



CHILD LABOR PREVENTION IN THE PHILIPPINE SUGAR INDUSTRY

INTRODUCTION

Majority of families who depend on the sugar industry work on the field as farm laborers. This is the case in Negros Occidental, the country's leading sugar-producing province. The dependence of a great number of marginalized families in the sugar industry has brought about many social problems.

Child labor is one complex and deep-seated social problem. It thrives on many excuses. It is spread out through varied age groups and its effects are diverse and harmful to human dignity.

Child labor in the sugar industry of the Philippines is as old as the industry itself. It is deeply ingrained in the local culture. Because of this, it requires a comprehensive and sustained intervention.

According to the 2001 Survey on Children conducted by the Philippine National Statistics Office, there were 327,466 children in Western Visayas who worked. They were between the ages of 5 & 17 years old. Of this number 60.2% were male, 39.8% were female and 71.9% lived in the rural areas.

Children between 15 and 17 years are listed as the most predominant working children. For the entire Visayas region, they comprise 52.3%. But in Negros Occidental which hosts the highest number of working children, the 15 to 17 age group makes up 62.7%

Records show that the most popular reason why children leave school and work is to augment family income. This is most evident in the sugar industry where work is seasonal and contractual. Past interventions have been made, but much more needs to be done.

The sugar Industry has not turned a blind eye to this social issue. Through its social arm, the Sugar Industry Foundation, Inc. (SIFI), it continues to implement short-term and long-term interventions to address the problem of child labor in the sugar industry.

PROJECTS IMPLEMENTED TO ELIMINATE CHILD LABOR

1. **School Building Construction Program** – A perennial problem in the Philippines is the acute shortage of public school facilities around the country. For example, in the municipality of Quezon, Bukidnon, children from Brgy. Butong who wish to attend high school have to travel at least 10 kilometers to reach the poblacion. While school-based costs are minimal, non-school expenses such as daily transportation, meals, or allowances hinder or oftentimes cause the children from poorer communities to stop schooling. The able-bodied ones end up in the sugar fields assisting their parents in the weeding, application of fertilizer, furrowing or cutting and harvesting cane.

In response to this problem, the construction of schools in far-flung rural areas was undertaken by the Sugar Industry Foundation Inc. (SIFI) In partnership with the Dept of Labor and

Employment, and the Federation of Filipino Chinese Chamber of Industries. To date, SIFI has facilitated the construction of thirty (30) units two-classroom school buildings located in various sugar milling districts around the country.



This coming school year 2011-2012, SIFI in collaboration with Coca-Cola Foundation and the BUSCO Sugar Mill will help to construct much-needed high school facilities for the Quezon National High School in the province of Bukidnon where 70% of the sugar in Mindanao is produced. This project will provide the sugar worker dependents of Quezon with better access to quality secondary education.

2. **SIFI-ILO Program on Child Labor** - The first project of the SIFI-ILO IPEC program on child labor was implemented in 2006 in Negros Occidental. The program concentrated on information dissemination, provision of educational opportunities to child laborers and income augmentation activities to families with child laborers.

As a result of its advocacy and information campaign, the Asociacion de Agricultores de La Carlota Y Pontevedra, one of the biggest planters association in Negros Occidental came up with a policy declaration to its members planters not to hire child laborers.

A total of 80 working children ages 15-17 were taken out of work and provided with skills trainings such as automotive-mechanic, tractor driving, and welding. On-the-job trainings were arranged for the participants with various companies in Bacolod City and La Carlota City. One hundred (100) members of families working in sugarcane farms were trained to enhance their business skills in implementing income-generating projects.

This time around, the SIFI-ILO IPEC program will be implemented in Mindanao starting on the third quarter of 2011. The curriculum development of a two-year associate course in Sugarcane Farm Technician is being conceptualized and initiated by the Central Mindanao University in Bukidnon.

3. **Reproductive Health and Family Wellness Program** – The implementation of a Reproductive Health program for sugar workers is considered to be one of the long-term solutions/responses to the problem of child labor in the industry.

At present, average family size among sugar workers is 6 to 7 members. Because of poverty, children would usually marry at an early age. The objective of the RH Program implemented by SIFI within the industry is to encourage sugar worker families to plan ahead their desired number of children and appreciate the value, effectiveness and productivity of small-sized families.

The RH program of SIFI was started in 2008 in partnership with the Employees Confederation of the Philippines (ECOP) and funded by PRISM-USAID. It was implemented in 5 sugar mills in Negros Occidental with the goal of integrating RH and Family Planning Education as part of their human resource development program and advocacy with the mill employees.

Currently, SIFI is implementing another RH program in the province of Batangas involving 6 cooperatives and 1 barangay (Nasugbu, Balayan, Calaca, Calatagan and Ibaan,). It is being funded by the Philippine Center for Population and Development (PCPD).

The project in Batangas targets almost 10,000 families of marginal sugarcane planters and micro-entrepreneurs. It involves the training of RH Counselors within the coops, called the Family Wellness Action Teams. Mini-drugstores or "botika sa coop" are also established to provide access to quality but affordable medicines. "Pop Shops" which offer family planning commodities are also being operated by 4 participating cooperatives.



SIFI has also been identified by PRISM 2/ USAID as its potential partner in Negros Occidental which will roll out Public-Private Partnership initiatives for RH and Family Planning in sugar communities. Initially SIFI has identified eight municipalities and cities and will work with selected planters' associations in the area. It is expected that the project will start by June 2011.

- 4. Curriculum Development for Sugar Technician Course** - The ILO-IPEC has approved a proposal from SIFI to start up a special non-degree course in sugarcane farm management technology in partnership with the Central Mindanao University (CMU) in Bukidnon. This 2-year curriculum will be conceptualized and developed by the CMU under its agronomy program. Enrollees of such a course can proceed to take up Bachelor of Science in Agriculture as an option.

The initial enrollees of this program will be identified by SIFI as child laborers who have graduated from high school but have discontinued schooling. The tuition will be subsidized to ease the enrollees' financial burden.

Sugarcane planters and millers in Bukidnon have expressed their support to the project as this will provide the industry with trained manpower and will enhance productivity in the farms.

- 5. SIFI Training Center** – As envisioned, the new Training Center of SIFI in Negros Occidental will serve as the anchor of the Foundation's initiatives against child labor in the industry. It will give priority to child laborers as participants and enable them to acquire technical and other necessary skills.

The Training Center will provide trainings on Entrepreneurship, Manpower Training, Parenting & Values Formation, Overseas Work Assistance, Women's Health and Welfare, Environment and Reading & Literacy Skills (**EMPOWER**). (See attached brochure.)

INDUSTRY PARTICIPATION IN THE PREVENTION OF CHILD LABOR

- 1. Child Labor Monitoring Teams** – The industry will pilot a child labor monitoring system in the province of Bukidnon which will involve the planters' association crop inspectors to also act as child labor monitors. This will happen in the inspection and survey of the planters' crops during the planting and harvesting periods. This will be a joint collaborative endeavor with the Department of Education and the Barangay Child Welfare Committee.

The child labor monitors will report to the Child Labor Monitoring Committee whose members will come from SIFI, the planters' associations, the Labor Sector and the sugar mills.

- 2. Non-Hiring of Child Laborers as a Policy of Sugar Farm Owners** - One of the major achievements of the SIFI-ILO project implemented in Negros Occidental in 2006 was the agreement forged with planters associations in Southern Negros to declare as a policy the non-hiring of child laborers among its members. This initiative continues to be an advocacy of SIFI today among sugar farm owners and laborers/parents in order to comply with R A 9231 or the Special Protection of Children Against Child Abuse, Exploitation and Discrimination Act.



3. **Monitoring of Labor Contractors** – The Luzon Federation of Sugarcane Producers (LUZONFED) and the Batangas Federation of Sugarcane Planters Associations (BAFESPA) have partnered with their Barangay Officials to monitor the migrant workers brought by labor contractors in Batangas who are child laborers. The member associations of these groups will not sign any labor contract with contractors if their crew-for-hire involve children ages 17 and below.

POLICY LEVEL

1. **SIFI Accreditation in Local Special Bodies of Local Government Units** - SIFI has applied for accreditation with Local Government Units (LGUs) in sugar producing areas like Pampanga, Batangas, Negros Occidental, and Bukidnon. This accreditation with LGUs will allow the Foundation to promote meaningful partnerships with the public sector and tap into the 20% of Internal Revenue Allotment (IRA) of the LGU allocated for projects in education, livelihood generation, environment protection and women and children welfare.
2. **Membership in Child Labor Committee** – The Sugar Industry Foundation, inc. is an active member of the Child Labor Committee of the Province of Bukidnon, The Committee was organized under an Executive Order issued by Governor Calingasan. The Committee is tasked to plan and monitor anti-child labor projects in the Province of Bukidnon. It is also involved in formulating and recommending policies for the elimination of child labor in Bukidnon.

SUBMITTED BY:


EDITH Y. VILLANUEVA
President and COO