



Celebrating a Decade of Success

Happy 10th Year Anniversary

to the Center for Migrant Advocacy!

December 2012 marks a decade of achievement at the Center for Migrant Advocacy.

In celebration, some CMA members reflected on the past ten years through individual interviews. Each member was asked about how they came to CMA and how CMA has evolved since they have been involved. They were asked to describe successes and challenges that CMA has encountered.

Edna Pugeda

Similar Goals, Different Programs

Edna described her journey to being an associate of CMA. She explained that, many years ago, she and her colleagues formed Shared Communities, a nonprofit organization in Washington, DC which assisted domestic workers who were employed by IMF- World Bank employees, diplomats, and residents. Many of the domestic workers were from the Philippines. At that time, they had a partnership with a migrant organization. Their partnership continued with the newly formed Center for Migrant Advocacy. CMA and Shared Communities had similar goals of assisting migrant workers and their families through different programs. Later, when Shared Communities became inactive, she served as a volunteer and continued to do so to date.

Successes in Many Arenas

In regards to CMA's successes, Edna spoke about CMA's direct services as providing assistance to numerous migrant workers and their families with the assistance of other nonprofit organizations and in coordination with government agencies

She listed policy advocacy successes, such as the campaign that led to the passage of the Overseas Absentee Voting law. Other successes, according to Edna, involve the development of broad support from policymakers, government officials, and employees of different agencies.

Furthermore, CMA has achieved in the public education arena, having produced many reports and publications that were disseminated to stakeholders.

CMA has become the the "go-to resource on migrants' concerns for the media, government, non- profit community, and the public in the Philippines and the region"

- Edna Pugeda

CMA: The Go-To Resource!

Edna described CMA as the "go-to resource on migrants' concerns for the media, government, nonprofit community, and the public in the Philippines and the region", emphasizing that CMA "has generated extensive media coverage of issues that are important to mi- grant workers". Furthermore, CMA is known as a strong advocate in the region and internationally. It has formed strong relation- ships with community and advocacy organizations at the country, regional, and international levels. These partnerships have resulted in support for migrant workers and their families, joint advocacy work in the host countries and with regional organizations/ agencies, and media coverage.

CMA'S Foundation = Committed People

In conclusion, Edna stated that “CMA has a group of committed and dedicated staff and volunteers. These are its greatest resources. It is through their hard work that CMA has evolved from an emerging organization to one that is known and recognized in the Philippines, the region, and internationally for its advocacy work to protect the rights and welfare of Migrant workers and their families.”



Anna Navarro

CMA's small start

Like other CMA members, Anna worked for Kakammpi before CMA. She explained that other former Kakammpi coworkers were interested in focusing on policy advocacy and lobbying- and so, in December 2002, CMA was registered with the Security and Exchange Commission!

Anna expressed a few funding challenges that CMA has faced in its development. At first, she claims it was hard due to a lack of institutional funds. However, she explains that CWS was able to give a bridge fund for a year for the two CMA staff, Ellene and Anna.

CMA's big successes

When asked about CMA's successes, Anna immediately referred to the absentee voting (OAV) campaign. She described how CMA assisted government when the OAV first passed into law and implemented in 2004, expressing that “we were in the forefront of this!”.

“We were in the forefront of this!”
- Anna Navarro describes CMA's role in the overseas absentee voting campaign

In addition, Anna referred to the positive relationship that CMA has formed with government agencies, both in the Philippines, and abroad, as a success.

A Wish for CMA!

Anna concluded with a wish: that CMA could have a long, long life- span, despite funding issues! She also wished that CMA could have a few more staff!

Rene Raya

Rene shared how he entered the field of migration, and CMA. He was working overseas for a short time. Since then he has been working with Filipino migrant organizations and was coordinating their education program. This started his deeper involvement in migration work

Like many other interviewees, Rene indicated that CMA started small- but has made big achievement in migrant advocacy! He explained how CMA began as a “limited operation with basic funding”. He indicated that the major growth that CMA has had is a result of CMA people, like Ellene and Irynn, who have a long track record in working with migrants, having been involved in strong campaigns for welfare, mi- grant rights, and voting rights. According to Rene, CMA's “biggest asset is its people, enhanced by strong links with Filipino groups overseas”. This association with migrants all across the world is, in Rene's words, “a distinct feature of CMA”.

When asked about CMA successes, Rene immediately described two: 1) the expansion of CMA networks. Rene explained that “Filipinos having links with CMA inside the country is a great moral booster becoming a part of a support system, as you are seemingly alone overseas. You need that social support and CMA is providing this.”

CMA's “biggest asset is its people, enhanced by strong links with Filipino groups overseas”
- Rene Raya

As a second major success, Rene pointed to the emergency assistance that CMA provides as “concrete”.

As a last word, Rene discussed that the volunteers of CMA are positive accomplishments that have helped with not only enhancing CMA’s work, but also strengthening its connections abroad. In Rene’s opinion, “this should be developed further and systematized”.

Dr. Renato “Boyet” Mabunga

A history in human rights

For years, Boyet worked with human rights (HR) organizations in the Philippines. In 2002, he was on leave from the Philippines Alliance of Human Rights Advocates (PAHRA). Coinciding with his leave were discussions that many of his friends working in migration were having. They were exploring coming up with a specific group to focus on migration policy advocacy. Boyet participated in these discussions- which eventually evolved into CMA.

Family ties

When asked “why” he became a part of CMA, Boyet expressed that he saw migrant and families and migration issues as one of the big issues in the Philippines at the time. He depicted how many of his nephews and nieces are working abroad, and how he was partially motivated to be a part of CMA to help his family.

In response to the question “how has CMA evolved”, Boyet replied that neither he, nor any other member, expected that CMA would grow as it has. It started as a simple discussion about “what can the group contribute on the issue of migration/ migrants”. It evolved so fast that it has now become one of the strongest organizations that deal with migration. Never had we thought that this would be the CMA 10 years from then- from a simple idea to a full grown policy advocacy organization- that deals squarely with government, government personalities, international organizations, ASEAN, the UN and the World Social Forum.

Like all interviewees, Boyet easily listed off a number of successes. He included not only the passage of the OAV, but also CMA’s continuing work on the issue through trying to advocate and entice migrants to at least register and then participate in the election process in the Philippines even though they are working outside.

“We all know that CMA is doing well- and I don’t just say this because I’m in CMA! We are really helping our O “Never had we thought that this would be the CMA at ten years. It has grown from a simple idea to a full grown policy advocacy organization that deals squarely with government, government personalities, international organizations, ASEAN, the UN and the World Social Forum.”

- Dr. Renato “Boyet” Mabunga

Policy and Practice!

He cited that CMA’s engagement with government agencies (that deal directly with migrants) is another point of achievement.

Finally, Boyet proudly explained that, even though CMA deals with policy, it doesn’t neglect direct services for migrants at risk.

Boyet explained that, although CMA’s case work may not have so much impact on migration in general, it has a lot of impact on these migrants and migrants’ families.

Boyet reflected that no one has thought that CMA would get this far in ten years. He concluded by saying “now that we are on our tenth year, there will be 50 more years to go... Congratulations!”

H a z e l C o t o n e r

H a z e l began as a part of Kakammpi, and, like other former coworkers, decided to leave. When Hazel’s first child, Ashka, was born, she chose to concentrate on being a mother. After a few years, CMA, needed another staff member, and she was contacted to be a part of the team. She initially worked on daily activities and programs, starting in 2006.

Growth Despite Struggle

When asked how CMA has grown, Hazel referred to its campaigns, expressing that “we’re really growing in terms of what we want to be [...] even though we’re struggling with finances”.

Hazel alluded to the number of projects that CMA has taken on as a major success. In addition, she mentioned partnerships with organizations like the CHR and FES as integral successes.

Hazel concluded that “we all know that CMA is doing well and I don’t just say this because I’m in CMA! We are really helping our OFWs to know and fight for their rights we are truly advocating for their rights in this way, not just doing case work. We are helping them to lobby in both Senate and House of Representatives”.

“We are helping our OFWs to know and fight for their rights- we are truly advocating for their rights in this way”

- Hazel Cotoner

Wishing CMA a long life!

Hazel added to the chorus of other CMA members with her wish “that CMA will keep on going and continue our work in the years to come!”

Rhodora Abano

CMA’s Beginning

Irynn reflected that CMA was founded only in December 2002. This was based on the need for stronger policy advocacy for OFWs and their families and also urgent issues then like the campaign for the overseas absentee voting law, campaign for a better OWWA, and campaigns for better promotion and protection for OFW rights and their families .

A couple of challenges and a lot of support!

Irynn considered a few challenges that CMA has faced in its evolution: resources and traditional media coverage. Although resources have been a challenge, Irynn referred to the very supportive organizations that believed in and supported CMA. For example, from the beginning until now, FES, CSOs like Migrant Forum in Asia, PMRW, trade unions like APL, PM and BMP, PAHRA as well as partylist organizations like Akbayan, Partido ng Manggagawa government partners like CFO and CHR; .

Irynn also described how volunteers have been helping CMA including local volunteers like IT consultant Bobby Soriano, and including Board Members and associates like legal counsel Atty. Henry Rojas.

In addition, Irynn highlighted how foreign organizations have been very supportive in terms of human resources. For example, CAPI (The Center for Asia Pacific Initiatives) has been sending young Canadian volunteers as well as other individual volunteers from both the US and Europe who have all been a huge help .

“I think we can say that indeed CMA is of, by and for OFs/OFWs and their families”

- Irynn Abano

Irynn finds it very touching that there are individual overseas Filipino workers and groups like Patnubay.com in Saudi, Kasapi, Diwata and Munting Nayon Community School in Greece, Hope Workers Center in Taiwan, Alliance of progressive Labor and Filcomsin in Hong Kong, Solidarity Philippines Australia Network (SPAN) in Brisbane who remain partners of CMA through thick and thin. OFWs in KSA even sent CMA cell cards to help us in following up cases of distressed OFWs.

Vic Barrazona and former OFW Mike Bolos from Saudi, Daphne Ceniza of HK, Rob Ceralvo, Marvin Bionat and associate Edna Pugeda from the US and more have shared with us their resources by supporting our projects financially and otherwise. With this in mind, Irynn thinks “we can say that indeed CMA is of, by and for OFs/OFWs and their families”.



Maximizing Media

Irynn explained that, being a small NGO, CMA has been unable to fully maximize media opportunities to expound more on migration issues as well as what CMA is doing and what it can do more. However, Irynn is proud that there are OFs who help us here like those in Balitang Middle East, in Arab News and even in Al Jazeera. She mentioned that there are also those in the alternative media like “Kasama Newsletter” of SPAN with publisher Dee Dicen Hunt of Brisbane Australia.

So Many Successes!

When asked about CMA’s successes, Irynn listed many! She referred to: (1) the passage of OAV law in 2003 and hopefully its upcoming amendment (2) the amendment of the RA 8042 or Magna Carta for OFs and their families; (3) assistance to numerous Filipinos in distress world- wide; for example, seafarers

stranded in Athens, a trafficked Muslim woman rescued and repatriated from Cote d'Ivoire, repatriation of a number of OFWs with their children from KSA; (4) submission of alternative report on Philippine government's report on compliance with the Convention on Migrant Workers to the UN Committee on Migrant Workers that picked up many of our issues and recommendations in their Concluding Observations in 2009; (5) inclusion of CMA as resource persons in the PDOS for new foreign service cadets and outgoing OWWA welfare officers (6) recognition by YMCA as one of its outstanding partners; and, (7) productive engagement with government agencies who play a huge part in the lives of our OFWs and their families particularly the Committees on Overseas workers' Affairs (COWA), on Suffrage and on Foreign Affairs of the House of Representatives, Office of the Undersecretary for Migrant Workers' Affairs (OUMWA), Overseas Workers Welfare Administration (OWWA), Philippine Overseas Employment Administration (POEA) as well as Bureau of Immigration (BI).

Malu Padilla

"From what I understand, Ellene is even on a text message level with some of the commissioners and representatives in the Congress!"

- Malu Padilla

A CMA Board member abroad

When CMA started, it was very easy for Malu to decide to be a part of it. She added that, despite living abroad "I have tried to give as much as I can, for I have a lot of affinity with the organization and the people involved in it". When Malu sees the work of CMA she is not only inspired, but also energized, motivated, and kept in touch with the happenings in migration.

Malu contextualized CMA's evolution in the changing political scene in the Philippines. She spoke of its "good impression" upon the government, and its "reputation as a reliable lobby organization- not only in the Philippines with the previous and current government, but also with the international network"- as two major successes. Although she celebrates CMA's successes, she knows that CMA must continue its work, as "there's still a lot of work to be done!".



4 Women and a lot of interns

According to Malu, there is so much that CMA has to be proud of. In her words, "To think- for such a small organization with 4 women and a lot of interns- it has gained a lot of successes!". Malu also brought up the role of interns at CMA, which, for such a small organisation "is a recognition of the worth of the work that CMA is doing!"

Attorney Henry Rojas

Atty Henry's Path to CMA

Atty Henry had been involved in advocacy work for the rights and welfare of Filipino migrant workers and their families since 1984 when he joined the pioneering migrant NGO - Friends of Filipino Migrant Workers, Inc. (KAIBIGAN) in 1984.

Through the years, he has worked with many NGOs and human rights activists both here and abroad who were working for the rights and welfare of overseas Filipino workers - some of these NGO workers and human rights activists happened to be the founders of CMA.

"CMA is a regular source of resource persons in Congressional hearings on bills affecting migrant workers - and there are many bills of these nature. Administrative agencies of government like POEA, OWWA and the DFA also consult CMA on policy matters".

- Attorney Henry Rojas

Atty Henry left full-time NGO work in 1991 in order to concentrate on his law studies. He became a working student then. During the day, he was employed as a congressional staff of the Committee on Human Rights headed by then Congressman Bonifacio Gillego. In the evening, he attended law classes in the College of Law of the University of the Philippines.

As a working student, he kept his ties with migrant NGOs and organizations, one of which was KAKAMMPI - an association of families of migrant workers and returned migrant workers. Some of the key people of CMA, namely Ellene and Irynn were working with KAKAMMPI at that time.

When CMA was first organized, Atty Henry maintained his links with CMA. The people who organized CMA were well-known to him, as he had worked with them before in many human/migrant rights issues. When he passed the Bar in 1996, he became a volunteer lawyer for CMA.

A Volunteer Lawyer at CMA

As a volunteer lawyer, Atty Henry gave legal advice to CMA, handled selected labor cases involving migrant workers, prepared a legal opinion/analysis/position paper on policy issues affecting Filipino migrant workers, and engaged in representation work (Congress, government agencies, local and international conferences, etc.)

Since he is also engaged full-time in the private law practice in the Philippines, his arrangement with CMA is quite informal. He does not report to the office nor draw salary from CMA. Migrant labor cases (mostly money claims and administrative complaints against erring agencies and/or foreign employers) are referred to him by CMA from time to time. He handles these cases, and gives an up-date on the case status to CMA.

Sometimes, CMA requests him to render his legal opinion on policy issues - mostly, pending bills in Congress, or new policies being implemented by some government agencies affecting Filipino overseas workers. In some instances, he also represents CMA in congressional hearings and meetings/ conferences.

CMA's Reputation

Atty Henry agrees with other interviewees: CMA's reputation as one of the main policy advocacy NGOs for overseas Filipino workers has grown through the years.

According to Atty Henry, CMA is a regular source of resource persons in congressional hearings on bills affecting migrant workers - and there are many bills of this nature. Administrative agencies of government like POEA, OWWA and the DFA also consult CMA on policy matters.

So many events!

CMA also sponsored regular forums and symposia on issues and policies affecting migrant workers.

CMA has also participated, mainly through the Migrant Forum in Asia, in the advocacy for the adoption of International Conventions for the protection of migrant workers.

Rene Nachura

International Solidarity

"Very few of even the established local NGOs have sustained their publication activities as CMA does"

- Rene Nachura

According to Rene Nachura, CMA was actually set up as a continuation of the "international solidarity work" that progressive groups and activists in the Philippines had been doing for years. Those who organized CMA were all previously engaged in this work. He, too, was involved in this "international work" since 1983 including some years in North America (the US and Canada). When Ellene et al. decided to organize CMA, they invited him to be a member of its founding Board.

Rene defines CMA as unique because it took up a more specialized focus than the previous "solidarity work" of the progressive groups.

Pioneering Work

While the Filipino migrants had always been involved in the earlier "solidarity work," their concerns as migrants was then not of central importance to these progressive groups. Rene explains that, with the rising wave of Filipino labor migration in the 1990s, the organizers of CMA opted to focus the work on the multiplying problems that the migrants faced through the different phases of the migration cycle. In Rene's words "This, in a sense, was new and pioneering for CMA".

That CMA, in its research, information, and policy advocacy activities, has established itself and is recognized as a reliable advocate of migrants' rights and welfare, and a credible resource on matters of migration, is a big achievement. And much of this is due to the persistent efforts, despite limited resources, of Ellene, Irene, and Rene R.

Main Achievements

For Rene Nachura, the main achievements of CMA are : (a) the mainstreaming of the migrant rights issues and their advocacy in the country, esp. among the civil society groups; (b) its publications – very few of even the established local NGOs have sustained their publication activities as CMA does; (c) the contacts with the government agencies connected with migrant affairs and the respect CMA has gained from them; (d) the sustained policy advocacy work for migrant concerns, both with the legislative and the executive agencies of government; (e) CMA's role in developing and deepening the migration discourse in the Philippines, both among the CSOs and in government; (f) its current efforts to bring migrants' advocacy and support activities to the local communities; etc.

Renewing Linkages

Rene encourages celebration of, not only CMA members, but also the volunteer work of interns from partner groups abroad. Rene adds that "They not only bring in added woman-/man-power for CMA's work, but also renewed solidarity linkages with international friends".

Thanks to all featured in this newsletter, as well as all those who did not have a chance to complete an interview.

In Memoriam and With Gratitude

To our Advocacy Colleagues and OFW Partners who passed away – CMA wouldn't be the same without you



**Martin "Kulot" Babiano,
CMA Volunteer Researcher- Writer;
February 27, 1962- October 3, 2011**



**Dr. Alfred J. Ganapin
August 11, 1961- December 20, 2004
OFW cum advocate par excellence in
Saudi Arabia; e-Lagda Riyadh**

**(Continued)
In Memoriam and with Gratitude**



Fely Villasin
She passed away on December 27, 2006
Feminist, Poet, Executive Director
of Intercede in Toronto



Lydia "Liclic" Orben Schmidt,
Migrant initiative Hamburg;
She passed away on February 2009



Eduardo "Ka Edong" del Rosairo
"Sleepless" OAV advocate from Guam;
He died on July 2, 2010



Engineer Raffy David
Spending more than 22 years in Saudi
Arabia; an outstanding community
leader; he passed away on April 25, 2005
shortly after he came home for good.



Antonina "Ka Tonyang" Binsol
Woman techie in Japan;
Primover of Tulong Pinoy Movement;
She passed away on July 10, 2007