

*Kwansei Gakuin University*  
*Social Sciences Review*  
Vol. 22, 2017  
Nishinomiya, Japan

## Participatory Action Research as an Approach to Empowerment of Self-Help Groups: Facilitating Social and Economic Reintegration of Women Migrant Workers<sup>1)</sup>

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### I. Introduction

Economic globalization has widened the disparity in economic power in the world. Poverty and unemployment in developing countries, coupled with a demand for inexpensive labor in developed countries, has created more migrant workers than ever before. According to the United Nations (2013), the number of international migrants worldwide reached 232 million in 2013, up from 175 million in 2000 and 154 million in 1990. Women make up almost half of migrants. The Philippines is one of those countries with an economy heavily dependent on remittances of migrant workers, especially women migrant workers. The Commission of Filipinos Overseas (CFO, 2015) reports that the estimated number of Filipinos outside the country reached 10,238,614 people as of December 2013, which means that about 10 percent of the total population work or reside abroad.

While migrant workers contribute to the economies of their host countries, as well as their countries of origin, by sending remittances to their hometowns, migrants, especially women migrants, are vulnerable to exploitation and human trafficking (ACHIEVE, 2011; Lund, 2013), and their migration often has negative impacts on their families, such as family separation and neglected children (Grande & Kerr, 1998; Tornea, 2003). Even upon their return and reintegration to the Philippines, women migrants face a wide range of difficulties. Return and reintegration of women migrant workers is not a process of simply going back home, particularly

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1) This work was supported by JSPS KAKENHI Grant Numbers JP23530790, JP15H03441.

when return is not fully voluntarily and harmonious, such as in human trafficking and exploitative labor situations. This return and reintegration process involves psychosocial and economic consequences that the returning women migrant workers would face. Although many studies (c.f., Alcid, 2006; Batis Center for Women, 1995; Beltran & De Dios, 1992; Beltran & Rodriguez, 1996; Constable, 1997; Enrique, 2003; Francisco, 2014; Guevarra, 2006; Grandea & Kerr, 1998; Weekley, 2004) in the past have revealed the problems and coping strategies of Filipina migrant workers during their migration, the number of studies focusing on reintegration is limited. This study accordingly focuses on the social and economic reintegration of Filipina migrant workers after their return to the Philippines.

Batis Center for Women plays a challenging role in facilitating the reintegration of distressed women migrant workers. Batis is committed to providing direct services to help the returnees recover from their negative migration experiences and rebuild their lives back home with their families and communities. These direct services include psychosocial interventions, capacity-building activities and economic interventions to facilitate the psychosocial and economic empowerment of the returnees. Batis provides a lifeline of support to transform the lives of returned distressed women migrant workers from victims of exploitative migration to empowered individuals.

This study focuses on Batis AWARE (Association of Women in Action for Rights and Empowerment), a self-support organization of former clients that Batis Center for Women formed. The objectives of this study are to examine how participatory action research (PAR) facilitates the social and economic reintegration of women migrant workers and contribute to the empowerment of this self-help organization.

## **II. Reintegration of Women Migrant Workers**

### **1. Reintegration Problems**

Reintegration is the process during which a returning migrant worker re-adjusts and re-assimilates into the context from which he or she originated (ACHIEVE, 2011). Upon their return, migrant workers need to reintegrate socially as well as economically into their home countries.

While those migrant workers who have completed their contracts can pay pre-employment debts, acquire assets, and/or keep some savings, those who are forcibly repatriated or prematurely terminated tend to sink further into debt and lack the necessary financial means during the re-entry period to sustain their families' basic needs (Tornea, 2003). The past studies on reintegration of migrant workers to the Philippines (Angsuthanasomba, 2007; Lund, 2013) and Africa (Majodina, 1995)

have revealed that many face severe economic reintegration problems such as financial problems and unemployment upon returning. In a comparative study between Thai and Filipino migrant workers, Angsuthanasomba (2007) found that most returned Filipino migrant workers were unable to find employment upon their return or to adjust to the great differences in wages between the foreign country of employment and the Philippines. This study suggested that common needs of these Filipino returnees include information on financial resources, legal aid and social welfare services, financial advice or assistance on how to invest their savings wisely, how to open a business, how to become a member of a cooperative, self-employment opportunities, entrepreneurial skills training, business consultancy, credit or access to capital, and local job placement.

Besides economic reintegration, returning migrant workers often undergo difficult social reintegration because of the long separation from family and community. Many are unable to return to their former social networks which may have been weakened by the migration process (Torrea, 2003). Estranged relations between migrant workers and family members left in the home countries due to prolonged separations have caused irreversible damage. The studies on returning African women migrant workers (Majodina, 1995; Minaye 2012) have revealed that their re-entry problems include adjusting to changes in the new context, meeting family expectations, confronting changes in family, sharing exile experiences, harassment, and discrimination, which can cause sadness, hopelessness, self-hate, and suicidal thoughts among these returnees. Studies on Filipino women migrant workers have found similar social integration problems. Lund (2013) reported that many women returnees experienced strained relationships with other family members as well as isolation, harassment, and discrimination in the community. Some of them have feelings of shame from not having succeeded in sending home money to family members. Angsuthanasomba (2007) also found that many returned Filipino women migrant workers faced difficulties in returning to their families and social networks that might have been weakened by the migration process, especially if the migration ended with failure.

## **2. Importance of Self-Help Groups for Reintegration**

Social support has been shown to be one of the most significant variables for a positive outcome on the quality of life of women migrant workers upon their return. While Majodina (1995) argues that the most common primary sources of social support for returnees include family, supporting organizations, and neighbors/friends, Lund (2013) points out that it is often difficult for Filipino women returnees to share their problems and experiences with their families, their neighbors, and other members of their own community because of strained relationships with them. Some

women were afraid that family and relatives would blame them and gossip about their situation if they open up to them.

For women with limited support from relatives and other people around them, self-help groups have been found to be an indispensable resource for reintegration because social support tends to be more efficient if it comes from others who have experienced or are experiencing the same stressors (Lund, 2013). Women returnees state that they can understand each other because they have had similar experience, and Lund (2013) noticed that women returnees gradually regained their dignity and their self-confidence in self-help groups. The experience of helping others in the group is also effective for their empowerment. Helping others by sharing their experiences and difficulties can be considered as an active strategy not only to release inner stressors but also to value one's own experience as it helps prevent other women from going through the same ordeals. These experiences in a self-help group provide empowerment opportunities for Filipino migrant women, which in turn facilitate their social and economic reintegration processes.

Many studies on women's self-help groups have demonstrated their effectiveness at empowering their members. In a case study on a self-help group in India, Anand (2002) points out that participation in a self-help group is an empowerment process in which women interact with group members through awareness and capacity building, which ultimately lifts their families above the poverty line and improves the extent and levels of their political participation. Social, political, psychological and/or economic empowerment have also been found in studies on self-help groups with Indian women in poverty (Galab & Rao, 2003; Moyle, Dollard, & Biswas, 2006; Swain & Wallentin, 2009; Tesoriero, 2005) as well as with breast cancer patients (Gray, Fitch, Davis, & Phillips, 1997; Lieberman & Goldstein, 2005; Winzelberg, Classen, Alpers, Roberts, Koopman, Adams, Ernst, Dev, & Taylor, 2003), and widows and widowers (Lieberman & Videka-Sherman, 1986) in North America.

### **3. Batis AWARE**

Batis Center for Women is a non-stock, non-profit, non-governmental organization working to address the reintegration needs and concerns of returned distressed Filipino women migrant workers, including victims of trafficking, illegal recruitment, unjust working conditions, domestic violence and family abandonment, and other forms of violence against women migrant workers, and their families through social case management, women's empowerment, and children and youth development programs. Batis AWARE (BA) is a self-help organization formed by the Batis Center for Women, together with some female survivors/clients of the institution, in 1996. It was initially composed of former women migrant workers who had worked

in Japan as entertainers. Many of them had “failed” relationships with their Japanese husbands or partners, and are the mothers of Japanese Filipino Children. These women have experienced different forms and levels of violence such as abandonment and domestic violence by their husbands or partners, as well as exploitation and abuse by employers and customers, among others.

After more than a decade of exclusively serving women returnees from Japan, in 2007 BA extended its services to returnees from regions other than Japan such as Southeast Asia and the Middle East, as many of these women have had similar difficult migration experiences. This expansion paved the way for BA clustering or grouping: (1) Novaliches, (2) Caloocan, and (3) Center-based. The first two clusters are composed of members from the districts after which they are named, while the center-based cluster is composed of members who come from different areas within Metro Manila and beyond. The organization aims to provide assistance to fellow returned women migrant workers through their core programs, including peer counseling, livelihood, organizing, education and training, and networking and advocacy.

In 2012, five years after the expansion, the organization began to experience challenges such as decreasing numbers of active members, unstable livelihoods/social enterprises, and ill-defined leadership resulting in inefficient organizational management among others. BA was concerned about its ability to continue its programs and thereby to sustain the organization.

### **III. Conceptual Framework**

Ecosystems and strengths perspectives, as well as the gender and development (GAD) approach, were utilized as the grounding framework of the study. The ecosystems lens views the women individually as a system, their environment as a system, and the interrelationship between them and the environment ecologically (Mat-taini & Meyer, 1995). It is important to analyze the different interdependent subsystems shaping their lives and to determine the environmental factors that directly or indirectly affect them. This perspective bears the concept of person-in-environment and thus would take the different aspects of the returnees’ well-being into consideration. In other words, this perspective allows us to see the difficult circumstances that occurred in the course of their migration, their current situations as survivors integrating back into their families and communities, and the environmental aspects relevant to their coming to terms with rebuilding their lives.

The goal of the study was to facilitate the renewal and development of the organization. Accordingly, the strengths perspective was also of great importance. The strengths perspective helps us to focus on BA’s existing competencies, capacities, possibilities, resilience, and resources (Saleebey, 2009). This perspective encourages

the women to be positive and look forward, and to believe in the hope that their difficulties will bring opportunities for growth and change, and that they have, both individually and collectively, a great wealth of assets and strengths, and are thus capable of responding to their own problems, needs, issues and concerns.

The gender perspective or the GAD approach, on the other hand, was undertaken in response to the gender needs or the shared and prioritized needs that BA members identified as having arisen from their common reintegration experiences. The GAD approach recognizes their right to freely and fully participate individually and collectively in the research process (Razavi & Miller, 1995; Young, 1997). It promotes their rights to the means for assuring their social and economic welfare. The GAD approach emphasizes women's empowerment within the context of a reintegration that would bring them into full participation in mainstream society as well as the development of equal opportunities and power in women. The aim of the GAD approach is to equip the women with knowledge and to empower them by contributing to the continuing fight against inequality, specifically with regard to the issues and concerns that they face within their families or communities as returned women migrant workers.

#### **IV. Method**

This study utilizes a PAR methodology to facilitate social and economic reintegration of women migrant workers and to understand how this process contributes to the empowerment of BA. Action research is "a collaborative approach to inquiry or investigation that provides people with the means to take systematic action to resolve specific problems" (Stringer, 1999, p.17). According to Chesler (1991), PAR is the most relevant scientific paradigm for inquiry and action with regard to self-help groups such as BA because it allows its subjects individually and collectively to be involved in the design, implementation, and utilization of the research, and because it promotes actions to improve group functioning. It restores the ability of the "oppressed" to create knowledge and practice in their own interests, concomitantly engaging them in consciousness raising and action (Freire, 1993). In other words, the process of PAR is meant to be empowering as participants gain control over important aspects of their lives (Duffy, 2011). Past studies have shown that PAR resulted in empowerment, capacity building and/or making action plans for improving lives or policy changes for various groups of women around the world, such as Muslim women (Aziz, Shams, & Khan, 2011; Khan, Bawani, & Aziz, 2013), single mothers (Duffy 2011), women in Zaire (Schoepf, 1993), migrant female sex workers in Cambodia (Busza & Baker, 2004), Filipino domestic workers in the US (Francisco, 2014), Filipino domestic workers in Cambodia (Grande & Kerr, 1998), Fili-

pino female bar workers (Morisky *et al.*, 2010), formerly incarcerated women (Parsons & Warner-Robbins, 2001), and low-income women (Reid, Tom, & Frisby, 2006).

In addition, PAR tries to recognize and build on the strengths, resources, and assets that exist within communities or organizations, such as individual skills and social networks, to address its concerns (Israel, Eng, Shulz, and Parker, 2013). Furthermore, PAR emphasizes an ecological approach which pays attention to individuals, their immediate context (i.e., the organization or social networks), and the larger contexts in which these organizations and networks exist (i.e., community and society; Israel *et al.*, 2013). As these characteristics show, PAR corresponds to the conceptual framework of this study.

The PAR project with BA ran from January to December 2012. The organizational diagnosis/assessment process took place from January to March, reflection and action planning from April to June, implementation of action plan from July to November, and reflection and evaluation in December. The details of the research methods used in these four phases of PAR are described in the following section.

## **V. Outcomes of PAR**

### **1. Organizational Diagnosis/Assessment (January-March)**

A total of ten BA members participated in this organizational diagnosis/assessment process. They represented two generations of membership: founding members (caretakers ad hoc, members since 1996) and more recent members (Novaliches cluster, members since 2007). The objectives were to: a) examine the members' views about the organization vis-à-vis their expectations and gains; b) describe the nature of problems that members encountered in the organization; c) explore the perceptions and feelings of members about the current state of the organization; d) analyze the organization's strengths and weaknesses; and, e) plan and implement needed organizational interventions.

A series of individual key interviews with the participants revealed that members have a positive regard for the organization but were discouraged about the negative realities of their interpersonal relationships which eventually resulted in a decrease in the number of active members. Several problems, issues, and concerns among members were identified on both a personal and an organizational level. Common issues included conflict between and among leaders and members, usually caused by intriguing/gossiping that ultimately led to bullying and aggression, and tension or dynamics between founding and recent members, resulting in the recent members' impression of arrogance or domination on the part of the founding members. These concerns imply difficulties in the interpersonal relationships among

members, which are likely to affect members' sense of self-worth and friendships and to induce hesitation or timid behavior in the recent members toward the founding members, which in turn will affect the members' trust and confidence in the organization. Moreover, members are also affected by issues of alleged corruption or financial opportunism in the organization's social enterprises. There was the impression of unequal distribution of opportunities or resources.

After completing individual interviews, a series of focus group discussions (FGD) was conducted to analyze the strengths and weaknesses of the organization by performing SWOT analysis. Although more weaknesses were noted, the women came to realize that the organization still has a great deal of strength and opportunities, and this discovery motivated them to hold on and move forward. The dominant strengths they identified include the willingness of the members to sustain the organization, the presence of their board of advisors, friends and networks, and the existence of their social enterprises such as the burger shop, sewing shop, food business/catering services, and the laundry shop. Hence, the members were appealing for necessary assistance to enable them to unite, act collectively, and thereby sustain the organization.

Results of the consolidated SWOT were synthesized in order to clarify the common starting point among the several problems that had to be addressed. According to the members, BA needed to consolidate its membership, conduct education and training sessions, and collectively do something to address these problems. Although there have been efforts to consolidate and improve BA in the past, these efforts have not been sustained. As specified by the women, although they organized the project that paved the way for the organization's expansion in 2007, the organization remained inactive after this project to such a point that members became confused regarding its activities, especially when the officers resigned in 2010 and they lost their leadership structure. Hence, the organization of BA needed to be overhauled. BA wanted to develop the organization into a true medium for change.

## **2. Reflection and Planning (April-June)**

The organizational diagnosis/assessment process culminated with a member-driven plan for organizational intervention. Given the situation previously discussed, sustaining BA would mean overhauling the organization, which would entail strengthening the leadership as well as consolidating membership in terms of orientation, direction, and goals of the organization. The women decided to conduct consolidating activities and training that would strengthen their commitment and improve their ability to sustain the organization. They all wanted to sustain the organization, but they didn't know how and where to begin. With facilitation by the Batis Center for Women staff, BA formulated an intervention plan titled "Organization



Development (OD) Process for the Renewal of Batis AWARE” in order to improve the organization’s situation by consolidating and re-organizing the members in terms of orientation, direction, and commitment to the organization. The intervention would include all contactable members of BA in addition to the 10 key participants in the process of organizational diagnosis.

### 3. Activities/Implementation of Action Plan (July-November)

The implementation of the action plan was divided into five major components: 1) organizing; 2) awareness raising; 3) team building; 4) capacity building; and, 5) strategic planning.

#### (i) Organizing

After all participants had validated the organizational diagnosis and action plan, they tried to identify and understand the causes and effects of their two major problems, namely, interpersonal conflict and inefficient organizational management, at the FGD held in July. In order to generate a better picture of these two problems, the group identified their causes and effects as a way of synthesizing the various problems already mentioned. Figures 1 and 2 illustrate the cause-and-effect diagrams of interpersonal conflict and inefficient organizational management, respectively. These two major problems are reciprocally connected. Without harmonious interpersonal relationships among members, it is difficult, if not impossible, for the organization to prosper. The group committed to active participation in addressing these

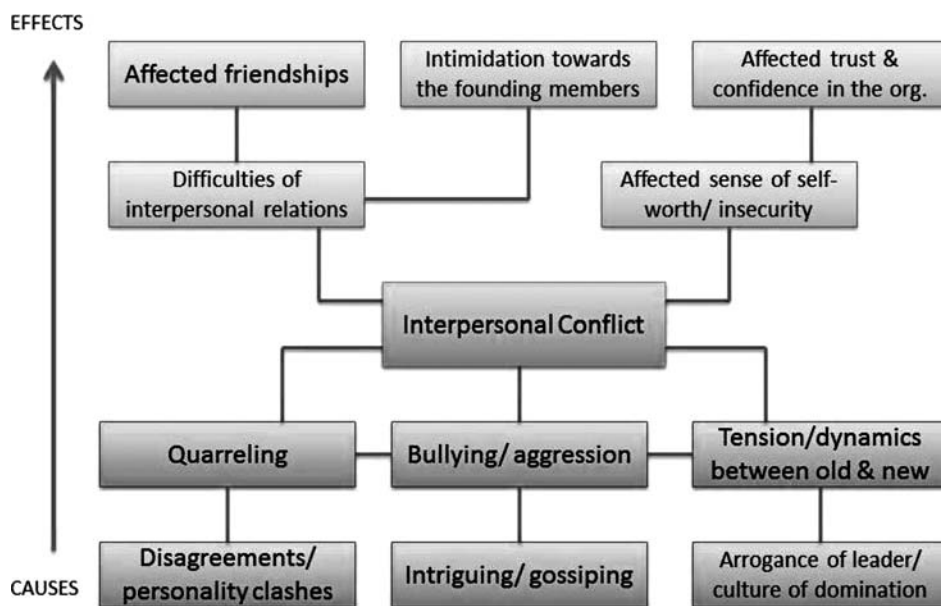


Figure 1 Causes and Effects of Interpersonal Conflict



Figure 2 Causes and Effects of Inefficient Organizational Management

problems out of their desire to sustain the organization.

The proposed organizational development process was then discussed. The discussion strengthened the group's desire to realize the OD process as they believed that the process would indeed renew or reactivate BA. The session culminated with the members electing a new set of officers so as to achieve their first goal for the renewal of BA, namely, to establish its leadership structure.

### (ii) Awareness Raising

A 1-day awareness-raising seminar was conducted in August to review women's migration issues and the significant role of BA as an organization of women migrants. A re-orientation session facilitated by the BA president clarified the misconceptions of some members on the purpose of the organization and its relevance in society, which ensured that all members had views and expectations of the organization equivalent to those expressed during key interviews. This sharing strengthened members' positive outlook and refreshed their commitment to the organization as they recalled what the organization had been actively doing in the past.

The session on gender awareness provided the women with awareness and insight on the different roles and responsibilities of men and women in their homes

and communities as well as the relationships between them with reference to historical roots of sexist stereotyping, discrimination and violence. Although jargons were heavily used in this session, the women were able to understand them based on their personal experiences. The discussion also touched on gender-sensitive parenting strategies to generate respect for individuals regardless of sex. The inputs and insights served as an underlying framework for understanding their relationships in a practical way with regard to how each member treats other members of the organization and the impacts on the self and the organization as a whole.

In the third session on current trends in migration and common critical reintegration concerns, they raised the need to find alternative livelihoods. There was a growing enthusiasm among the women to accept the challenge of engaging in livelihood/enterprise activities as they acknowledged that stable income is what they need to support their families. Apart from obtaining social support, the women expected to have more concrete economic activities within the organization to further enhance their enthusiasm about the organization and their sense of organizational purpose and unity.

These seminars restored the members' energy for actively engaging in the organization again. They vowed their commitment to and participation in future organizational activities, thus creating an organization that would achieve their common goals. The leaders acknowledged the need to reach out to other members who were currently less active in the organization.

### **(iii) Team Building**

A 2-day team-building workshop was conducted in mid-October to develop a harmonious, self-empowering and productive organizational climate/culture, as well as to deepen relationships through sisterhood. Overall, the women appreciated the workshop. According to them, they learned many things, but the most important of these was self-control. They said that things like misunderstandings and conflicts, aggression and/or any violence within the organization can be avoided if they can just keep their composure and control themselves when caught in an unpleasant situation.

### **(iv) Capacity Building**

A 2-day training session on organizational capacity building was conducted in late October. Through self-evaluation and peer evaluation of the task requirements, members' capacity, and task performance, the women realized that, in their organization, it is important to think always as a group. The "I" should be replaced with "WE" and, thus, everyone should be equal, instead of being divided or favored within the organizations. Everyone who has a strong commitment to the organiza-

tion should complement it with action, i.e., by giving their time for the organization. One major concern that the group raised as a hindrance in performing their tasks at the office was the lack of budget for transportation and meals. They hoped that there can be an allowance for those on duty, so that they can work full time in the organization such as in making proposals, organizing documents, and other administrative work.

Another fact revealed during the sessions was that, although they have had several trainings already in the past, they do not always practice what they have learned from those trainings. During the discussion they realized that the trainings should fit into their needs as well as the organization's vision and mission. They also discussed the importance of having a clear set of rules and regulations, especially because they were running businesses/livelihood activities. They should set clear roles and responsibilities if they want to expand memberships and livelihood programs. They should prioritize this because a clear set of rules and regulations would end all of the doubts and mistrust among members. Otherwise, others will continue to find loopholes and react negatively or worse, talk behind backs or complain. Hence, the participants, particularly the officers, said that they would draft their rules and regulations based on existing concerns, have them advised and approved by the board, and introduce them to all members.

#### **(v) Strategic Planning**

Strategic planning was performed in another 2-day workshop, which was conducted in November. The strategic planning focused on the reflection and evaluation of outcomes of the study thus far, and BA devised a new 3-year strategic plan. The group first critically reviewed the organization's vision, mission and goals and revised them according to the current needs of returned women migrants, based on what had been revealed by the consciousness-raising activities and women's needs. The participants were able to formulate a 3-year strategic plan according to each of their programs, namely, membership and organizing, education and training, social enterprise, and networking and advocacy.

### **VI. Evaluation of PAR**

The FGD for the reflection and evaluation of the PAR process was held in December. According to the women, they were able to meet their objectives in terms of reactivating the organization and setting mechanisms to facilitate their harmonious social and economic lives. The PAR project was indeed empowering in itself as it restored BA to a new condition and new strength in the face of new challenges.

In this FGD, the members identified the learning they had acquired personally

**Table 1 Positive Changes (Personal Level)**

Knowledge	Updated on the current trends in migration, including return and reintegration issues and concerns addressed by the work of Batis Center for Women Acquired new learning and skills necessary for personal development and for upkeep of the organization
Skills	Improved skills in managing existing resources of the organization, able to do systematic financial recording and inventory Able to budget efficiently and handle finances that they are able to allocate/afford for necessities One member said that, previously, she had hardly gone to the office due to the lack of a budget for transportation, but after she learned how to budget efficiently, she has been able to make a way/allocate transportation costs in her budget Able to manage/balance time efficiently for self, family and organization Able to focus on performing task, and to deliver/manage the operation of the organization despite the lack of human resources (i.e., absence of other members) Officers became more active and helped each other more
Ability/Attitude/ Character	Becoming more understanding and more sensitive to one another Practicing patience amidst misunderstandings, thus, able to solve problems without conflict and aggression Showing commitment to the organization Being humble Becoming more prayerful and trustful so that they can now deal with personal, family, and organizational issues more effectively

and the organizational changes that had occurred. On the personal level, the members said that the PAR project helped them improve their knowledge, skills, and attitude. Table 1 summarizes positive changes on a personal level identified in FGD.

On the other hand, the group categorized the organizational changes into leadership structure and four BA programs. One major accomplishment of the PAR project is that BA was able to establish a new leadership structure (see Table 2). Before the PAR, the organization was facing various problems as described above, and there was no clearly identified set of officers to address the problems. Rather, the operation of the organization was being managed by three members acting as caretakers or interim leaders. Thus, with the establishment of a new leadership structure, the women felt that they had rebuilt or renewed BA. The women shared that the learning they acquired from the discussions and workshops during the PAR project had a positive impact on their ability of managing all the programs. As shown in Table 2, the women identified salient improvements and changes in each program.

The staff of the Batis Center for Women has noticed that the women involved in this group activity have indeed changed. According to them, the women have strengthened their commitment to the organization as evidenced by their active participation during and after the PAR process. They have also strengthened their relationships as evidenced by their continuing meetings, cooperation, and performance

**Table 2 Positive Changes (Organizational Level)**

Leadership Structure	Elected a set of officers and formed committees to ensure clear roles and responsibilities of officers as well as members
Developed a strategic plan	<p>Membership and Organizing</p> <p>Strengthened teamwork/improved interpersonal relationship</p> <p>Gained a sense that “we are not disunited now despite inevitable misunderstandings because we apply what we learned and what we now know to handle conflicts amidst negative reactions of other members”</p> <p>Some members who had been lying low are now participating or getting in touch with BA again</p> <p>Gained a sense that “we are united because, despite all the ups and downs of the organization, we continue to have a positive outlook that we can do well and we are working on that”</p> <p>Gained confidence that “we are capable enough that, whatever problem comes along, BA will persevere. Even if we have fewer active members now, we can still perform our organizational functions because we understand each other now. We are capable of facing the problems that we may encounter. And most of all, we are happy because it feels like there are positive changes every day and that we are learning every day”</p> <p>Encouraged transparency in the management of the organization and enterprises as well as recording and reporting</p>
Education and Training	<p>“The discussions during PAR helped us have a common understanding of the issues and concerns in the organization”</p> <p>Clarified misconceptions as to the purpose of the organization and its relevance to society</p> <p>Leveling-off of expectations and gains among members</p>
Social Enterprise	<p>“The training on financial literacy and budgeting helped us in managing the existing enterprises”</p> <p>Confirmed importance of keeping cash flow/financial records of each enterprise</p>
Networking and Advocacy	<p>Conducted inventory on the resources of the organization, including partners and networks and realized how to sustain/develop/improve these further</p> <p>Reflected on the possibility of rebuilding connections/networking by looking back on former partner organizations</p> <p>Encouraged active participation in network meetings and social mobilizations</p>

of duties during and after the PAR project. They were able to sustain their current economic activities including the reoperation of the laundry shop and the maintenance of the sewing shop and catering business. Furthermore, they have maintained communication and updating of members about the organization’s current activities. The BA officers are now able to disseminate information to all the members via social media such as Facebook as well as phone calls and text messages.

Although BA could identify many positive changes within the organization, there are also factors that may hinder their progress or keep them from sustaining these positive changes (see Table 3). However, it is important that the women were able to identify them so that they could make efforts to address them. These hindering factors are not necessarily unusual to them. Rather, these are constant challenges that the organization can expect to face long-term.

**Table 3 Hinderling Factors**

Weak Commitment	Other members may still lack in commitment: 15 members consistently participated in the PAR project; after a year, only 10 participated in the follow-up session. The others kept in touch and offered reasons why they were unable to attend the session, however Lack of members who will really commit to the organization through thick and thin
Lack of Funds	Lack of effort on looking for grant sponsors Lack of follow-up on some identified existing potential sponsors
Lack of Continuing Adult Education	Lack of follow-through activities, especially with regard to training on financial literacy
Lack of Strategic Plan	Lack of clear plan for future activities and clear scheduling Only drafted plans for 2013 and for 2014 onwards
Affected Leadership Structure (resignation of 2 others)	The vice-president and the treasurer resigned in mid-2013. They confessed they could not perform their duty due to personal reasons

**Table 4 Strategies to Overcome Challenges**

Being Resourceful	Tapping existing partner organizations and linkages Exerting more effort in fund generation and making project proposals Building linkage with local government
Continuing Training	Linking with other local agencies/organizations and women's associations for training, etc. Training on project management and development; budgeting
Planning Strategically	Conducting a rigid strategic planning workshop Developing a strategic plan for the next three years
Work Ethic	Officers must focus on the organization's work Organizers/leaders must be committed to continuing follow-up with the members
Encouraging Commitment	Must have responsible members who will commit and be responsible for the organizational work

After identifying these hindering factors, the women also reflected on how they could be able to address them and sustain the positive changes. They emphasized that they must be able to overcome the factors that may hinder their development. Table 4 shows the consolidated ideas of the women on how to sustain the positive changes in their organization and thereby overcome the hindering factors. They include being resourceful, continuing training, planning strategically, a strong work ethic, and encouraging commitment.

## VII. Discussion

Despite the relevance and timeliness of the topic that is discussed, this study

has several limitations. First, its findings are solely based on the actual experiences of BA. Second, the number of key participants in the organizational assessment process of the first stages of PAR was only half the number of the total participants in the intervention phase. Although the findings regarding organizational diagnosis derived from the key participants were presented to the rest of the group for validation and feedback, they may have made a greater difference if the level of participation had been consistent throughout all the stages of PAR. Third, the number of participants in the PAR follow-up session after a year was only two-thirds (10 out of 15) of the participants in the original PAR sessions. Although the women actively participated during the follow-up process and collectively reflected and evaluated how the PAR project had helped them, the five others who were not present might have had additional insights.

Despite these limitations, this study showed that the PAR can be a very effective approach in organizing returnees and facilitating their social and economic integration. The PAR process itself is empowering as it elicits active participation in all aspects of the research, including analysis of the situation, action planning, implementation, evaluation, and reflection on their learning, and planning for next steps. Through this process, participants can develop their competencies and expand their knowledge, skills, and self-confidence as shown in the project with BA. “Rebuilding lives” is no easy process. It will take some time for the returnees to come to terms with their recovery and rebuild their lives. Building a group such as BA using PAR can be a sustainable method of supporting returnees in rebuilding their lives.

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