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Panel on

The Globalization of Households in Pacific Asia – Trends, Consequences and Responses

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Overview

The formation and inter-generational continuity of households in Pacific Asia is increasingly reliant on the global movement of and transactions among people beyond national territorial boundaries. This globalization of householding – processes through which households are formed and sustained through time and inter-generationally – can be seen as a means to compensate for increasing difficulties or disjunctures in forming households within a given society. The household is seen everywhere as an institution that is vital to both society and economy; an inability to nurture householding poses a serious threat to social and economic coherence, meaning and resilience of society.

A host of current research indicates that householding within nations might have reached its limits in many Pacific Asia societies. Marriage rates are declining, divorce rates are rising, and the number of housing units with only one person also grows. Fertility rates are rapidly moving to or have already fallen below replacement. Working men and women find little time to care for their children. Elderly people are finding living on a fixed income without adequate support of children increasingly difficult in their home countries.

These trends are already having impacts on nations. Severe labour shortages are now chronic in several countries. Rising dependency ratios places increasing pressure on working people to pay for non-working elders in rapidly aging societies. Juvenile delinquency, loneliness and suicide rates are at least partially associated with the breakdown of family structures.

Partly to compensate for these trends, people are “going global” in all life-cycle stages of household formation. International marriages are on the rise. In Taiwan alone, one-third of all marriages are now with one spouse who is not a Taiwan citizen. Birth rates among

these international couples are higher than nationals. Household helpers and caretakers from abroad are being recruited in the hundreds of thousands to care for children and aged family members and thereby allow both parents devote time to their careers. Mothers and children are moving abroad to seek better educational opportunities for their children, with fathers staying behind to work and send support money. Remittances from international migrant workers to their households in home countries now exceed the total of all foreign assistance from governments. Retirement complexes and communities are being built in such countries as Thailand, Vietnam and the Philippines to attract seniors from higher income countries of Asia.

More than just cross-border exchanges of migrants, these interrelated facets of household formation and sustenance are truly global in their reach and complexities, occurring in and impacting all regions of the world. They are also leading to profound social, political and economic changes in all affected societies. Societies that perceive themselves to be culturally or ethnically homogeneous are now on a path of becoming multicultural. The idea of citizenship, rights to public services and their political ramifications are being challenged by increases in global households. National economies are increasingly dependent on foreign workers who are themselves investing in distant household relations. From these perspectives, global householding presents fundamental challenges to every society and to the international political system based on the nation-state.