

CASE STUDY

Facts and Figures:

- ▶ The Centres provide a bridge with catch-up lessons for child labourers to facilitate their reintegration to formal school.
- ▶ The project implements a livelihood support programme for the children's families and an awareness campaign against child labour.

Total Cost:

453900.91 €

Entity in charge:

Development Coordination
Asia, Central Asia, Middle
East/Gulf and Pacific

Benefiting zone:

Philippines

Partners:

- ▶ EILER, the Philippines

Duration:

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Bittersweet: Combatting Child Labour on the Sugarcane Plantations in the Philippines

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The project aims to withdraw 300 boys and girl child labourers in target communities from hazardous work and facilitate their reintegration to formal school.

“ Working in the sugarcane fields is inherently dangerous. ”

Pitang, a 14-year-old sugarcane plantation labourer



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Context

The International Labour Organization (ILO) estimates that there are 5.5 million children aged 5-17 working in the Philippines. Moreover, 3.2 million children are considered to be working in hazardous environments. The EU is working to reduce child labour in the country.

Objectives

- ▶ To withdraw 300 boys and girl child labourers in target communities from hazardous work and facilitate their reintegration to formal school.

Impact

- ▶ 6 Bata Balik-Eskwela Learning Centres have been opened in 6 plantation and mining communities.
- ▶ At least 100 children are enrolled in these Learning Centres each year.

Testimony

Reintegrating child labourers to formal schooling

Until recently, a 14-year-old Jeraldine Aboy, or Pitang to her friends, worked in one of the sugarcane harvesting camps, or 'tolda' around Minanao. She is the second of four children. The eldest suffers from polio and cannot work. This placed a greater burden of helping the family on Pitang's shoulders. Her family belongs to one of the indigenous groups, the Manobo Pulahingon who, in Bukidnon province, have lost a huge part of their ancestral domain as sugarcane and pineapple plantations aggressively encroach into their lands.

Pitang first joined her father in a camp, located far from their home in San Nicolas, when she was just 6. Her work included harvesting and cleaning the sugarcane fields, slashing through weeds in the direct heat of the sun. During the night, she burnt the sugarcane to prepare it for harvesting in the morning. With her father, they would sleep in a makeshift cot and eat dried fish and rice, provided by their employer and deducted from their pay. For this gruelling labour, she would earn a meagre 150 pesos (€2.49) per day.

Pitang could endure the hardship of work, only as long as her father was with her, providing comfort and a sense of safety amidst the razor-sharp leaves of the sugarcane. Things went from bad to worse when her father became ill and could no longer work with her. She was then 10 years old and since the family was in desperate need of money, she had to drop out of school in the middle of the year.

But the work and loneliness never hampered her from dreaming of receiving an education. Last year, Pitang heard of the "Bata Balik Eskwela", an EU-supported project of a Filipino NGO, the Ecumenical Institute for Labor Education and Research, Inc. (EILER). She immediately approached their tribal elder, the Datu, and asked permission to join the programme. Due to her excitement, she enrolled without her parents knowing.

Having missed three years of school, Pitang battled with spelling, and found mathematics very demanding for her, along with other subjects. Since the start, however, she has never missed a session, always trying to improve herself. She can now read in Filipino, shows improvement in mathematics and can now read even a little of English. Her latest achievement was writing an essay, something unheard of before.

Now, she dares to think of her next big dream: being on stage, singing in front of an applauding audience.

