of them are forced to give it up in order to work and help their families. The legal recognition from their fathers has now become more relevant to them since it will serve as their passport to acquiring Japanese citizenship or at the very least the visa needed in order for them to work in Japan.

In a society that puts premium on a “complete” family (a mother, father and child at that), it was inevitable that despite the love and affection showed by their mothers and other family members, some JFC would still say that they would only achieve self-fulfillment once they have met their fathers or have stepped on the land to which their fathers belong. This longing, coupled with the need to fend for their families the desire to live in the land of their fathers are some of the factors that have been pushing them to leave for Japan.

Some chose to leave, others stayed. Among those who left, all of them ended up doing factory work and were subjected to the 3D (difficult, dirty, dangerous) or 3K (kitsui, kitanai, kikken) jobs we know. Some were able to find their fathers but their meeting did not develop into the relationship they were hoping for. For some who have been preoccupied with their work, finding their fathers was put on the side and it was already too late for they have died when they have found them. Based on our interviews with them, they all expressed the difficult lives they had to live in Japan – adjusting to the new culture and environment, learning the language and way of life, being discriminated in and outside of the workplace. All these they had to
go through. It was tough for them but they do not regret it and have lived by the decisions they made.

Others chose to stay, for reasons that they don’t have the proper documentation needed to leave or because they have already embraced the reality that their fathers abandoned them and that life in Japan would be very difficult for someone who goes there unprepared. Some have also have also finished their studies and are now gainfully employed and thus find no need to leave and be away from the families who love and care for them.

In a workshop we conducted about identity among JFC from the Philippines in Japan, they have collectively summarized their thoughts and views on who they truly are through this poem which I will read to you.

**Who am I?**

_Who am I? Who am I really?_
_I am Yuri, I am Shig_
_I am Mikas, I am Yuki_

_In the Philippines, I’m different._
_In Japan, even more different._
_Even though this is what we encounter_
_we have never even once thought_
_that life is worthless._

_I don’t try to become like the others._
_I accepted who I am_
_Even when I get mocked in school,_
_by other people. I am who I am._

_Though they laugh at my name_
_Or mock me because of my race._
_I am myself who is fighting the world_
_for my rights and showing my abilities._

_Even though my father and mother’s races are different._
_I am like this when I was born._
_Sometimes confused as to where I belong._
_“I am both, that’s how I was raised.”_

_I am Yuri, I am Shig_
_I am Mikas, I am Yuki_
_I am Ai, I am Yumi_
_Filipino, Japanese, I am both._

**Empowering the Women and the Children**

Through the years, the services and interventions undertaken by the Batis Center in addressing the plight of returned women migrant workers from Japan and other members of their families evolved such that by the
early-1990s, the institution began to engage in the work of facilitating the empowerment of returned women migrants and other members of their families.

It was during the latter part of 1992 that organizing women clients was identified in the Batis Center Strategic Plan. The plan is premised on the need for awareness-raising, skills- and capability-building as necessary ingredients to empower the women. Batis also ventured into alternative livelihood projects to facilitate the earlier generation clients’ continuing involvement and engagement in the activities of the institution towards the rebuilding of their lives.

Batis steered the second phase of the journey of the women towards transformation and empowerment through the building of a collective identity as survivors, coming together to become involved in the advocacy of their issues, and working together in developing alternative livelihood projects.

In 1995, Batis established the Women Empowerment Program (WEP), to continue the interventions of the Social Case Management program (SCM), albeit beyond the personal and individual levels, to working with the women collectively, and later on their children through the Children and Youth Development Program (CYDP). WEP “considers women clients as partners for the promotion of human welfare and development instead of just recipients of programs and services. They are the ones affected, therefore, they are in the best position to advance their rights, and to improve or change their situation”.

Batis then initiated the organizing of a core group of women. Alongside continuing individual interventions, Batis provided opportunities for the women to develop their capabilities as peer counselors, public speakers, writers, advocates, project managers, among others. This paved the way for the establishment of Batis – AWARE in 1996. Having their own organization apart from Batis Center for Women served as their venue to help and support each other, foster cooperation and build teamwork, trust, and confidence.

The year 1996 was a watershed year for Batis as it marked a shift in the thrust of institution’s service delivery. It redefined its role “beyond merely providing welfare services to the women to being an active facilitator of genuine women’s empowerment through its framework, using a holistic and sustainable strategy and approach.”

The years after the shift in the institution’s service delivery thrust, Batis focused on helping Batis-AWARE women to gradually run their organization by themselves through knowledge enhancement, skills and capability-building activities, and provision of support to their livelihood pursuits.

After several years of providing support to the women as they work towards empowerment, Batis Center for Women grew more confident of transforming their close, if at times inter-dependent relations with Batis-
AWARE, knowing full well that the work that was done in providing venues, opportunities and challenges for the women, and Batis-AWARE to dream, learn, discover, bond, grow, take action, and develop (individually and organizationally) contributed to their level of practice and internalization of their empowerment.

Thus by 2004, Batis Center for Women initiated the process of transforming the inter-dependent relations with Batis-AWARE to provide more space and opportunities for the women to have full control of and make decisions in relation to their organization. The conscious step towards transformation was Batis Center for Women’s response to the expressed interest of Batis-AWARE to be an independent organization.

**Empowerment: From the Point of View of Women**

In 2005, Batis Center for Women reviewed the past decade to see how far it had fared in women’s empowerment. It was a good time as any, coming at the heels of the transformed interdependent relations between Batis Center for Women and Batis – AWARE to that of a partnership based on principled and formal terms of agreement on various areas of work.

There was also a sense that Batis Center for Women was near to coming full circle in providing services and support to the earlier generation clients. And as the institution prepared to take on new challenges in providing assistance, services and support to a new generation of returned distressed women migrant workers from Japan and beyond, learning the lessons of the past will serve the institution well in its continuing work to effectively respond to the needs of returned distressed women migrant workers.

An internal research to assess Batis’ work on facilitating women’s empowerment was thus conducted to surface the earlier generation clients’ views and experience on empowerment in the context of their involvement and engagement in various Batis activities.

**Views on Empowerment**

One of the views shared by the women is that empowerment helps them deal with pain and problems towards healing and coming to terms from their hurting experiences as women migrants from Japan. Further more, Batis provides a safe, comfort space for women. Batis thus serves as a refuge for women victims of violence.

There is also a view that Batis is there to help women empower themselves because there is the deep trauma in each of them.

Another view shared by the women is that Batis’ work on empowerment helps develop women’s capacities. Respondents shared that Batis helps women see alternatives from their own experience, showing them the way to develop on their own as women.

Still another shared that Batis helps women rebuild their lives. What is important to note here is that the starting point for the women in this
response is no longer the pain of their experience as former migrant workers, but control of their lives.

Another view that surfaced is that Batis work on empowerment helps women help other women. WEP does this through its theater advocacy work, where the women actors of Teatro Batis are able to share their experiences with prospective women migrant workers to enable them to know the real situation of migration (GGD). WEP also teaches the women to help other women, like family and friends, through personal advocacy.

**Definition of Empowerment**

What then is the earlier generation women clients’ organic concepts and practice of empowerment? For the women, empowerment involves having a set of values, a framework, perspectives, and knowledge. For women to be empowered, they have to be aware of their social situation and their rights, especially knowing how to fight for them.

The women recognize that empowerment is not a one-time thing. The earlier generation women clients of Batis underscore their experience of empowerment as being a process. For them, empowerment is developmental, a course of action to achieve results, perhaps increasing incrementally. For the women, this translate to empowerment being up to the individual or group to make their empowerment progress from one point to the next, depending on where they define the next empowerment stop to be.

**“How to’s” of becoming empowered**

For the women, seminars and trainings facilitate empowerment. The discussions give the women a handle to view difficulties, teach them not to blame themselves, and encourage them to reclaim the power that had been taken away from them by their negative experience as migrants returning from Japan. Batis’ activities helped raise awareness or understanding of the women’s situation, giving the women a guide on how to cope with the situation they find themselves in. There is also a deeper understanding of the Philippine situation, as well as a forum to share their learnings with other women, without breaking down in tears.

A favorite Batis activity was theater advocacy. Sharing their experiences as former migrant workers through the performing arts enabled the women to show the people watching the performances that they are able to move on despite their heartbreaking experience in Japan. These helped them stand on their feet and face other people, without the shame.

One of the women said that dealing with different kinds of people from various sectors and sections of society, even policymakers from the Philippine Congress, is empowering because it proves that they can now confidently carry themselves and talk about their analysis and position about migration issues. She added that if one does not have the guts, then you will not be able to face others, but Batis helped embolden the women.
It is not just the activities of Batis that facilitated their empowerment, according to the women. For some, it is also about the people who say they want to help. In the case of Batis, the staff knows how to carry out the activities and services, how to relate to the women in various levels of distress, recovery and empowerment, and how to listen to the women when they need someone to talk to. These attitudes and behaviours also enhance the empowering character of the institution.

**Manifestations of Empowerment**

Empowerment has to take root in oneself. Inner strength develops with a person, who has been empowered. She has come to terms with her situation (referring to the trauma faced). She is able to face the challenges in her life with the help of support groups like Batis. She can handle, survive all her problems, and is able to help herself. She is now able to take care of herself. She is also able to make decisions for herself, as well as do things now that she was not able to do before. She can run her own life and live life on her own terms. An empowered woman can stand on her own. She is responsible for herself, for her action and the consequences of those actions. She can control her own actions, especially those that are not good for oneself and for others.

An empowered woman also exhibits certain skills and acquire more knowledge. She can express herself, can dialogue and connect with others. She knows how to deal with or interact with people and show the world her evolved self. She is not shy or embarrassed anymore, even with those who may seem to have “more” than her (money, education, knowledge, etc.). As a mother, she has the confidence to raise her child by herself, and can stand on her own.

An empowered woman has also gained organizational skills. She knows what they are doing when they come together for collective action. She has skills in handling the women, and is now always dependent on others. Yet, she also knows that she cannot do it by herself. She is part of a community, she lives and participates in community life.

One feature of empowerment, according to the women, is being able to use their empowerment to help others. One has the capacity to apply what one has learned, to themselves, with other women and to their organization. An empowered woman helps other women see their potentials and values in life in the midst of challenges, as well as give women the expression, the space, the opportunity to see that for themselves.

**Aye! Aye! To Empowerment**

The earlier generation women clients were in agreement that Batis’ empowerment work was good for them. Space and opportunities to air out their concerns were provided, the women became more aware of their rights, their involvement and engagement in the activities of Batis helped boost their self-esteem and strengthen their self-confidence, which ultimately enabled them to heal from their negative migration experiences.
The women say that Batis’ work on empowerment is about alternatives. The continuing challenge is to create, widen or expand these options for the women. Equipping them with the resources to choose and take on an option, and creating the safe space and setting up the support system for the choices they make, especially non-traditional and unpopular choices.

JFC journey Towards Empowerment

To facilitate the process of empowering the children, the first step initiated by Batis Center was to change the title accorded to them. From JAPINO, an acronym or shortened form of Japanese and Filipino, they were then called Japanese-Filipino children or JFC. In a survey done by Batis to clients and partner organizations, majority indicated that the term JAPINO may be discriminatory, stigmatic and offensive. It puts the children in a special category and the term could easily be attributed to children born to Filipino entertainers and Japanese men. The term JFC is more general, referring to children born to Filipino and Japanese parents. This is way better than the term which was originally used to describe them, “hinomaru babies” or children borne out of economic consequences.

The JAPINO Program of Batis Center for Women then evolved to become the Children and Youth Development Program. The CYDP aims to promote the development of total self and human rights, strengthen self-awareness, self-confidence and sense of responsibility of the children and youth through workshops on migration and other socio-economic-cultural issues both in the Philippines and Japan, summer camps, exposure trips, sports festivals, youth meetings, and scholarship and educational assistance.

While the cases for legal recognition and child support from their Japanese fathers were ongoing, the CYDP provided venues and opportunities for the JFC to discuss and come to terms with the issues they face as children of migrant workers, learn about their rights, and involve themselves in self-development activities. More importantly, the program organized the children to provide support to one another and address the issues confronting them as JFC and youth in general.

In 2000, with the encouragement and initiative of the program, the children and youth then formed Batis-YOGHI or Youth Organization that Gives Hope and Inspiration. The name sums up what the organization desires to do – to give hope and inspiration to fellow JFC. That same year, they elected their own set of officers, drafted their constitution and by laws and designed their organization’s logo.

Batis Center envisioned an organization wherein all JFC are empowered, ready to face and overcome the challenges they face as they grow older and are active participants in issues affecting them.

From Children to Young Adults
The establishment of Batis-YOGHI came at a very opportune time when majority of the JFC clients were transitioning from kids to young adults and their needs and issues were changing. By supporting them in their decision to form an organization, Batis Center helped them create a collective identity and sense of unity. Opportunities for individual and collective development were provided by Batis Center in the form of workshops, trainings, educational discussions, interactions and the like.

From the art workshops and mother and child session which were given to them when they were small children, Batis Center saw the need to develop a more mature and age-appropriate educational sessions with the JFC because of the need to foster their social, psychological, physical and intellectual well-being.

During the early years of organizing the JFCs, the

To quote Batis-YOGHI President Mikas Matsuzawa,

The workshops address the needs of the members of our organization in a timely way focusing not only on our unique situation as JFC but also on our needs as we grow up. Here, we are given space to showcase our talents, learn new things and be creative. Here, a venue is offered for us children and youth to step out of the box and fully enjoy learning and participate in issues that concern us. From the mother-child relationship and child rights workshop up to the gender sensitivity and adolescent sexuality discussion, training activities were arranged in consideration of the need to strengthen and empower Batis-YOGHI members, from just being beneficiaries into independent and brilliant young leaders.

The JFC themselves expressed that empowerment is a process which different JFC go through at different paces. They acknowledged too that empowerment may be facilitated by the existence of supportive individuals, family members and groups, opportunities for self-development activities and exposure to JFC issues, constant self-reflection and culling out of lessons from the challenges they experience in life.

In preparation for this paper, I have interviewed JFC leaders about their concept of empowerment. Who is an empowered JFC? How is empowerment manifested by a JFC? What would help JFC achieve empowerment? They do not claim that they have all the qualities of an empowered JFC at this point in time. But defining what an empowered JFC is would serve as a guide and a reminder for them as they undergo through the process of being an ideal JFC.

For them, the answer would be:

- An empowered JFC is someone who owns the issues that affect them and puts a stake on JFC causes. This empowered JFC does not only have a say on his/her personal issues but claims other JFC’s issues as her/his personal issues as well.
• An empowered JFC is responsible for her/himself emotionally, physically, spiritually and financially. S/he knows how to make decisions for her/himself and can stand by the consequences of her/his actions. An empowered JFC is a responsible member of her/his family and society.

• An empowered JFC is someone who is conscious that the search for one’s true identity is a process. It may be a long, tedious and painful process but s/he will never tire of seeking answers to complete it. A product of the long process of knowing one’s identity is a raised consciousness which the empowered JFC will share among other JFC so that it will help serve as a guide in defining their own self-identity.

• An empowered JFC seeks for dialogue to find answers regarding his/her questions on her identity. S/he knows how to forgive and let go of her/his past. S/he can forgive his/her parents of their shortcomings and can look at his/her past with confidence. S/he can draw strength and inspiration from the hurts and sufferings s/he suffered before -- this strength will then serve as a foundation to which other JFCs can lean on.

• An empowered JFC does not have a victim mentality. S/he can take on the challenges confronting him/her. S/he may have been a victim of circumstance but s/he will look past that. Instead s/he lives for the present and prepares for the future.

Education is very important for JFCs’ empowerment. Formal education, which has become a privilege rather than a right to some JFCs, will prepare them for their life ahead. Keeping them in school and helping them finish it will open more opportunities for them and would help them veer away from the path which their mothers treaded on before.

JFC leaders have articulated that the activities they have undergone as beneficiaries of the CYDP of Batis Center and members of Batis-YOGHI have helped them become empowered young people. Developing each member individually at first and providing opportunities to develop collectively helped them see the importance of each one’s contribution in advancing the cause. Trainings which were very much youth-centered and oriented caught their attention and sustained their interest in the issue. Cultural exchanges and study tours allowed them to know what is happening outside of their own world and the realities and ways of life of other people. Regular team building activities also helped them bond and share experiences with other JFC.

Another manifestation that JFC are empowered is when they have decided to come together and organize themselves. They continue to develop oneself not just for their own personal benefit but for the benefit of the entire JFC community. This would be good training ground wherein JFC will work in solidarity with one another at first and then in the future it will also try to reach out to other interracial children like them.
The presence of stakeholders who support the JFC helped strengthen their organization and widened the opportunities for JFC to empower themselves and at the same time tell others about their empowerment. Being allowed to run an organization which is for them and by them is a big step towards achieving empowerment.

Lessons Learned

Batis Center’s engagement with children and young adults stemmed from its commitment to helping returned distressed women and their families. By helping the JFC develop to their full capacity and providing them with the knowledge and proper information needed by young people like them we are actually assisting them in making informed choices in life – something which their mothers did not have before.

In 2009, Batis-YOGHI was awarded as one of the ten accomplished youth organizations in the Philippines. This was a reason for celebration among all JFC not just the members of Batis-YOGHI. It was also a reassuring fact for Batis Center that we are on the right track in our work with the JFC. It was through the ideas and creativity of these young people that their issues are now becoming known to JFC who are non-members of Batis-YOGHI, the general public and other stakeholders.

Instead of just being a target group or beneficiaries, Batis-YOGHI played an important role in finding solutions to their own concerns. Instead of being passive recipients who rely on adults to make things happen for them, they become active participants and own the issues and find ways to work towards their empowerment. Provide them with opportunities to articulate their needs, a process that is participatory, allow them to make decisions and play important roles in their own organization and they become genuine partners in our work. These JFC bring with them optimism and dynamism which they easily pass on to fellow JFC and even to adults like us. This I guess is one thing which we should learn from them.

Essential to the work that we do with the JFC is our partnership with like-minded organizations and individuals in Philippines and Japan who help advance their cause. Without their help we wouldn’t have gone this far in our work with the JFC.

Most importantly, the realization of their rights as JFC and human being – right to nationality, right to education, right to basic needs, right to participate in matters that affect them are the most crucial towards attaining empowerment.

Batis Center exists to facilitate the empowerment of the JFC. The JFC can empower themselves provided they have an enabling environment. As long as we provide them with opportunities to empower themselves, the JFC will continue to create better futures not just for themselves but also for other JFC and to the society in general.
Going Beyond Full Circle

Last year, Batis Center for Women celebrated its 20th year anniversary. The institution considers it a bittersweet moment in the continuing herstory of Batis Center for Women. It comes at a time when an ever increasing number of Filipino women and men find themselves working overseas. When policies in countries of destination present challenges to migrant workers due to stricter border controls and labor market realities. When employment opportunities for low-skilled work attract the next generation vulnerable migrants. When threats and vulnerabilities are ever present especially for women migrants and for low-skilled, temporary migrant workers.

Alongside this global migration landscape, Batis is pleased to see how we have evolved as an institution, how our programs and services have responded to the changing needs of our beneficiaries. Opportunities to innovate, try out new approaches and explore new directions have also presented itself and we have utilized these to the fullest, in making our services more accessible, relevant, efficient, effective, and heartfelt. We are reminded of the strength and resilience of the women and the children, as we work together with Batis AWARE and Batis – YOGHI in protecting and promoting the rights and welfare of women migrant workers and the children resulting from migration.

Batis looks forward to meeting the challenges of providing direct services, working for women and children’s empowerment, and in transforming individuals, groups, communities and societies in the next decade of its existence.

* This article draws from the papers of the authors in the Roundtable Conference entitled “Immigrant Children and Women Empowerment Social Work in Diverse Communities in Japan” held in Tokyo, Japan on 3 November 2010.