


Chapter 1

Diffusion of Policy Innovations in Migrant Local Governance: A Case Study of the Philippines and an Origin Province

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ABSTRACT

This chapter showcases the case of migrant local governance by an origin country, that which was adopted by a province and its jurisdiction localities, under the lens of

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the Diffusion of Policy Innovations theory by Berry and Berry (1990). This chapter presents the case of the Philippines then zooms in to the province of Ilocos Norte (northwestern Philippines) and how its provincial and local government units have embraced influential national-level policy innovations on migration management. This policy innovation diffusion-cum-adoption locally has led to over-a-decade-long period of providing frontline services to overseas workers and their families. This Philippine case highlights possibilities for other origin countries of overseas migrants to diffuse migration management policy innovations locally so that migrant frontline services provision becomes a national-to-local affair that is built on coordination.

INTRODUCTION

Overseas migrants make up a critical social sector in their origin countries. Migrants send exponential earnings that uplift the socio-economic welfare of their families and, by extension, the origin country and the communities where they came from (Opiniano & Ang, 2024). Migrants' birthplace communities thus carry a stake in serving their needs, especially since foreign remittances provide spill-over economic benefits (Taylor et al., 1996) out of migrant families' spending, entrepreneurship, savings and investments. Migrant workers' rights, welfare, safety and health conditions abroad matter for these communities of origin (Garabiles et al., 2024).

How do local stakeholders respond to the welfare needs of their overseas migrant townmates especially when they face vulnerable situations abroad? In practice, some local governments in migrants' origin countries remain clueless about serving migrants (Nijenhuis, 2009). Research has documented the various approaches (including "innovations") of local governments in *migrant receiving countries*, to integrate overseas migrants and address their needs (e.g., Lacroix & Desille, 2018; Joint Migration and Development Initiative, 2012). Globally, since the mid-2010s, local authorities in both origin and receiving countries have committed to launch migrant-oriented programs (Lacroix & Desille, 2018). An example here is a periodic conference called the *Mayoral Forum on Human Mobility, Migration and Development*, which has formulated the *Mayors Mechanism* in 2018 (www.mayorsmechanism.org) that formally links local authorities to initiatives formulated in annual editions of the Global Forum on Migration and Development (GFMD).

However, research on the role of local governments in *origin countries* for overseas migrants is slow to keep pace with global initiatives. This development is troubling since it may leave behind origin countries' local authorities in global migration-and-development efforts, especially when their efforts are being assessed. Yet in practice, origin communities in some countries had catered to overseas migrants (Riallant, 2017). The recent COVID-19 pandemic also highlighted the role of local

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