

**CHILD LABOR AMONG INDIGENOUS PEOPLES:  
THE CASE OF A MANOBO TRIBE IN  
BUKIDNON PROVINCE**

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**December 2000**

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**RIMCU**



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# CHILD LABOR AMONG INDIGENOUS PEOPLES: THE CASE OF A MANOBO TRIBE IN BUKIDNON PROVINCE

## Introduction

The issue on child labor is a well-documented concern. The working child of antiquity, of the middle ages and of modern history had always attracted attention especially as children labored under exploitative conditions. During the early period of economic history, the employment of children was allowed for the purpose of artificially increasing the supply of labor and therefore decreasing wages (Lenski, 1966). In modern times, children are made to work, among other things, in order to augment family income (McMullen, 1992). In both instances, the circumstances are seen as disadvantageous to the children, who should have been spending more time at play than at work.

Numerous studies have noted that exposure of children to work can pose serious consequences not only upon the lives and future of the children themselves but also upon the community and society as a whole. For example, Rivera (1985) found children between the ages of 9 to 14 years working as street vendors and scavengers. The money they earned would go to their parents or their "care taker." An ILO-UNICEF draft paper (2000:84-85) noted that in some instances children work as prostitutes (cf. Sealza, 1992). And in the report by Palma-Sealza (1992:12), children work in farms as farm hands, in construction sites as laborers, in sand and gravel quarry sites as divers, in gold mines as panners, in households as domestic helpers, and in commercial establishments as errand boys. Most of these children were removed

from school by the circumstances they were into. Under these exploitative conditions, it is likely that they have learned anything and apply this when they reach adulthood.

But child labor as a phenomenon continues. Are the disadvantages of child labor obvious only through the eyes of the outside observer? The definition of child labor can be economic, social and cultural. The parents of the working children may see it as part of early childhood training and socialization. The children themselves may look at labor as part of a cultural tradition, of social expectations that children must support (as sort of pay-back) the parents. The outside observer may have been inculturated in a tradition wherein it is the parents' responsibility to support the children. This inculturation may differ from some communities' belief that children should make life easier for the parents.

The plight of the working children is disadvantaged mainly because their parents are disadvantaged. If the poor people living in the lowlands (dominant culture) experience difficulties, those living in indigenous communities would likely experience more problems.

The disadvantages being experienced by the adult members of the indigenous peoples (IPs) must have been reflected in the conditions of their children as described by Cabaraban and Bayog (n.d.). The tribal children were seen as pale, wide-eyed, with big belly and swollen face, undernourished and generally stunted and sickly.

When in a state of good health, many children of the IPs work. And whatever definition of work is used, one cannot help but see the exploitative circumstances of working children. This study investigates



the conditions of working children coming from an indigenous community.

### Scope of the Study

This study focuses on child labor in an indigenous community in the province of Bukidnon: the Manobo community in Purok 7, Botong, Quezon. For the purposes of this study, a person is a child if he/she is below 18 years old. A child is working if he/she is engaged in gainful work either in the formal or informal sector, or both, for wages, piece-work pay, and/or other forms of remuneration.

### Objectives of the Study

The main objective of this study is to examine the nature of the labor force participation of Manobo children in the formal and/or informal sectors of the economy. Specifically, it aims to:

- a) describe the various cases of child labor among the Manobos;
- b) understand how child labor is defined among the Manobos;
- c) determine the type of work and the work conditions of the children, and the characteristics and circumstances of the child workers' families and community;
- d) describe the children's work environment, the problems that they encounter including the hazards posed by their specific work, the relationships that they have with adult people in the workplace; and,

- e) explore the children's and parents' level of knowledge regarding the legislated rights of children.

### Research Methodology

This study abides by the data collection guidelines for rapid assessment developed by ILO and UNICEF in investigating child labor. The study is a situational analysis involving the following activities:

- a. Soliciting the assistance of local government officials and local leaders: First, the members of the study team went to the Social Action Center of the Archdiocese of Bukidnon and the Office of the Provincial Planning and Development Office to inquire about possible IP communities for the group to study as well as to solicit their assistance in identifying possible informants. From these offices, the team was able to obtain a list of possible contact persons. The team then visited persons in the list and the suggested communities. The initial visits made by the team proved very useful. The team was given instructions on some prerequisites for outsiders when soliciting information from IP groups to acquaint them about the IP's culture or way of life.

- b. Collecting background information from available sources: Useful documents pertaining to child labor and about indigenous peoples were also reviewed. Some of these papers include those from the Social Action Center of the Archdiocese of the province of Bukidnon, those kept by the indigenous peoples themselves and those kept in various libraries

in Manila and at Xavier University. Information taken from these materials is noted in this report. The data were also used as basis in formulating some of the questions for the Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) which the study team conducted with the youth and the parents.

c. Interviewing key informants: Several individuals served as key informants regarding child labor in the communities studied. These included the chieftain of the tribe, locally known as the “*Datu*,” the working children themselves, local leaders in the community, the parents, and old members of the tribe.

d. Identifying and mapping key locations of working children: This activity was pursued by asking key informants. The informants were asked the usual work that children were engaged in and their location. This facilitated the work of the study team in identifying working children in the community and their places of work.

e. Conducting case studies of children: Firsthand information about work and their conditions at work were provided by the working children themselves. The children were asked to give a detailed description of their activities, including their problems and aspirations.

f. Observing children at work: Children at work were observed. Some specific activities were documented using still cameras.

g. Conducting Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) with parents and the working children: FGDs with parents and the youth group (some of whom were working children themselves) were conducted. The discussions were recorded and transcripts of the discussions were analyzed and made part of this study.

Data obtained from different sources were cross-checked and verified during the conduct of the field work. Members of the research team compared notes every afternoon after the data collection for the day was done in order to verify information.

Initial processing of the results of interviews, discussions and observations were done while still in the field. The final processing was done at RIMCU by all the members of the research team.

### Selection of the Study Sites

Because the study should be done rapidly, the study team decided to conduct the investigation in one tribal community only.

The site which was finally chosen is in the Municipality of Quezon. This site was chosen for the following reasons:

- a. the presence of indigenous people belonging to the Manobo tribe in the area;
- b. the presence of a large agricultural industry devoted to sugar cane plantation;
- c. children were seen to be working in the plantation and elsewhere; and
- d. a big proportion of the agricultural lands is devoted to wet farming in the area and other places nearby.

### Problems and Difficulties Encountered and How Were These Resolved

The team originally planned to study working children from two tribal communities. The team members visited the two sites in order to

make preliminary contacts with the people in the communities particularly the chieftains. In the two sites, the team was asked to participate in a ritual, as a way of asking permission to enter the area from their supreme god and other spirits. The ritual went on smoothly in one of the target communities. In the other site, however, aside from the ritual, the study team was required to get the consent form from the National Commission for Indigenous Peoples (NCIP) office. They also required the signing of a memorandum of understanding between the study team and the tribal council. The team was asked to comply with the requirements before any formal gathering of information will be allowed. Because of the complexity of the requirements and the time involved in meeting them, the team decided to exclude the group as subject of inquiry for this study.

## FINDINGS

### Brief Description of the Province of Bukidnon

Bukidnon is an inland province in the island of Mindanao. The population of the province as of May 1995 was 940,403 and is growing at a rate of 2.05% per annum. It has a total land area of 829,178 hectares or about 9,912 square kilometers. It is composed of 22 municipalities, with the City of Malaybalay as its capital. The province lies on top of a wide plateau in central Mindanao. The province has an average elevation of 915 meters above sea level. Its terrain consists of

plains, rolling uplands, deep canyons and valleys. Rugged mountains and dormant volcanoes accentuate its geophysical picture.

The leading economic activity in the province is agriculture. It has a total agricultural area of 237,394.39 hectares. A total of 72,132 hectares are devoted to rice farming, of which 66,606 hectares are irrigated. The leading crops grown in the province are sugarcane, pineapple, rice and corn.

#### Description of the Manobo Tribe in the Research Area

The Manobo tribe is an ethnic group in the Province of Bukidnon. They have lived in the mountains because it is said, historically, that they did not want to live alongside the lowland settlers (PPDO, 1996:1).

The tribal community of these working children is classified as the Southern Manobo, one of the eleven indigenous groups that inhabit the Bukidnon uplands (PPDO, 1996:2). The particular Manobo group covered by this study lives in Purok 7, Barangay Butong of the Municipality of Quezon (see Figure 1). As of September 27, 2000, there are 429 Southern Manobo households with a total population of 1,432. One hundred seventeen of these households are living in Purok 7 and 312 households are living outside yet near it.

This group in Purok 7 have organized themselves into what is now known as QUEMTRAS (Quezon Manobo Tribal Association), as they close ranks to make their ancestral domain claim. Their ancestral lands, according to them, has been affected by the establishment of sugar industry in Bukidnon (Madigan and Sealza, 1985). From this group

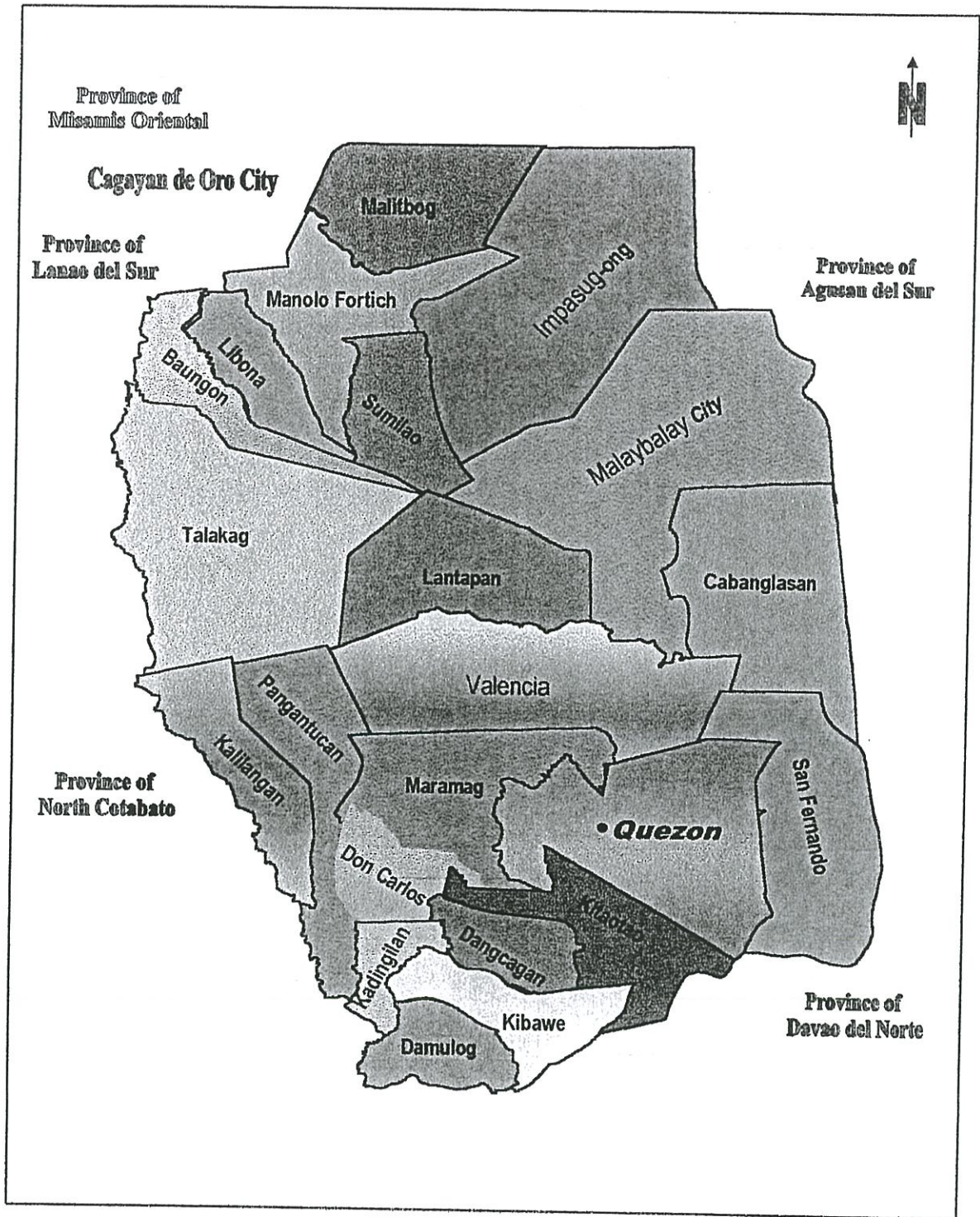


Figure 1. Map of Bukidnon Province

belong those who picketed for more than a month in 1998 inside the Department of Environment and Natural Resources compound in Quezon City to press for their ancestral land claims (Fieldnotes, 1998:11). The Manobos hope that they will have their ancestral land back soon.

They live in an area leased by the local government unit of Quezon as their temporary dwelling place while waiting for the result of their ancestral domain claim. They live in shanties which are mostly made of nipa, bamboo and sacks and having low ceilings. Others are only covered with plastic canvass; some do not have floors at all. The shanties are built near one another, in the middle of the plantation.

The place is muddy and slippery when it rains and dusty if it does not. Very few of the residents have gardens in their backyard. There are about ten communal twin comfort rooms in the vicinity. These were built collectively by the group as required by the local government.

Their source of drinking water is far. Fetching from this source is also scheduled. The schedule for them is from 10:00 am to 3:00 pm. For their household consumption, they also make use of rain water. Electricity is not available in the community. There are three sari-sari stores found in the area.

Majority of the children who move around do not have slippers and are not properly clothed. Most children appear malnourished. The most common illnesses and causes of most deaths among children are diarrhea, measles and malnutrition.

Tilling their own land used to be the main source of livelihood of the Manobos. After they were dispossessed of what they claim to have



been their ancestral lands, and after these lands were converted into sugar plantations, most of them worked in corn and wet-rice paddies as laborers and in the sugar cane plantation as farm hands. Most of them became wage earners. Work in these farms is seasonal, so they are jobless at certain times of the year. There is no available work for them in the sugar cane industry from May to August. The children are involved in four workplaces: sugar plantation, corn farm, wet-rice farm, and the households.

Almost one-third (32.1%) of the Manobos residing in the study community have never been to school. About 15 percent of the population have some high school education. Only 3 percent have reached college. One person was able to complete a college education. The level of education of almost one-half of the population is the elementary grade.

Table 1. Highest Grade Completed by Sex

Highest Grade Completed	Male		Female		Total	
	f	%	f	%	f	%
No education	221	15.4	238	16.6	459	32.1
Primary	139	9.7	241	16.8	380	26.5
Elementary	181	12.6	153	10.7	334	23.3
High School	83	5.8	130	9.1	213	14.9
College	20	1.4	25	1.7	45	3.1
College graduate	0	0.0	1	0.1	1	0.1
Total	644	44.9	238	55.0	1432	100.0

The Manobo children have access to two elementary schools. The nearest is about one kilometer away from the location of the community being studied. Another elementary school is approximately 5 kilometers away.

There are four schools offering secondary education and these are located in the Municipality of Quezon. One of these schools also offer tertiary level of education. There are also other schools located in the adjacent municipalities of Maramag and Valencia.

Non- formal education classes sponsored by the Department of Education, Culture and Sports (DECS) are sometimes held in the area. These include classes in dressmaking, manicure, pedicure and shoe repair.

The families in the community are very poor as manifested by insufficient food. This is also apparent in how they look and the structure of their houses.

## Circumstances of the Child Workers' Families and Community

During the term of Marcos as president, the indigenous peoples (IPs) of the Philippines were hit by a severe blow when he signed a decree declaring untitled lands with slopes of 18 percent and above as public land (McMullin, 1992; Sealza and Palma-Sealza, 1985). The IPs and their ancestral lands are mostly located in steep-sloping mountainsides and forests and because of such decree the security of their land which is their only source of livelihood became precarious.

The IPs were forced up to the mountains by the pressure of lowland settlers. In recent years, agri-business and plantation industries devoted to pineapple, sugar, rubber, and coffee, have exacerbated the threat to the already precarious land tenure claims of the IPs putting them in a "position of exploited dependence where once they enjoyed a state of isolated independence" (REPROWATCH, 1998).

The consequences of such developments has greatly affected the Manobos of Quezon, Bukidnon. Many of them are fighting to gain their ancestral lands. In 1965, they began to assert their claim to these lands but their leaders, Datus Vivencio Balag and Vicente Subog, and the people did not succeed. In 1975, ten years after they made their first claim, the first demolition of Manobo communities took place during the establishment of the Bukidnon Sugar Company (BUSCO). Because the Manobos had nowhere to go and nothing to eat, they were forced to work in the sugarcane fields as laborers.

In 1989, the Manobos again started to organize themselves in order to claim their ancestral lands. This time, 315 families joined together to

claim 2,000 hectares of land. In 1990, two of their members were killed when they tried to enter a sequestered property and one of their leaders was charged with illegal possession of firearms and illegal entry. Fortunately, the case was dismissed. There are four other groups of Manobos in the area who are making the same claim. These groups joined forces in 1994. Leadership has changed since then. Now, the groups are led by Datu Carlito Anglao and are receiving support from various concerned organizations like the Community Aid Abroad (CAA) and Philippine Association for Intercultural Development (PAFID). Finally, in June 5, 1997, they were awarded the Certificate of Ancestral Domain Claim (CADC).

In August 1999, they tried to go back to their ancestral lands but were prevented by a Temporary Restraining Order (TRO) issued by the court. For four months, they camped along the highway but were later ordered to leave the area by the Department of Public Works and Highways. When they refused, their shanties were destroyed and two other members were killed. They are now temporarily relocated in Purok 7; their struggle to regain their land continues.

Life is very miserable for the Manobos. Without land, they have no source for livelihood to provide for their families. It is the children who have been most affected.

#### Description of Two Major Local Industries Employing Children

The Manobo children were found to be working in either plantations/industries or domestic setting. They are hired to work as

laborers in sugar, rice and corn plantations, as herders of ducks in duck raising industry, or as domestic helpers.

Two major local industries which are currently employing children will be described. Work in these industries appear to be more complex.

### 1. The Sugar Industry in Bukidnon Province

The sugar industry in Bukidnon began in the early 70s, but it formally took off with the establishment of a sugar milling plant called the Bukidnon Sugar Company (BUSCO) which started operations in 1976. From then on, mill-oriented plantings continued to expand. There were 54 planters, covering a total of 1,947 hectares, who participated in the 1976-77 milling season. By 1982, the figures increased to 1,083 planters, operating in a total of 20,991 hectares.

About 38 percent of the planters own between one to six hectares of sugarcane land. All together, their farms cover some eight percent of the total land area at an average of about four hectares per planter. In turn, a smaller number of planters (3.3%), own farm sizes of 100 hectares and above. The plantings of these big owners cover close to one-half of the total land area used for sugar crop at an average of 263 hectares per person. A large proportion of land holdings (45%) are in the hands of a small minority of planters (3%). This pattern is not surprising; in fact, this is common in farms devoted to plantation crops.

Earlier on, workers in the sugar plantation were the "*sacadas*" (experienced sugar cane workers from Negros and Iloilo). They were purposely brought in by the land owners to do the planting and

harvesting (locally known as “*tapas*”).

Slowly, the Manobos as well as other residents along the BUSCO area learned the skill of planting and harvesting sugar cane from the “*sacadas*.” In 1978, the Manobos started working in the sugar plantation in order to survive.

## 2. The Duck Raising Industry

In Bukidnon, duck raising is very common in agricultural places devoted to wet rice farming. Ducks, particularly the mallard breed, are known locally as “*itik*” or “*bebe*.” The farmers raise ducks primarily as an income generating activity. These “*itiks*” regularly lay eggs which the farmer sells in markets for “*balut*” production and other food production purposes. A unique Filipino delicacy, “*balut*” are eggs incubated for 16 to 21 days, then cooked and sold at Ph P7.00 each.

The ducks are also useful because they feed on golden snail (locally known as “*kuhol*”), weeds and other insects that destroy or eat rice stalks.

Most wet-rice farmers see “*itik*” production as shooting two birds with one stone. It helps them maintain good rice production by getting rid of insects and golden snails that thrive on rice stalks, and it brings in additional income from eggs that the ducks lay everyday.

Duck raising is a very popular undertaking among lowlanders because it requires low production cost and high financial returns. There are only two basic requirements to ensure high production of eggs-- sufficient provision of food and ample water for ducks to thrive in. Also,

ducks are easier to keep as they are proven to be more resistant to diseases compared to chicken.

With sufficient food, ducks start to lay eggs at the age of 5 months up to 7 months. They will not lay eggs during the succeeding two weeks. After this, the ducks lay eggs again until the 10<sup>th</sup> month. At 10 months old, ducks undergo a period of molting, or "*pangarol*" for one month. During this period, ducks shed off feathers. There is no egg production during this period. After this, another cycle begins. The estimated productive range of ducks would reach up to four years. After this, stocks have to be replaced. The average daily production is 80 eggs for every 100 heads of ducks.

The ducks partake of leftovers in the rice fields. During harvest season, ducks invade newly harvested rice paddies for food. During planting season, they are brought back to the owners' house where they are fed on shelled corn.

#### Description of the Different Stages of Work Engaged in by Children

It might prove useful to describe the major stages of work in the different work settings so that it would be easier to situate the involvement of the children in the work cycle.

### 1. Work in a Sugar Plantation

The first stage in planting sugar cane involves land preparation. This takes three steps. The first step is clearing the area by breaking through and plowing with the use of a tractor (especially in the case of big land owners). Breaking through and plowing a one hectare piece of land takes about one day with the use of a tractor. Some small planters use a disk plow pulled by a draft animal, a carabao or cow, and it takes a day to complete one hectare with five persons, each using a carabao. The laborers are paid Ph P120.00 per day. Only very few Manobos can do this activity because most of them do not own carabaos or cows

After the plowing comes the harrowing (locally known as "*rastilyo*"), a process of breaking up clods of soil with the use of spiked iron frame pulled by a carabao or tractor. When using this, a one hectare of land will usually take five men with a carabao each to complete the work. In contrast, it will only take one man using a tractor to accomplish the same.

The land is then ready for the next step which is called furrowing (locally known as "*tudling*"). Furrowing involves trenching the soil with a plow to create furrows of about 4 to 6 inches in width and about 6 to 10 inches in depth to plant sugarcane stock (locally known as "*patdan*"). The furrows are at least one meter apart from each other. With a carabao, furrowing one hectare takes about two man-days; with a cow it



takes one man-day because the cow can withstand prolonged heat from the sun. Furrowing the same with tractor takes half a day or less.

Plowing, harrowing and furrowing can be done either using a carabao, cow or tractor.

Only adult men are involved in activities relating to land preparation. However, a seventeen or eighteen year old Manobo can easily pass as an adult because they are already regarded as grown up in their community.

The next is the planting stage. The sugar cane cutting ("*patdan*") measures about four to six inches in length. Two "*patdans*" are planted in a slanting (semi-vertical) position side by side in a set one after the other and lined through the "*tudling*." Each set is partly covered with soil. Sugarcane sprouts begin to be evident after one week. After a month, it is expected that all the "*patdans*" have already developed new sprouts. To cover a hectare, one needs four "*laksa*" which is equivalent to 10,000 pieces of "*patdan*." This means some 40,000 of "*patdans*" are planted in one hectare. About thirty persons can finish planting 40,000 "*patdans*" in one day.

This activity is not only done by the adult males, but also by children and women. They are paid Ph P40.00 per 1,000 "*patdans*." Employers who prefer to pay on a per day basis, give Ph P70.00 per person.

The next activity has something to do with maintenance through weeding. Both adults and children can do this. They are paid between Ph P800.00 to Ph P1,200 per hectare. With this pay arrangement, the whole family is involved. Sometimes, they can choose to be paid on a daily basis, at Ph P70.00 per day. At other times, especially during summer, some children do weeding and they are paid Ph P8.00 per “*tudling*.” Usually a child finishes only one “*tudling*” in a day. They use tools like “*piti-ay*” or “*slicer*”(see Figure 2).

The fourth stage is the application of fertilizer which begins after weeding is completed. The planters use at least two kinds of fertilizer-- 1620 and 4600 (urea). After the third month, the second round of fertilizer application takes place. During this time, aside from the 1620 and 4600, potassium is also applied. Application of fertilizer is done by hand.

Adult men and women as well as children are involved in this activity. They are paid from Ph P25.00 to Ph P30.00 per bag of fertilizer or Ph P70.00 per day.

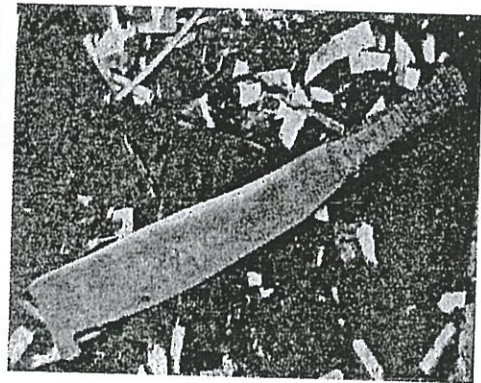
Brushing is another activity that requires hired labor. This involves removing unwanted leaves in order to increase the sugar content of the plant. They use “*ispading*”, the same tool they use for harvesting. The laborers are paid Ph P400.00 per hectare or Ph P70.00 per day. Brushing is usually done during the months of March and April.



“piti-ay”



“sarong”



“ispading”

Figure 2: Tools used by children and adult workers in sugarcane plantation.

After brushing comes harvesting (sugarcane cutting) called "*tapas*" in the local dialect. Here, the workers cut the sugarcane leaving about three inches of the stalk from the ground. The sugar stalks are piled. Male laborers are paid according to number of tons of sugarcane stalks they had cut and loaded. They are paid between Ph P90.00 and Ph P95.00 per ton of cane (one ton is equivalent to 1,016.0469 kilograms) depending upon the distance of the farm to the cargo truck. Aside from harvesting, the payment also includes hauling or loading of the sugar stalks.

In cane cutting, the workers have to wear a mask, gloves and thick jacket for protection from sharp leaves of the sugar cane and other weeds (like *bolonsiri*). Boys who are 14 years and above are allowed to do the harvesting. They use a long, and sharp bolo called locally as "*ispading*."

Harvesting usually starts in the month of October and stretches toward the end of May of the following year.

The next activity is to prepare the "*patdan*." Preparing the "*patdan*" is done simultaneously with harvesting during the fourth harvest (the owner plants once and harvests four times). This is the top portion of the sugar cane which is cut during harvest (the sugar cane itself is sent to the sugar milling plant). Workers remove sugar cane leaves from the stalk and the "*patdan*" is taken. *Patdans* are stocked and

made ready for the next planting season.

Both children and adults can prepare the "*patdan*." A sharp bolo is used to prepare the "*patdan*." Children who are 12 years old and over can participate in this activity. They are paid Ph P35.00 for every 1,000 "*patdans*."

An adult male can finish 4,000 "*patdans*" per day and for this, he is paid Ph P140.00 and a female adult can finish only about half of this and therefore gets only Ph P70.00.

The next activity is locally called "*dipol*." Here the remaining stalk of the sugarcane which was left during the harvesting is further trimmed to the ground. New growth from the cut stalks will grow into new stalks. "*Dipol*" is done by both adults and children. They are paid Ph P400.00 per hectare.

Then comes the stacking or filing of harvested sugar stalks. This is locally called "*tapok*." They are paid Ph P1.00 for every 40 stalks piled. They get their pay every afternoon. There are many children who are involved in this activity.

Another work involving children is the removing of remaining leaves from prepared "*patdans*." For every 1,000 *patdans* that are peeled off, they get Ph P5.00 as payment.

On the average, the harvest will take place 10 to 12 months from the first planting. Then they wait for another 10 to twelve months to do

the next harvest, until they make the fourth harvest. It is during the fourth harvest that the new "patdans" are prepared.

The sugarcane stalks are then loaded to a cargo truck for delivery to the sugar milling plant for initial processing. Loading is done by both adults and children who are 17 to 18 years old. A laborer carries about 40 stalks at a time. This load weighs about 50 to 70 kilos. Sometimes, they have to do this until the evening. They have to stop when it rains.

## 2. Work in Duck ("Itik") Raising Industry

"*Bakero*" (from the local word "*baka*" which means cow) and "*duckboy*" are the local terms for a duck herder. "*Duckboy*" is the popular name given to children, usually young boys, who work for pay watching a flock of ducks. This is parallel to "cowboys" who attend to cattle. Since there is "cowboy," local people have coined the name "*duckboy*." Among the responsibilities of a *bakero* or *duckboy* are to find areas where ducks can get enough food, bring them to places where there is adequate water for swimming, and see to it that ducks do not destroy standing crops.

On the average, a flock consists of about 500 "itik." The "*duckboy*" is required to follow the flock as it moves from one rice field to the other until the ducks had their fill. The "*duckboy*" stays in the field the whole day, making sure that not one of his flock goes astray.

He carries a long and slender stick which he uses to make sure the ducks follow the same direction.

It is necessary for a “duckboy” to move fast to prevent some ducks in his flock from joining other flocks. When a duck strays to another flock, it is difficult for him to retrieve it. Also, there is a tacit agreement among “*duckboys*” that once a duck joins another flock, it becomes part of that flock. It would be difficult to identify a stray duck because all ducks look the same. For every lost duck, the owner charges the “*duckboy*” Ph P80.00 to be deducted from his salary. Sometimes one can be lucky, that is, if a duck from another flock joins his flock which increases the size of his flock. He can sell the extra duck or give it as replacement for what was lost from his flock.

A “*duckboy*” follows the ducks from early morning when he gets the flock out of its pen. He counts them up before driving them out to the rice field. At about 5:00 o'clock in the afternoon, he counts them again and takes them back to the pen. In the afternoon, the owner makes his own headcount to make sure that not one is lost.

The boys are paid on a monthly basis. They are paid from Ph P500.00 to Ph P700.00 per month. They usually live away from their parents. Often, they stay with their employers.

### 3. Work in Rice and Corn Plantation

When work in the sugar plantation is unavailable, the Manobos, including children, also work as farm laborers or harvesters in a rice or corn field. Work of this nature can be found not only in the nearby barangays but also in other places.

When young children weed someone's farm, they usually get paid on a per day basis in the amount of Ph P25.00 per day. Adults receive Ph P35.00 per day.

They also earn from harvesting rice or corn during harvest seasons (usually during the month of August). They go to places where harvests are on-going. When the place is far from their residence, they also sleep in the area in their makeshift tents. Sometimes, they have to be away from home for two weeks. The owner usually provides free rice for food. They have to provide for their own viand, however. Their viand usually consist of sardines, noodles and dried fish which they get on credit from a store or the farm owner. This is deducted from their share once harvest time is over. They get a corresponding share of rice or corn based on the volume of rice and corn they are able to harvest. The most common sharing pattern is this: for every twelve sacks of rice or corn harvested, they get one sack as share. In one day, they can harvest 12 sacks of corn cobs.



#### 4. Work as Domestic Helpers

It is usually the female Manobo child who engages in this kind of work. The girls stay in their employer's house and are paid on a monthly basis. The most common work that they do involve baby sitting, doing the laundry, cooking meals, cleaning the house, doing errands and sometimes tending domestic pets and hogs. Some girls, if they are lucky, do only one specific activity (e.g., cooking).

The girls wake up early, earlier than their employer. They are up at 5:00 in the morning.

#### 5. Other Paid Activities

Fetching water is another activity that some children are engaged in. This is common to small boys who cannot work in the sugar plantation. The source of potable water is about one kilometer away from the community. A child uses a wooden push cart to transport two five-gallon plastic containers. The child is paid Ph P5.00 per trip.

#### Concept of Child Labour Among the Manobos

The concept of child labor in the context of most lowland settlers is apparently non-existent among the Manobos. To them, a child is allowed to work for remuneration when he/she is strong enough to grip

and carry objects and is able to do a particular job or activity. Manobo children usually start doing household chores at age 6. By the time a Manobo child is between the ages 9 and 10, he/she is considered ready to work for remuneration. There are, however, few instances wherein a child starts earning at age six (one mother reported that her son started working at this age). To them, a child who works for pay or other forms of remuneration and contributes to the family income, regardless of age, is already an adult. Working children are considered responsible and capable of making decisions and should be treated as one. In fact, as early as age 14, a Manobo can already get married.

The Manobos do not see child labor as an issue. The lowland concept of child labor is not applicable to them. Besides, reckoning of one's exact age is not important to them because these are often not remembered.. The informants said:

*“Ang amo gyud nga gatan-awon kay ang iyang gimbuhaton. Kung tarong na ang gabuhaton ug gahunahuna na, dako na siya. Dili mi gatan-aw sa edad.”*  
[What we see is the work. If he can do it and uses his head, then he is already an adult. We do not consider the age.]

*“Ako, dili kuntento nga ingnon nga tiguwang na. Basta kay igo na motrabaho. Ang dyes anyos, angay nana motrabaho.”* [I am not after calling one an adult. As long as he can already work. For me, a ten year old child should already work.]

*“Daku na gyud na ang dyes anyos kung magtrabaho kay naa na man na siyay paghuna-huna ug responsibilidad. Gadesisyon na pod siya ug iya ra.”* [A ten year old child is old enough to work because he is already responsible and can already decide.]

*“Kung maminyo sa dyes pa ang edad, dako na gihapon na siya.”* [If one marries at age 10, he/she is considered an adult.]

### Education and Work Among the Manobos

The Manobo, like the others, also value and recognize the need for education. This sentiment is not only true to Manobo parents but also their children. Stories like the following, as narrated by the informants, are common:

*“Ta-as ang among tan-aw niadtong mga naka-eskwela.”*  
[We regard highly people who are educated.]

*“Ang akong bata lagi akong ga-ingnon nga dili na gayud siya makapadayon ug eskwela pagkahuman niya sa elementarya. Busa gahilak na lang intawon siya.”* [I told my child that he cannot study anymore after finishing elementary education. The child cried.]

Young Manobo Mother

Thus, as much as possible, they want their children to be educated. However, many of their children have not been able to pursue higher education because of poverty. Work has been given the priority. Many children have lost interest in pursuing their studies.

*“Tungod sa puro problema ang kasagarang madunggan sa mga kabataan, mao pili-on nila nga mangita ug kwarta.”* [Because they always hear about problems caused by poverty, they choose to look for money by working.]

Some children see how attending school gives additional burden to their parents. Thus, most of them, even at an early age, had thought of working to help the family.

A number of informants disclosed that some children stopped attending school in order to work in the plantation. Some do not attend school because they are hungry. Cases of absenteeism is common among children who are enrolled in school. They usually skip school during harvest time and when there is work available in the plantation.

However, some informants also reported that some children have lost interest in attending school because of discrimination. A child, for example, reported that he stopped attending school because of an unpleasant experience.

*“Sa eskwelahan, akong mga classmate mubo ug panan-aw sa ako. Muingon dayon sila ug: ‘nitibo mga hugawan’.”* [My classmates in school look down on me. They would call me: ‘native, you are dirty’.]

Another child said he stopped going to school because his teacher slapped him because he had a fight with a classmate who bullied him.

Aside from formal education, they put high value on the guidance and education (“*pangara*”) that is supposedly given at home by parents. In most cases, however, the parents leave home to work early in the

morning and do not have time to give this basic education to their children. The children are left to the care of their older siblings. In one of the interviews, Datu Carlito Anglao expressed his regret over the neglect of most parents in fulfilling this task.

*“Ang edukasyon gikan sa ginikanan talagsa ra mahatag tungod sa sobrang pagpaningkamot sa panginabuhian.”*  
[The education that children are supposed to get from their parents is hardly realized now because parents have to struggle for a livelihood.]

The parents, as expressed by Datu Anglao, hope that their children will have the opportunity to learn and appreciate the Manobo culture including their beliefs, system of government, health practices and language. They also dream that someone will write a book about these.

#### Work Opportunities of Children

Based on interviews with informants, the chance of Manobo children to work in the sugar plantation is quite high since they live near the plantation area where their parents also work as laborers. There are opportunities in the plantation for work that is paid according to output or land area covered (e.g., per hectare). In this case, an entire family or group may opt to finish a specific activity (e.g., weeding a one-hectare plantation). When this arrangement is allowed by the owner, the parents (husband and wife) and all the other children in the family who are

capable of working are expected to help. In some instances, the owners also hire and pay individual laborers on a per day basis. Manobo children may also be given work on a per day basis.

The chance of getting hired as *duckboy* is also high. Adults do not like this kind of job. Most of the time, a Manobo boy does not have to apply; he is simply recruited.

Some Manobo children also indulge in harvesting corn and rice. They do this not only in rice and corn fields in nearby barangays but also in far away municipalities like Wao, Lanao del Sur. The other places that they go to are Dagat Kidavao in Valencia, Musuan in Maramag, Paitan, and Kalilangan. When they do this, they get a share of the harvest depending on the volume of rice or corn that they are able to harvest. On the average, for every 12 sacks of rice or corn that they are able to harvest, they get one sack of rice or corn as share. In one harvest, they can collect about 2 sacks.

The smaller children have also their ways of earning money. They fetch water for some families. Water is fetched from a source about one kilometer away. To carry the container, they use a wooden push cart. The cart can take two containers which contain five gallons each. They are paid Ph P5.00 per trip. Sometimes, a child can earn Ph P10.00 in one day. In the neighborhood, about fifteen children, mostly boys, are engaged in this activity. Children of ages 7 to 12 carry out this activity.

## Decision to Work

Aware of the difficulty of their parents in making both ends meet for the family, the majority of Manobo children interviewed reported that they were the ones who made the decision to work. Some of them said that their parents wanted them to finish their studies, but they themselves had opted to work.

*“Malooy ko sa akong ginikanan. Kinahanglan gyod ko motrabaho.”* [I pity my parents. I really have to work.]  
Fourteen year old boy

Some children are personally brought by their parents to their would-be employers. This indicates that in some cases, the parents themselves are the ones who are making the decision as to whether the child will work or not. Because food supply is always insufficient, some parents are forced to let their children find work in other places. This usually happens during lean months when there is no work available in the plantation.

## Reasons for Working

Firsthand information regarding the reasons why children work were provided by the working children themselves. In general, children share the responsibility to gain the bare minimum necessary for survival -- their families' and themselves. Most children work because of poverty.

Changes in family economic circumstances had forced many children to leave home and school in order to earn. Most of them cannot eat three times a day. A mother informant described instances like:

*“Usahay walay among pagka-on. Usahay makaka-on sa isa ka higayon lang sa sulod sa usa ka adlaw. Busa kung gutmon, moka-on na lang ug tubo. Usahay lagi, murag ikaduha nalang mi mamilok.”* [Sometimes, we don't have food to eat. Sometimes, we eat only once in a day. If we are hungry, we chew sugar cane. Sometimes, we feel we will not last long.]

### Recruiting Children to Work

The manner in which a child is recruited to work varies. Some children are personally recruited by their would be employer. This is especially true among workers in the “*itik*” production. In this case, the employer offers to pay the child a certain amount. Often too, the child stays in the house of the employer.

Others apply personally. In the case of a sugar cane plantation worker, they apply to the “*kabo*” (work supervisor). They do not negotiate for the amount of pay that they will receive. There is a standard cost for a specific activity.

There are also instances in which the parents themselves will bring along their children to work with them in the plantation. This is true when payment is on a per output basis. At times, parents themselves apply for work for their children.



*“Kung tanan sa grupo nga motrabaho mga bata, kasagaran ang mama ang gaingon nga motrabaho.”*  
[When the group who wants to work is composed of children, it is usually the mother who applies.]

### Hours of Work

The length of time that the children spend working vary according to type of work. On the average, work in the sugarcane plantation is about eight hours per day. This can sometimes be extended for another hour or more.

*“Sugod mi alas siyete sa buntag. Mahuman sa alas kwatro i-medya. Usahay mahuman mi sa 5:30 o’ 6:00 pero walay dugang nga bayad.”* [We start at 7:00 in the morning. We finish at 4:30. Sometimes, we end at 5:30 or 6:00 without additional pay.]

Working time for children hired in the “*itik*” production is longer. They usually start at 5:00 in the morning and end at 5:00 in the afternoon. They stay all day in the ricefield and even during meal time they continue to keep watch over their flock.

Children working as domestic helpers also appear to spend more time working. They usually wake up at 4:00 in the morning and the earliest that they can be in bed is 8:00 in the evening. Some sleep at 10:00 p.m. This activity is common among girls.

## Income from Work

The wages derived by the children, no matter how minimal, from work in the plantation and other endeavors always provide a welcome relief to the difficulties that their families suffer. It seems that they cannot afford to give up these wages by attending school rather than working. Always, the desire to attend school is overpowered by the desire to at least save the family from hunger even for just a day.

The child worker often receives less than what an adult receives. If the standard pay per day is Ph P50.00 for adults, the child only gets Ph P40.00. When the pay is based on output, all the more the child gets a much lesser pay. There are other activities in which children are not allowed to do even if they are willing to do so for less pay.

A child who works as a baby sitter reported that her starting salary was Ph P100.00 per month. This means that her daily pay is less than Ph P4.00 per day. Boys who work in the "itik" production receive from Ph P500.00 to Ph P700.00 per month.

In many cases, the parents are the ones who receive the child's pay. Most of them, however, said that their parents sometimes give them an amount for their needs. In some cases, the child collects his pay but turns over everything to their parents and the parents decide whether to give the child a share or not.

There are instances wherein, despite the minimal pay that the working children receive, their take home pay is not always the full

amount that they expected to receive. Some children related that some employers do not give their full pay after work or after a month's work. One parent, for example, complained that her child was not given her salary as a domestic helper because she broke two drinking glasses. A child reported that there are times when his employer paid his salary partially until he forgot to pay the balance. One boy's salary was cut by Ph P15.00 because the lead man said he was very slow. A six-year-old boy who worked as a "duckboy" quit after two weeks. He said the ducks run after him. His employer brought him back to his parents and paid him Ph P15.00.

#### Physical, Psychological, and Moral Hazards of Work

While the children (including their families) benefit from the work that they do, they are also exposed to hazards. Some children were not aware of many of these. Some of these hazards were mentioned by the informants, their parents, and from actual observation made by members of the study team.

*The Physical Hazards of Work.* Most of the hazards of work reported were physical in nature. This is so because the effects of physical hazards were easily seen and felt.

A. The hazards of work according to the children were the following:

1. Being exposed to cold weather in the early morning and

evening and to extreme heat at midday. This was specifically reported by children who were working in the sugar industry.

2. Absence of comfortable sleeping place. Oftentimes the children have to sleep in makeshift tents. When they were too tired to assemble an improvised cot made of sack cloth, they had to sleep on the ground. There would be more problem if it rains. They would get wet and cold.
3. Risk of hurting oneself with the tools used. The bolo used for cutting cane is very sharp. Getting wounded could not be entirely avoided because one had to work fast to keep pace with other workers.
4. Risk of falling and getting sprained. Having to carry about 70 kilograms of cane to be loaded into a truck, one would get sprained easily.
5. Risk of slipping while loading sugarcane. The stalks are loaded by climbing up a straight wooden ramp placed diagonally from the ground to the truck. The worker goes through this with the heavy load on his back and has to do it half-running to gain a momentum.

#### B. Hazards of Work According to the Parents and other Informants

1. Exposure to being bitten by snakes and insects in the field. The plantation growth is thick with sugar cane and weeds. Snakes and harmful insects abound in these places.
2. Extreme fatigue. Children, as well as the other workers, could only take rest during lunchtime. Sometimes they had to carry the sugar cane to a truck parked at some distance.

3. Getting wounded by cane leaves and weeds.
4. Over-exposure to fertilizer. Necrotic hands may result from too much exposure to commercial fertilizer.
5. Exposure to dust and heat. A mother gave this report:

*“Adunay ka-usa ang akong anak nga babaye nagsandig sa punoan sa lubi. Abi namo ug nagpahulay lang. Nakuyapan man diay tungod sa kainit.”* [One time, we saw our daughter leaning on a coconut tree. We thought she was just resting. She actually fainted because of extreme heat.]

6. Exposure to the water and wet environment. The ducks always stay in the water, and so should the “*duckboys*.”
7. Lack of sleep. The *duckboys* have to wake up very early in the morning and sleep late in the evening.
8. Not getting paid on time. Some employers do not pay their workers’ wages on time, others do not give the amount that was agreed upon.

*“Naay uban ugma-ugmaon ang among sweldo. Sa una, gi-ing-ana mi ug nabayaran mi pagkahuman sa pila ka semana. Wala huna-hunaa nga katulo baya sa usa ka adlaw mi moka-on.”* [Some employers do not pay us on time. It happened to us before. We only got our pay after several weeks. They do not think that we have to eat three times a day.]

*Naay ka-usa nga ang among sabot Ph P70.00, pero pag binayara , Ph P50.00 ra. Wala na lang mi mag reklamo kay kapoy maka-away.”* [There was a time when we agreed that I would receive Ph P70.00, but I only got Ph P50.00. I did not complain anymore because I did not like to quarrel with anyone.]

9. No medical or other protection benefits in case of accident. Employers do not give medical benefits for accidents occurring while at work. An informant narrated the story of a 12-year old Manobo girl who, together with eight other children, was hired to download "patdans" from a cargo truck. She accidentally fell from the truck and her legs were overrun by the truck. She was brought to a hospital. The owner of the truck gave the family Ph P1,000.00. The amount was not enough to pay for the hospital bills but the owner would not give anymore. Until now they still have an unpaid hospital bill of Ph P7,000.00. The owner denied that he recruited the children. He said that he allowed the children, who were on their way to fetch water, to hitch a ride. The family did not bother to bring the case to court as they do not have money to do it.

#### C. Hazards of Work Based on Observation by the Research Team.

The observations were only made of children who were working in the sugar plantation and in the "itik" production. Most of the physical hazards reported by the children and the informants were confirmed during the observation. Some of the hazards noted during the observation but not mentioned by the children and the informants are the following:

1. Unsanitary working condition. The children had to defecate in the field. There is very little water to clean themselves with in the sugar plantation.
2. The children have no place to rest.
3. Unsuitable clothing and insufficient protective gears. The clothing that children wore were not sufficient to

protect them during work. Not one of the child workers, or any other workers, wore something to protect their faces.

4. Long exposure to the heat of the sun. The children were practically exposed to the heat of the sun for eight hours every day.
5. Isolation from other children and adults. The child stays alone with the ducks in the middle of the rice fields. He has no one to talk to for practically the whole day.

*Psychological and Moral Hazards of Work.* Psychological and moral hazards of work appear to have very profound effects on the Manobo child. These effects are usually not apparent to the child but can be deduced from the way they view the world around them. These hazards have affected the children's attitude towards work, their condition in life as well as their view of life as a whole. Most of these hazards are psychological and result from their subordinate relationship with adults.

The most common psychological hazards to which children are exposed to is verbal abuse. A child, for example, reported that when one complains that he is not feeling well, his opportunity for work gets affected. A child said:

*"Kon mosilong ka, kasab-an ka sa "kabo". Kung labad ang imong ulo, maulaw ka mosulti kay ingnon ka man nga: 'maayo pa wala ka motrabaho'. Mo-agwanta na lang kay mapotbol ka ug dili na makabalik sa trabaho. Para may permanente ka nga trabaho, dili na lang mosulti sa*

*problema. Talagsa ra ba ang magpatrabaho.*” [If you take cover under the shade, the supervisor will scold you. If you feel dizzy, you keep it to yourself because you will be told, ‘it would have been better if you have not reported for work’. You have to bear with it otherwise you will be terminated and will not be allowed to return to work. In order to have permanent work, you must not tell the employer your problem. Only few people need workers.]

Sometimes the employer would say:

*“Sakto mo ug sweldo unya magluya-luya mo. Sakto ra ba mo ug ka-on.* [You are paid well enough but you are sluggish. You are also given enough food.]

Or the supervisor would shout:

*“Linti. Hijo de puta ka.”* [Linti literally means thunder. “Hijo de puta ka” means you, son of a bitch.]

These psychological hazards are also moral hazards. The kind of treatment that the child receives might be viewed by him/her as normal. And he/she will likely use the same treatment in his/her dealings with others.

### Aspirations of Working Children

As earlier noted, most working children who were interviewed are not educated. Despite these, however, they still have time to entertain dreams and wishes. Also, most of their aspirations have something to do



with education indicating that they really value it. Realizing some of these dreams, they know, would be very remote. However, having these seem to keep the children going amidst conditions of extreme poverty and hard toil.

Some of their dreams include the following:

- \*to be able to finish studies;
- \*to pursue a course in computer science, electronics, painting;
- \*to save family from destitution;
- \*to be able to uplift family's present condition;
- \*to be able to find a wife and raise own family;
- \*to be able to educate children and prepare good future for them;
- \*to be able to join the military; and
- \*to be able to finish high school and find a job in the city.

Some children may have realized that they have very little chance of fulfilling their dreams. For example, one boy reported that he used to dream of becoming a lawyer. However, he said he has no intention of going back to school because no one will support him anyway.

### Knowledge About Legislated Rights of Children

While the Manobo parents and leaders appear to be very articulate about certain rights, specifically about ancestral domain, they have no knowledge about the legislated rights of children. This is also true of the children.

## Observers' Notes

Insights about the life of the working children were also gathered by observing them at work. The observations were done particularly while children participated in paid activities at the sugar plantation. They were observed while doing the harvesting (“*tapas*”), loading, preparing the “*patdans*,” and while doing “*dipol*” work.

Work Involving Children. Only the older male children, those about 17 to 18 years old, participated in the harvesting activity. They were chosen by the “*kabo*,” who determined whether the child was capable of doing the job. The child worked with a team of 10 or 12 members.

It was observed that preparation of the *patdan* were done mostly by female adolescents and children. For every 40 pieces of *patdan*, they received Ph P1.00 as payment. On the other hand, only adolescent males were seen participating in the loading activity. Children were also seen participating in the *dipol* work together with the other adults.

Work Environment. Dry-weather access roads traverse in the middle of the plantation. These roads are not cemented. Big trucks used to transport the harvested sugar cane and other vehicles ply through these roads at an approximate interval of 15 minutes. The noise caused by these passing trucks were observed to be moderate but it made the place more dusty. Sugarcane leaves and grasses in areas where harvesting was completed were burned which exacerbated the dusty and very warm

environment in the plantation area. There was practically no shade to cover the workers while they were working.

Work Conditions. The children, along with the other adult workers worked for eight hours. They started working from 7:00 in the morning until 4:00 in the afternoon. They took their lunch break from 11:00 to 12:00 noon. They were paid the same amount that the adult workers received. Children were hired as a team and were supervised by a *kabo*. Most of the children were part of the team of which their parents were also members.

Tools Used. The children used *ispading* for harvesting and preparing *patdans*. The size of the *ispading* they were using were of the same size used by the adults. It weighs about one kilo and is very sharp. They would regularly sharpen it to make cutting efficient and fast. Most of them sharpened their *ispading* during their lunch break.

Abuses Observed. The presence of the *kabo* made the children very careful with their work. The children were observed to be not threatened by his presence. There was no special consideration given to the children by the *kabo*. They were expected to finish the same output as were expected from the adults.

Protective Measures at Work. The children who were doing the harvesting wore shoes, a few were seen wearing boots, to protect their feet from sharp stalks and leaves. A number of children who were engaged in cutting *patdans*, however, were observed wearing slippers only.

Some were also seen wearing hats while others were using towel or old clothing to cover their head during work. Very few had gloves to protect their hands. Not all were seen using jackets or long sleeved shirts to protect their arms.

In general, the sets of clothing that the children wore for work were unsuitable and insufficient. Other protective gears were not available. For example, not one was seen using a mask, very few were using gloves, and very few were using boots. Their heads were also not properly protected.

Emergency, Personal Care and Rest. It was observed that there were no available first aid kits and medical professional within the vicinity or in the work area. Fortunately, no one was hurt while at work during the observation period. There was also no place to relieve themselves as there are no toilets. Drinking water was also not available. The workers were seen bringing their own supply of drinking water.

Children had their rest only during lunch break. Some took their lunch in their homes (those whose houses are nearby). Others took their lunch under the shade of big trees. There was no other comfortable place for eating. Water was not available so they ate their meals without having to wash their hands.

Lunchtime was also the only time that they were able to take cover under a shade. Some did not enjoy rest after eating because most were seen sharpening their *ispading* after having their lunch.

## Summary and Recommendations

This study focuses on child labor in an indigenous community in the province of Bukidnon: the Manobos. Its main objective is to examine the nature of labor force participation of Manobo children in the formal and/or informal sectors of the economy. Specifically it aims to:

- a) describe the various cases of child labor among the Manobos;
- b) understand how child labor is defined among the Manobos;
- c) determine the type of work and the work conditions that the children are in and the characteristics and circumstances of the child workers' families and community;
- d) describe the children's work environment, the problems that they encounter including the hazards posed by their specific work, their relationships with adults in the workplace; and,
- e) explore the children's and parents' level of knowledge regarding legislated rights of children.

The information was gathered using the data collection guidelines for rapid assessment developed by ILO and UNICEF in investigating child labor. The following steps were followed:

- a) Soliciting the assistance of local government officials and local leaders
- b) Collecting background information from available sources
- c) Interviewing key informants
- d) Identifying and mapping key locations of working children
- e) Conducting case studies of children
- f) Observing children at work
- g) Conducting Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) with informants and the working children

The site of the study was Quezon, Bukidnon. This site was chosen for the following reasons:

- a) the presence of indigenous people belonging to the Manobo tribe in the area;
- b) the presence of a large agricultural industry devoted to sugarcane plantation;
- c) children were seen to be working in the plantation and elsewhere; and
- e) a big proportion of the agricultural lands is devoted to wet farming in the area and other places nearby.

The tribal community studied was classified as the Southern Manobo, one of the eleven indigenous groups that people the Bukidnon uplands. The particular Manobo group for this study lives in Purok 7, Barangay Butong of the Municipality of Quezon. They live in an area

leased by the local government of Quezon. They are temporarily staying in this place while waiting for the result of their ancestral domain claim.

They live in shanties which are mostly made of nipa, bamboo and sacks. The shanties are built with low ceilings. Others are only covered with plastic canvass. The shanties are built near one another in the middle of the plantation.

Source of water for drinking and electricity are not available in the community. Drinking water is fetched from a source about one kilometer away.

Most children appear malnourished. The most common illnesses and causes of deaths among children are diarrhea, measles and malnutrition.

Tilling land used to be the main source of livelihood of the Manobos. At present, most of them work in the sugarcane plantation as farm hands, and in corn and wet-rice paddy as laborers. At certain times of the year, when work in the farms is not available, they are jobless. The families in the community are very poor.

Almost one-half of the Manobo population had only reached the elementary level of education.

These Manobos were driven away from their ancestral lands and are now trying to claim back these lands. Although they have been already issued their Certificate of Ancestral Domain Claim last June 5, 1997, they were prevented to return to their land by a Temporary Restraining Order

issued by the court. Four of their members had died because of this struggle. This predicament that they are in has made life very miserable for the Manobos and has greatly affected the life of their children. Thus, most of them, have to work in order to survive.

The Manobo children were found to be working in at least five work settings. They could be working as laborers in sugar, rice or corn plantations, as herders of ducks in duck raising industry, as domestic helpers and other related domestic activities.

The concept of child labor in the context of most lowland settlers is apparently non-existent among the Manobos. They do not see child labor as an issue. They consider a child who can work as responsible enough and believe that a child who works is capable of making decisions; therefore he/she is an adult.

The Manobos value and recognize the need for education. They want their children to be educated. However, many of their children have not been able to pursue higher education because of poverty. Some children see that their attending school is an additional burden to their parents. Thus, many of them had stopped schooling in order to work. Other children, however, did not like going back to school because of some unpleasant experiences such as being discriminated.

The Manobo also value the education ("*pangara*") that is supposedly given at home by parents. They hope that their children will learn and appreciate the Manobo culture including their beliefs, system of



government, health practices, and language. They also dream that someone will write a book about these.

The opportunity of a Manobo child to work in the sugarcane plantation, in wet-rice and corn plantation, as well as in the “*itik*” industry is high. In fact, in most cases, they do not need to apply because they are recruited to work as “*duckboys*.” To work in the sugarcane plantation, the child applies and in some cases their parents.

Most working Manobo children were the ones who made the decision to work and they do so because of poverty.

The length of time that the children spend working vary according to type of work. On the average, workers in the sugar cane plantation work for eight hours. Working time of children hired in the *itik* production is a little bit longer. Children working as domestic helpers have the longest number of working hours.

The child worker often receives less than what an adult receives. This is especially true when the pay is based on output. However, there are instances where children are paid the same amount that most adults also receive. In many cases, the parents are the ones who receive the child’s pay. Most of the children, however, reported that their parents sometimes give them an amount for their needs. Some children who collect their pay themselves turn over their salary to their parents and the parents decide whether to give the child a share or not.

The physical hazards of work mentioned by the informants and children and based on the observations made by the study team are:

- Being exposed to cold weather in the early morning and evening and to extreme heat at midday.
- Absence of comfortable sleeping place
- Risk of hurting oneself with the tools used
- Risk of falling and getting sprained
- Risk of slipping while loading sugar cane
- Exposure to being bitten by snakes and insects in the field
- Extreme fatigue
- Getting wounded by cane leaves and weeds
- Over-exposure to fertilizer
- Exposure to dust and heat
- Exposure to the water and wet environment
- Lack of sleep
- Not getting paid on time
- No medical or other protection benefits in case of accident
- Unsanitary working condition
- No place to rest
- Unsuitable clothing and insufficient protective gears
- Long exposure to the heat of the sun
- Isolation from other children and adults.

The most common psychological hazards to which the children have been exposed is verbal abuse.

The psychological hazards are also moral hazards. The kind of treatment that the child receives might be viewed by him/her as normal. And he/she will likely use the same treatment in his/her dealings with others.

Most of the aspirations of the children have something to do with education indicating that they really value this (e.g.: able to finish studies, pursue a course in computer science, etc.).

Manobo parents and children had no knowledge about the legislated rights of children.

The observation that the study team made reveal the following:

- Only older male children were seen doing the harvesting and the loading activity in the sugar cane plantation;
- Preparation of the *patdan* was done mostly by female adolescents and children;
- The place was very dusty and there was practically no shade to cover the workers while they were working;
- The children worked for eight hours, starting from 7:00 in the morning until 4:00 in the afternoon;
- The children used *ispading* for harvesting and cutting *patdans*. They regularly sharpened it to make cutting efficient and fast. Most of them spent their lunch break

- sharpening their *ispading* instead of taking their rest;
- There was no special consideration given to the children by the *kabo*. They were expected to finish the same output as were expected from the adults;
  - The set of clothing that the children wore for work were unsuitable and insufficient. Other protective gears were not available. No one was using a mask, very few were using gloves, and very few were wearing boots;
  - There were no first aid kits and medical professional within the vicinity or in the work area;
  - There was no place to relieve themselves as there are no toilets;
  - Drinking water was not available. The workers were seen bringing their own supply of drinking water. Water for clean-up (e.g., for washing hands) was not available; and,
  - Workers whose houses are far took their lunch under the shade of a tree. There was no other comfortable place for eating.

Recommendations:

1. The difficult situation of the Manobos is primarily due to the loss of their only source of livelihood: their lands. Since then, their everyday struggle included two things: to gain back

their lands and to live peacefully among themselves; and to meet the bare minimum for their survival. They have been in this predicament for many years now and they, including their children, had suffered enough. Unless a just decision is made in their favor in their quest to gain back their ancestral lands, they will continue to live in extreme hardship and their children will continue to abandon school in favor of work.

2. Many children of the Manobos seemed to have lost touch with their own culture. As one informant said, the Manobo elders wish to perpetuate their culture (way of life, beliefs and practices, medical practices, system of government, language, and so on) and that the young will be able to learn it. Yet, actual teaching is hardly realized.

Children can be encouraged to participate in the cultural life of their society by providing them opportunities to appreciate their own culture. The government and other concerned groups may provide some opportunities for these in school, for example, projects for specific classes like MAPE, Sibika and others. If lowland settlers are asked to do some of cooking favorite Filipino delicacies, the indigenous groups can be asked to cook their food specialty. Instead of asking them to do some needle work like cross stitching or crocheting,

perhaps they can be asked to do weaving or whatever is appropriate for their culture. These not only encourage the children to appreciate their material culture but also allow other groups to appreciate the indigenous peoples' culture.

Opportunities for learning can also be provided in the community. Special schools, as found in other tribal communities, can be opened where tribal elders get to teach the young generation about their tradition including their language. This may entail initial expenses but support might be available from concerned groups and government agencies. It should be designed to be self-sustaining.

3. Basic education is given free in all public elementary and secondary schools. Despite this, many Manobo children have not maximized such opportunity because of poverty. Often, work becomes their priority despite the fact that they all believe in the importance of education. Parents should be given income opportunities to take away from the children the burden of having to work to help support the family. The parents should also be enjoined to encourage their children to attend school. Those few who have finished their studies can serve as role models.

4. Entice the children who are out of school to return to school by creating a pleasant and friendly school environment. Teachers and other students must be taught to be supportive and accommodating to these children. Teachers must be alert for signs of discrimination by other students. Perpetrators should be reprimanded. Discrimination can be also avoided by encouraging activities which allow more interaction among students. Perhaps, these children will be allowed to lead some of these activities so that their other talents can be encouraged and supported (e.g., athletics).

A system of helping students who are having difficulties with their lessons should be developed. Teachers should be more accommodating and brighter students may be asked to assist the poorer ones. Any small improvement can be properly and regularly recognized. Students who give assistance should also be properly acknowledged.

If parents can't be gainfully employed on a regular basis, perhaps they will not worry so much about the opportunity cost of sending children to school. Some programs may be pursued for this purpose.

5. Working children had been exposed to various forms of hazards in their places of work. Most of these hazards put a toll on

the children's health. Some of these effects may not be very evident at the moment but continuous exposure will surely pose danger on the physical well-being of these children if no appropriate protection is extended. Constant health monitoring and support are very necessary. Perhaps a special clinic day can be arranged to enable them to avail of free health services in the area.

6. Most children have been victims of verbal abuses from their employers or supervisors. Educating these adults is in order. It may not be possible to have them attend special sessions for this purpose but other media of disseminating information (radio, TV, and print) can be utilized.

To ensure protection of children from all these hazards, proper laws can also be passed to assure that perpetrators are appropriately punished. Parents and children should also be informed of existing laws for the protection of children. These should also be disseminated to the public to deter perpetrators from committing the same abuses.

Another is to teach children, as well as the adults, the basic rights of children, as well as the basic responsibilities of adults or parents. In so doing, children will be able to know what to expect from their parents and society as a whole and



parents, on the other hand, will be informed that taking care of their children are their responsibility, and not the other way around.

7. Work in the farm is seasonal. Providing parents with alternative sources of income during off-season will greatly help. Skills training can be given but providing just any skills training is not enough. The training should be culturally sensitive and appropriate, one that the parents really like to learn and do. Also, the potential to generate income from these new learned skills must be ascertained. Their interest to pursue a new undertaking must be supported and proper guidance should be extended. One strategy can be to allow them to undertake the activity as a group to avoid competition among themselves. In this way, they are able to support each other and at the same time reinforce the value of cooperation among themselves. When this becomes institutionalized, they can be encourage to explore the possibility of forming a cooperative, giving them a part in the conceptualization of said activity. Once this is realized, they can be encouraged to sustain it.

8. The children's health needs attention. As observed, most children are malnourished. Most of them also suffer from diarrhea and measles, diseases which can be easily prevented. A special mothers' class can also be given to them. Mothers must be taught about nutrition, how to value proper sanitation and to be alert about common signs and symptoms of common illnesses so that they will know when to seek medical help. Some of them can be encouraged to become volunteer health workers. Other women in the community may be more open to relate their health problems and concerns to someone who is from their own group. This volunteer worker can assist them to avail of the health services being offered in the health center.
  
9. The women can be encouraged to go into earning endeavors which do not require them to leave home. This arrangement will allow them to earn and at the same time have time for their children. The problem of not being able to teach their children about their tradition can be partially solved.

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## APPENDIX A

### Case Studies

Eight cases of child workers were studied. They are presented here using pseudonyms in order to protect their real identity.

#### Case No. 1

Dakino A is seventeen years of age. He is an out-of-school youth. He has finished only grade three. He volunteered to stop going to school because his family could not afford to buy his school needs and other fees (contribution for school projects, cost of uniform). Although public education is free, there are some incidental expenses involved every now and then. Added to this of course is the opportunity cost of being in school instead of working for wage.

Dakino has been working since age 12 as a laborer in the sugarcane plantation as laborer. He would get paid for activities like weeding, harvesting, and carrying loads. On the average, he would receive Ph P300.00 per week and the money is spent for food for the family.

He laments, however, that work is irregular depending on the availability of work in the plantation. As is the nature of sugar industry, there would be sudden burst of work, followed by a dead season.

Now, he still gets to work in the plantation. This time, aside from the work that he used to do, he can also plow the field and apply fertilizer. His usual clothes during work includes a jacket, a hat, long pants and something to protect his face (a towel, or an old shirt). Rest,

which means being able to take cover under a shade, is only enjoyed during lunch time. All day long, he has to stay under the heat of the sun or under the rain. He further reported that even when the heat of the sun becomes unbearable for most people, he has to continue working because he is afraid of being reprimanded by the “kabo” (the work supervisor in the plantation hired by the land owner). If he is sick and feels ill, he does not tell the “kabo” because he is afraid the “kabo” will not be able to understand him. To be assured of getting rehired every time there is work in the plantation, one must show that he is healthy and always ready to work. Besides, there are few employers in the area and one does not want to lose the opportunity. Dakino said:

*“Kon mosilong ka, kasab-an ka sa “kabo”. Kung labad ang imong ulo, maulaw ka mosulti kay ingnon ka man nga: ‘maayo pa wala ka motrabaho’. Mo-agwanta na lang kay mapotbol ka ug dili na makabalik sa trabaho. Para may permanente ka nga trabaho, dili na lang mosulti sa problema. Talagsa ra ba ang magpatrabaho.”* [If you take cover under a shade during working hours, the supervisor will scold you. If you feel dizzy, you keep it to yourself because you will be told, ‘it would have been better if you have not reported for work’. You have to bear with it otherwise you will be terminated and will not be allowed to return to work.

In order to have permanent work, you must not tell the employer your problem. There are few people who will ask you to work..]

He has experienced pay deductions of Ph P15.00 at the end of the day because according to the “kabo” he was very slow.

He gives all his wages to his parents, which is all spent for the daily subsistence of the family. He said he feels he has to help his parents

because they are the ones who supported and raised him.

Dakino also reported that his employer has several parcels of land devoted to sugar cane located in other parts of the municipalities of Valencia and Quezon. Sometimes, together with four other boys, they would be asked to work as laborers in these places. In such cases, they would build a makeshift tent in the middle of the field and sleep in a “*tarima*” (improvised cot made of sack cloth). When this is not possible because of lack of materials, for example, they would sleep on the ground. Sleep would be difficult because usually the ground is hot and moist.

Since there is no available toilet, they would defecate right in the plantation and take a bath in a creek.

Dakino is now complaining of intermittent back pains. The sugar cane load seems to become heavier. He is able to rest only on Sundays. He feels relieved but knows the next day will be another hard day.

His main wish in life is to be able to help his parents.

#### Case No. 2

Cobi is fourteen years old. He finished grade three. He said that he had to stop studying because his parents are poor and could not afford to buy his school needs and pay the school fees. His father is jobless and a “drunkard.” His mother occasionally works as farm laborer doing jobs like weeding and planting. He has four other siblings, one boy and three girls. He is the fourth child. His elder brother works as laborer in a sugar cane plantation. The rest are all married now.

Currently, Cobi works as a *duckboy* watching a flock of about 500 ducks. His place of work is in another barangay of another municipality. This means he has to stay away from home and only visit the family every three months.

He wakes up at 4:00 o'clock in the morning. Then he wakes the ducks and goads them out of the duck shed. By the time the flock reaches the ricefield, it is daybreak and the ducks begin to feed on snails and other insects.

He eats his breakfast and lunch in the field. Another farmhand brings him food. Oftentimes, food comes later than breakfast time or lunch time.

Cobi reported that it is not easy to be a *duckboy*. He cannot rest. Sometimes, he eats while walking. He said: "You cannot stop the ducks. And they move fast. They are very wise. If they see that your eyes are not on them, they would go elsewhere." He describes ducks as "*badlongon nga mananap*" (stubborn animals). He added: "You have to be very careful that the ducks do not feed on the plants. If this happens, the plant owner will charge you for damages. This means another deduction from your salary."

The ducks lay eggs. The owner has his own estimate of the number of eggs that the flock assigned to you will produce at certain periods. If the number of eggs falls short of the owner's estimate, he gets scolded.

When it rains, Cobi is in trouble. During this time the ducks would all scamper in different directions to swim in deep water. Because he could not leave the flock, he has to endure getting wet and the cold.



He reported that he had experienced getting very, very tired. He fell asleep on the “*pilapil*” (about a foot-high contour strip of earth that divides one paddy field from the next, used by farmers as trail when they move from one field to the other).

He said that once he got very sick. He had high fever. His employer gave him medicine which was deducted from his salary. Cobi also recalled the time when a wound in his foot had swollen. It made walking difficult for him. It became more painful when wet. He applied on it alcohol and hot kerosene. Then his *amo* bought for him a pair of boots, again deductible from his salary.

If the pain is not really that much, he does not tell his “*amo*” (employer) lest he suspects that Cobi is just inventing stories so the *duckboy* can rest. Cobi gets scolded when he says he is sick. Once when he was not feeling well, his *amo* said to him:

“*Sakto mo ug sweldo unya magluya-luya mo. Sakto ra ba mo ug ka-on.*” [Your salary is exact but why are you very slow. You are also given enough food.]

Cobi has served three employers already. He said they were the same: apathetic and cruel. All of them, at one time or another, had humiliated him. For example, there was a time when a duck was limping, his *amo* shouted at him:

“*Linti. Hijo de puta ka.*” [Linti literally means thunder. “*Hijo de puta*” ka means you, son of a bitch.]

Cobi works about 13 hours a day, seven days a week. For this, he receives Ph P600.00 (about US \$12 at Ph P51 to the dollar) per month, if there are no deductions. He gives most of his money to his parents and keeps a little for himself. But sometimes, the amount given him by his *amo* is not full. Then the *amo* would forget to pay the balance.

Cobi appears to be very bright and witty. He talks fast. He narrated that when he was still in school his grades were in the range of 80 to 93. He used to dream of becoming a lawyer. However, he has no intention of going back to school. According to him, there is no one who will support him anyway.

He uses an umbrella or hat for protection from the rain and the heat of the sun.

### Case No. 3

Tarita is a fourteen year old girl. She is currently a first year high school student. She was born to a Manobo mother and an Ilonggo father. Her father works as a farmer in a different town and comes home to visit the family only once in a while. She is one of six children-- three of whom are girls. She is the fourth child. Her two elder siblings are already married and the rest are still studying.

She started to work as domestic helper only last year when she was still in Grade 6. She is a working student. Her work includes the basic domestic chores. She wakes up at 5:00 in the morning. She cooks the family breakfast, cleans the house and fetches at least two pails of water. She has to do these things before she goes to school at 7:00 a.m. After

school, at 3:00 p.m., she starts doing household chores again. She cleans pots and pans, plates and other utensils, and cooks food for dinner. She stops at about 7:00 in the evening. She spends the next hour studying her lessons after which she goes to sleep.

She does not receive a salary. Her employer pays her school fees. Because she is enrolled in a public school, her employer only pays Ph P195.00 (about US \$4) for her tuition and matriculation. Her employer gives her Ph P2.00 pesos daily for her snacks. Once a month, her employer buys her a t-shirt and a pair of short pants.

She claimed that nobody influenced her to look for work and that she made the decision herself. According to her, she only wanted to experience how it is like to live with another family. She found out that there is a difference between living in one own's home and in someone else's home. While you are free to do what you want to do in your own home, the same is not true in the other. She reported that she has experienced being scolded by her employer for watching TV during working time. She said that it was all right for her to be scolded because the employer is the one supporting her. If she wants to watch tv shows, she has to wait until all her household chores are through.

Her main wish in life is to be able to finish her studies. She wants to pursue a course in computer science.

#### Case No. 4

Both parents of Celia are Manobo. He finished only three years of elementary schooling and is now fourteen years of age. They are five

children in the family. His parents oversee a sugarcane plantation owned by one of the sugarcane planters in the area.

He started working when he was only nine years old. His first work was in the sugar plantation where he did jobs like weeding and cutting sugar cane seedlings. According to him, children receive less pay than adults. Thus, if the adults are paid Ph P50.00 for a day's work, children are paid Ph P40.00. He said work in the plantation is very tiresome. He said he was forced to bear it because he saw the sufferings of his parents and other siblings. He said:

*Malooy ko sa akong ginikanan. Kinahanglan gyod ko nga motrabaho."*

[I pity my parents. I really have to work.]

He receives his pay every Saturday. He is paid Ph P70.00 per day. A week's pay is equivalent to Ph P420.00. He gives all of his pay to his parents. It is up to them to share with him some amount. Sometimes, if there is extra money, his mother saves it so that they have something to use in times when work in the plantation is not available.

Aside from work in the plantation, he also experienced working as a "duckboy" and househelper. In 1999, he went to Valencia, one of the nearby municipalities, to work as a "duckboy." He was paid Ph P600.00 per month. He only stayed on that job for three months because it was very tiring. He then worked as a househelper in the same place and received Ph P600.00 per month. At that time his parents would come to Valencia every month to collect his salary. His parents gave him Ph P200.00 to buy some clothes and other things that he needed.

He said he stopped going to school because his teacher slapped him. He had a fight with one of his classmates who bullied him. That incident discouraged him from pursuing his studies.

His ambition in life is simple. He said that he wanted to save his family from extreme poverty.

#### Case No. 5

Pipo is seventeen years of age. He looks older than his age though. He has five brothers and one sister. He is the second child and has never been to school. He cannot read at all but knows how to write his first name. He said that as far as he can remember he has always been helping his father in the farm. His parents have also very little education. His father finished only grade three and his mother, grade two.

He started to work for a fee at the age of twelve. He was paid only Ph P30.00 per day for doing some weeding in the sugarcane plantation.

At the age of sixteen, he began receiving at least Ph P70.00 per day of work for doing other work in the plantation like harvesting and hauling.

He starts to work from 6:00 a.m and ends at 4:00 in the afternoon. He usually eats his breakfast at eight in the morning and lunch at twelve.

He wears a hat to protect himself from the heat of the sun. Below his hat, he also covers his head with an old cloth. He wears a jacket to protect his arms from the sharp edge of the cane leaves.

Pipo's work requires that he moves from one area to another. On the average, he moves at least once in every two months which partly explains why Pipo was not able to obtain any form of formal education.

Another is the fact that there is no available school in the area where he grew up. He said that if given the chance to go to school, he will still not do it. He feels he is too old to start now and he is ashamed. He is already resigned to just go ahead and continue as a farm worker.

Many times, Pipo also experienced getting sick while at work. He had experienced fever, stomachache, headache, and diarrhea. There had been no available help from the employer in this regard. His parents would make do with traditional herbal medicines.

When the area of work is far from their house, Pipo sleeps with nine other workers in the field. They build a makeshift tent and sleep in improvised cots made of sack cloth. Sometimes, when cots are not available, they simply sleep on the ground.

He said that even if it rains he has to continue working because, if he stops, he will not get his full day's pay. He collects his pay every week. The owner deducts from his pay the cash advances that he had made and the cost of the goods he and his parents had taken on credit from the store. Sometimes his net pay for a week's work is only Ph P300.00. He keeps the Ph P100.00 and the rest he turns over to his mother for their food. He said he pities his mother so much:

*“Dili ko mahimutang kung dili ko mohatag nila. Malooy ko sa akong inahan.”*

[I am not at ease if I cannot give. I pity my mother.]

His wish is to be able to help uplift their present condition in life. He also wishes that someday he will be able to find a wife and raise his own family.

## Case No. 6

Luning was born to Tala-andig parents. She is seventeen years old, married, and mother to a three-month old daughter. She is the third child of seven children, only four of whom are still alive. She became an orphan at the age of six at the time when her youngest sister was only a baby. She and her three other siblings lived with their 50-year old widowed grandmother.

Luning started attending school when she was eighth years old. She stopped after finishing only one year of primary education because her grandmother did not have money to spend for school (“*walay ikagasto*”).

She started to work for pay at age nine. Together with her grandmother and elder brother, she would remove weeds from the coffee farm of her grandmother’s elder brother. To get to the farm, they had to walk for about an hour. They would start working at 7 a.m. They would take their lunch, consisting mostly of broiled root crops (“*sinugbang lutya*”) at 1 p.m. after which they would take a short break. They would begin again at 2:00 pm. At about 5:00 p.m., they would walk back for another hour to her grandmother’s house.

Luning said that nine years old is rather late to work for pay. According to her, other children would start much earlier, usually at age 7, or as soon as they are able to do a particular job. She reported that, like her, most of these children worked in farms and did the weeding.

In order to make both ends meet, Luning would help her grandmother collect leftover corn cobs from cornfields after harvest (the owner would usually allow them to have everything that they are able to

collect because there was really not much leftover). From these, they would shell out the corn grits from the cobs. They would sell part of the shelled corn for Ph P30.00 per can. Sometimes, they would take the shelled corn back home. They would have these milled and then used for their consumption. This was so because she said that when you buy the price is high but when you sell, the price is low. They would give the corn bran to the miller as payment. Most of the time, however, they prefer to sell the shelled corn because the harvest area is usually far and it would save them from carrying the heavy load.

When Luning was 13 years old, she worked as a domestic helper for a Cebuano couple in Sumpung, Malaybalay. Her friend who also worked as domestic helper in the same place invited her. She asked permission from her grandmother and was told to make her own decision. Although her grandmother was a little bit apprehensive that she would not be able to bear the hardships of being a helper, she later allowed her to work since they did not have enough food at home.

As a helper, she woke up at 4 a.m. She cleaned the house and its surroundings. She watered plants (especially orchids), cleaned her employer's car, cooked rice for breakfast and washed the dishes. The family viand was prepared by her female employer because she did not know how. She took her meals after her employer and their children had theirs. She ate the same food as her employer.

While her employers were at work, she looked after the children and did the laundry. After doing the dishes after lunch, she would take a short rest. She said she did not take her nap because she was ashamed to do it.



In the early afternoon, she would do the ironing of clothes. She said that she had plenty of clothes to iron because according to her her employers wore several sets of clothes and they changed clothes daily.

She would start cooking rice for supper in the late afternoon. When all the dishes were cleaned, her employer would allow her to watch the television and after which, she would sleep. For two months, she did the same routine. She received Ph P500.00 per month. After the second month, she decided to go home because she found the job too tiring. She went back to help her grandmother in her work and used her salary to buy rice, salt and some needs of the house.

In 1998, she came to Barangay Butong (area of the study) to join her elder sister who married a Tala-andig (another indigenous tribe in Bukidnon) the previous year. She joined other workers who worked in the sugar plantation. She did some weeding in the plantation. Like the other workers, she worked from 7:00 am to 4:00 pm. Her only rest period was during lunch time. She reported that several times she had experienced missing her lunch ("*labina kung wa gyoy ika tak-ang*" - especially when we have really nothing to cook) or going to sleep without taking supper. We just had to bear it ("*agwantahon na lang*").

For her work, she would receive Ph P50.00 per day, the same amount that other workers would get. Because she was paid on a weekly basis, she had to borrow money from a neighbor to buy food for her subsistence for the week (It was not possible for her to borrow money from her employer). She used the money to buy rice. There was practically not

enough money to buy other things for herself, such as clothing, because the cost of rice alone was already high.

In 1999, when she was only 15 years old, she married her brother-in-law's younger brother. Together they worked in the plantation. She stopped working in the fields only when she got pregnant. She also reported that other women continued to work in the plantation even when they were on their 9<sup>th</sup> month of pregnancy. She said that one woman who did that gave birth to a harelip.

She dreams of a good future ("*maayong kaugma-on*") for her child and forthcoming children. She wants her children to be able to go to school.

#### Case No. 7

Elson is an 11-year old "*duckboy*." He has never finished grade 1 despite several attempts of going to the elementary school. His schooling has always been interrupted by opportunities for work (including occasional work at the sugarcane plantation). He is the fourth of seven children. He has four brothers, two of whom are already married. His other brother (aged 14) is also working as a "*duckboy*" in another remote barangay. One of his two sisters works as a domestic helper in a Muslim family in one of the barangays of Quezon.

None of Elson's three younger siblings are attending elementary school. His parents have no permanent jobs. His father works in the sugarcane plantation during harvest season. During off-harvest season,

his father occasionally works in rice plantations filtering rice hulls. His mother sometimes joins his father in his work.

Elson now lives with his employer. He normally wakes up at 5:00 in the morning. He cooks rice and prepares coffee for his employer. At 7:00 a.m., he guides 300 to 400 ducks to newly harvested ricefields. Aside from watching the ducks and taking care that the ducks do not destroy other crops, he also gathers the eggs that the ducks lay (about 80 eggs daily).

His employer reminds him always that he has to pay for any duck that is lost. This is very difficult for him because he could hardly count. He said that this makes him afraid of his employer. The owner counts the ducks twice daily - in the morning at 7:00 and in the afternoon at 4:00.

In addition, Elson also helps do some chores at his employer's house. In the evening, he cooks dinner and cleans the table after. Sometimes, his female employer also requests him to wash the dishes. It is only after these chores are done that Elson is allowed to watch television, listen to music or play with other kids.

His starting salary as a "duckboy" was Ph P500.00 per month. After one year, he was given a salary increase. He now receives Ph P700.00 per month. His money goes to his parents. His mother collects his salary every month. Most of the time, his mother comes to collect it before the salary date. Occasionally, his mother would give him an amount especially when he needs a new t-shirt or a pair of slippers.

Elson reported that he is in the middle of the ricefields practically the whole day and is exposed to the heat of the sun. He could barely find

shade for cover. He eats his lunch in the middle of the ricefield while watching the ducks. Elson said that with the nature of his work, he could hardly find a playmate. Even then, he does not have the time to play. Sometimes, he also associates with the other “duckboys” but this is very limited because they have to attend to their flocks.

He worries about the ducks getting lost or joining another flock. He also worries about his employer getting mad at him.

Elson does not like to be a “duckboy” forever although he said that he is afraid of losing his job at the moment. He wants to go to school and he dreams of becoming a military man someday.

#### Case No. 8

Abet is a 17 year old orphan of Manobo parents. His father, a sugarcane harvester, died when Abet was only eleven years old. His mother, an occasional farmhand, also died the year following his father’s death. He has to live with his uncle. He has two elder brothers and a younger sister. They are all living with their individual employers.

Abet has reached Grade 5. In fact, he almost completed Grade 6. He quit school because he had to join the work force of sugarcane harvesters (*tapaseros*). Sugarcane harvesting is a seasonal work, so when the opportunity is there, he has to grab it.

Abet started working in the preparation of “*patdan*” during the harvest season. He described his work as simple: “*I cut the top portion of the sugarcane, and collect the tips in a pile.*” He said he would earn

75 centavos for one pile of “*patdan*” consisting of 40 pieces. At the end of the day, he would be able to earn as much as Ph P30.00.

As he grew older, he began to experience other types of work including:

- 1) *depol* (cutting the sugarcane to the level of the topsoil)
- 2) *tapas* (sugarcane harvesting)
- 3) *karga* ( manual hauling of sugarcane up the truck)
- 4) *guna* (cleaning rice and cane fields by removing the weeds)
- 5) attending to ducks

Abet’s work is seasonal, just like any work of a sugarcane plantation laborer. *Tapas, guna, karga* and all the others are done by season in a year.

When he has work during *tapas* season, he would wake up early to ensure that he would get hired for eight hours, and get paid for it. At times, he had to do overtime work until late at night so that he would be able to earn a little more money.

Work in the plantation allows very little time for rest. Abet complained of having body pains. But he appears to be healthy as he is jolly and signs and symptoms of sickness, if any, are not apparent. He regularly eats rice and dried fish. Sometimes, he cooks vegetable soup and eat this with rice. He smokes often and can finish about 10 to 15 sticks of cigarette per day. He also drinks alcoholic drinks regularly with his friends.

Abet's work environment varies. As a *tapasero*, he works in the sugarcane field. While working in the field, there is no shade to protect himself from the heat of the sun. Sometimes sugarcane leaves in the neighboring areas are being burned. This adds to the heat that *tapaseros* experience. The smoke of burnt leaves that envelope the entire scenery also prove harmful to health. Most of the sugarcane fields are along uncemented highways where dust produced by passing trucks cloud over the areas.

Harassment in the field according to Abet are usually comes in the form of verbal threats. For instance, Abet recalls that his *kabo* threatened not to give his salary if he would not do overtime. In addition, the *kabo* also threatened to blacklist him in case he would be disobedient. In his long working experiences, Abet heard verbal harassment like: "*linti*," "*yawa*" and "*bilat sa imong ina*." All these words are in the vernacular and are derogatory.

According to Abet, some sugarcane owners provide their workers (including himself) with gloves to protect their hands. However, some workers feel uncomfortable with it.

Hauling for Abet is very hazardous but exciting. He reported that he already slipped on the wooden ramp when he was still 16 years old. An additional hazard involves the use of "*ispading*." It is sharp and can cut any part of the body if one is not careful. Abet has wounded his left hand with an "*ispading*."

Abet gets his salary himself. He believes that he is on his own now though he resides in his uncle's house. Sometimes, he shares his

income with his uncle. He cooks and eats by himself and buys his own needs like t-shirts, jacket, etc. A portion of his earnings is spent on cigarette and alcohol. Often, his take-home pay at the end of the week is not full because the amount of goods he gets from a store on credit has to be deducted from it. He does not save money.

Abet fears what will happen to him in the future. He understands that his work in the sugarcane plantation is not everything. He looks forward to the time when members of QUEMTRAS would be finally given their ancestral land. For Abet, once this is reverted to them, life will be better as they would be given lots where they can plant and build their houses.

Abet wants to finish Grade 6 and pursue high school. He believes that someday he can finish high school through scholarship. He dreams of finding a job in the city where work is not as difficult as in the sugarcane fields.

He is worried about the outcome of their ancestral domain claim. He does not want to see killings and murder anymore. What will make him happy is to see the day when the Manobos will finally be given the land that according to him rightfully belongs to them.



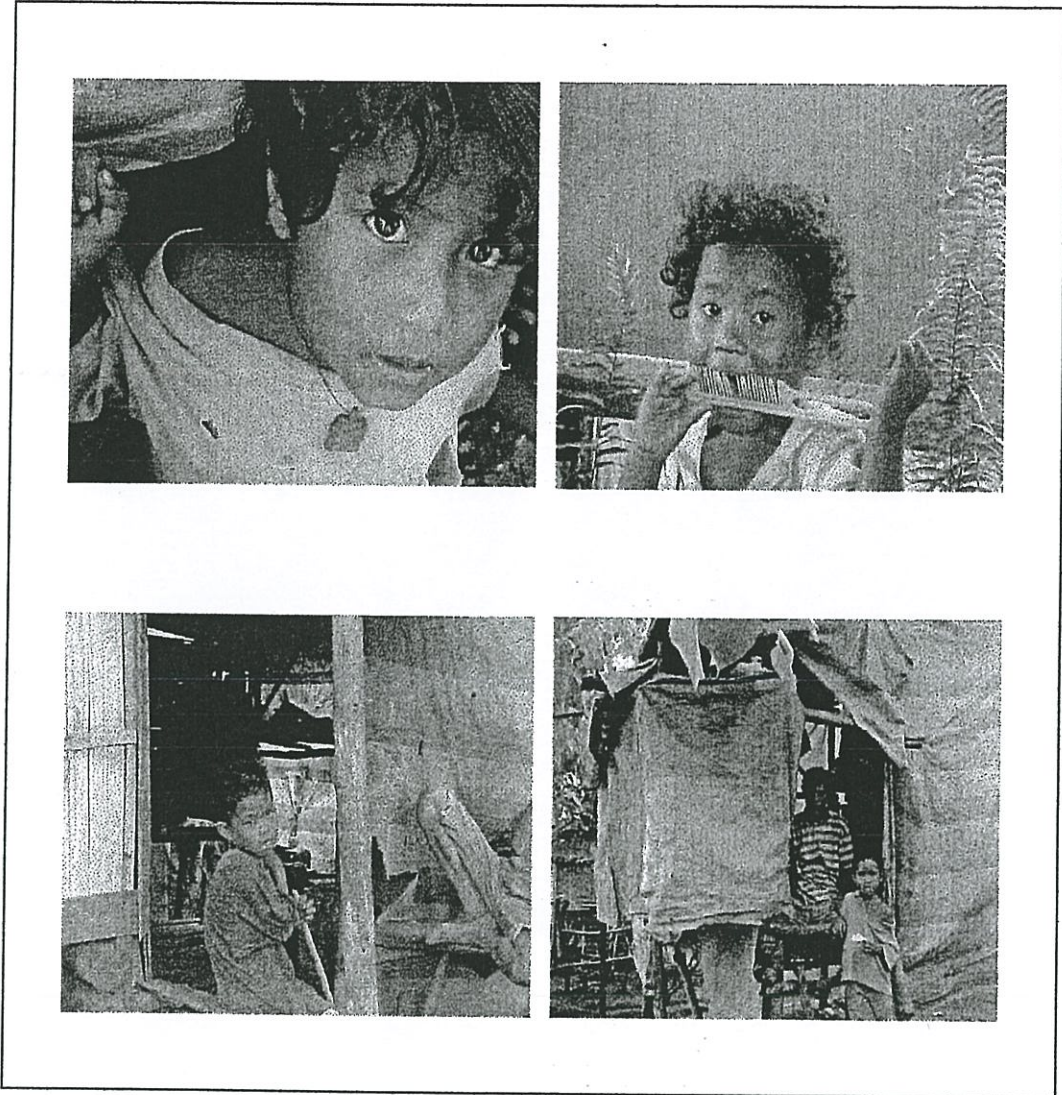


## APPENDIX B

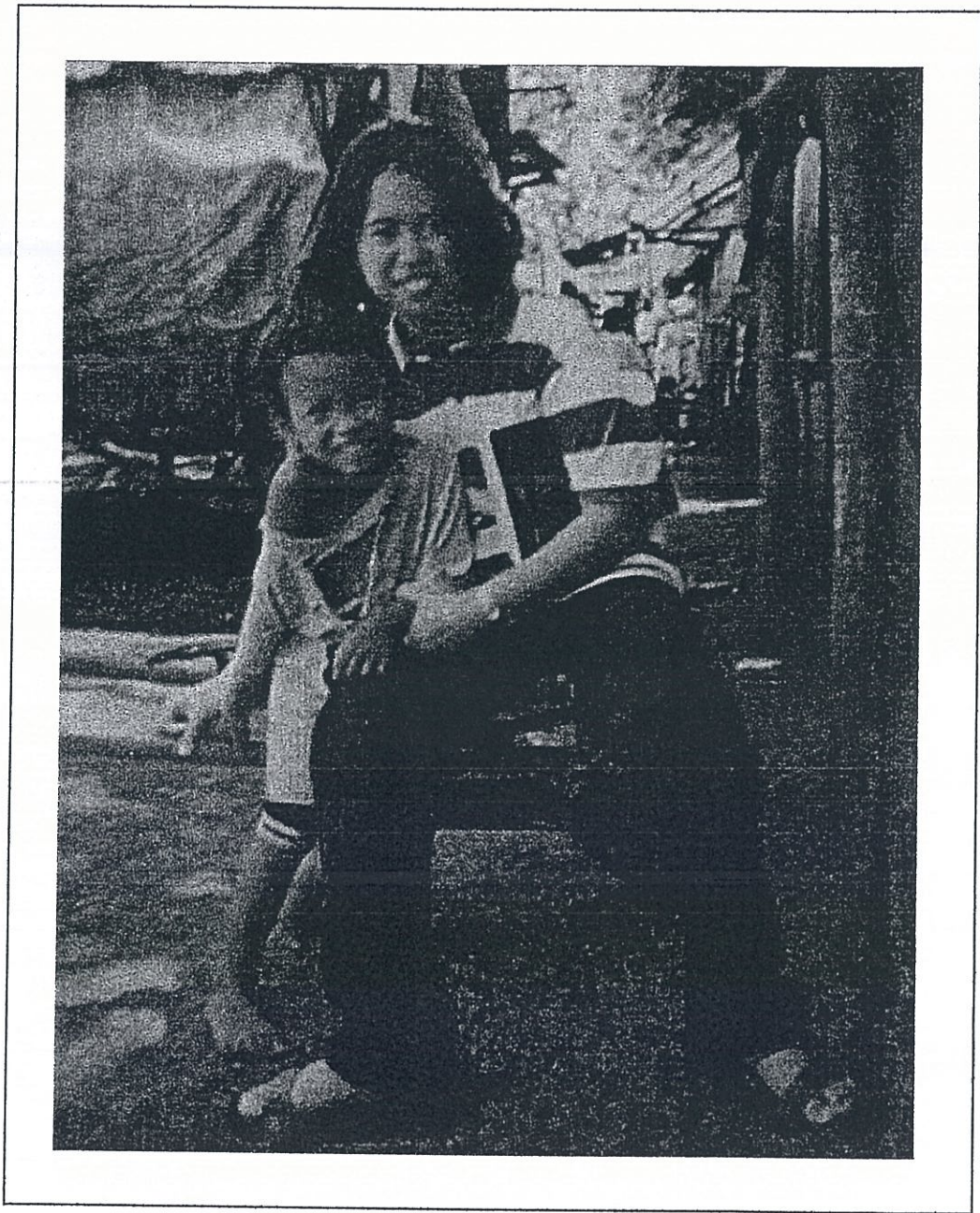
### PHOTO DOCUMENTATION

*Photographs taken by: Edvilla R. Talaroc, Gerald E. Potutan, Quivido T. Origenes,  
Evy R. Elago, Melvin A. Jabar and Alexander B. Dagalea*

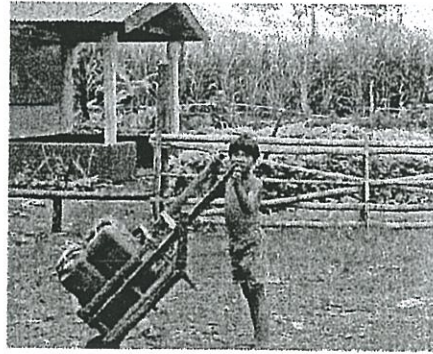
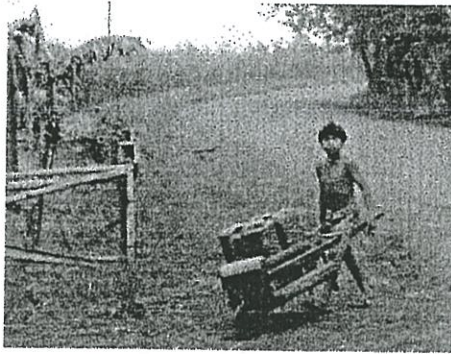




Faces of typical young Manobo children in the study area



A 6-year old duckboy with one of the members of  
the research team



Fetching water for a fee for some households



Flock of ducks and temporary sheds (built in the middle of the rice field) where the "duckboy" and his flock stay when he brings the flock to far-off fields



Working children doing the “patdan” activity

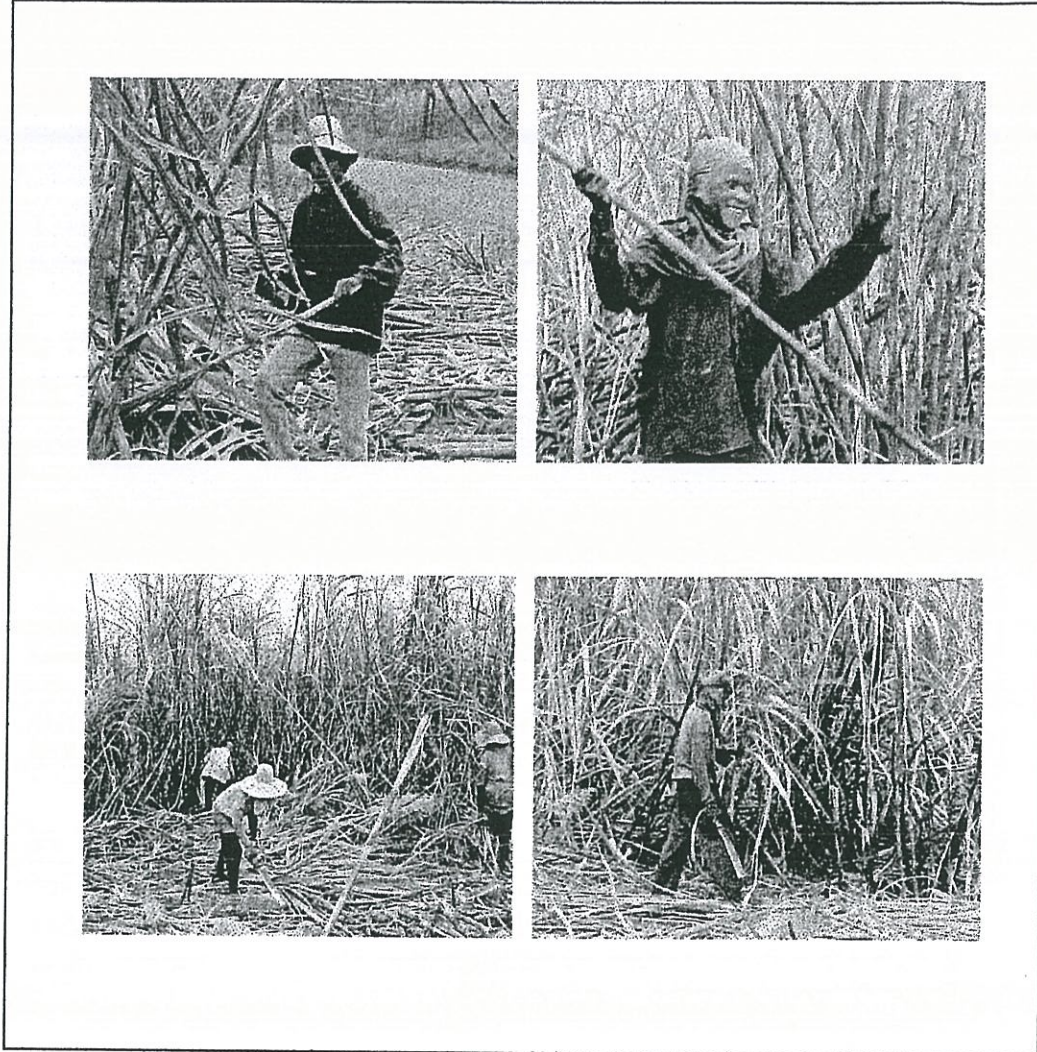


Working children and adults doing “patdan” work

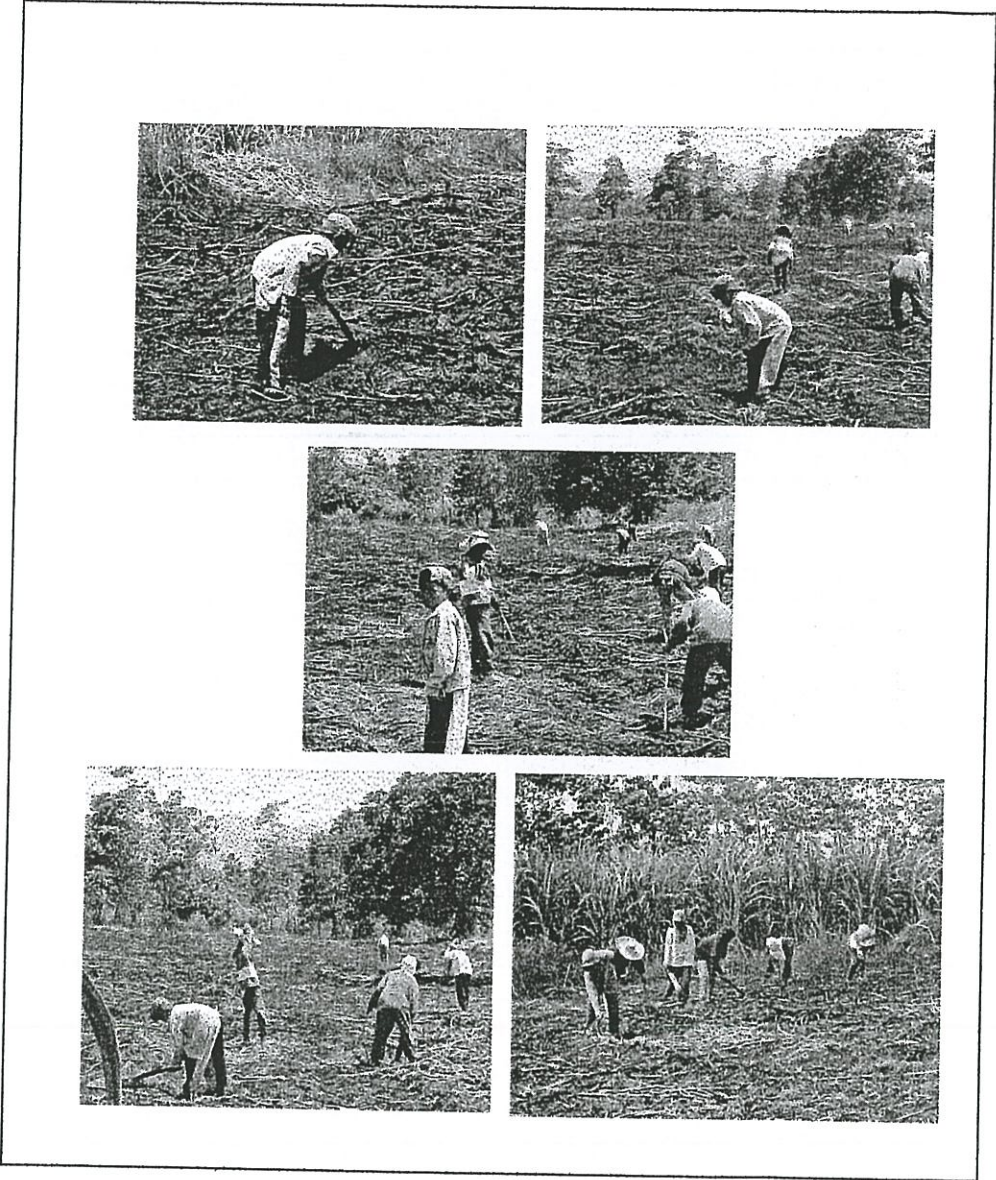




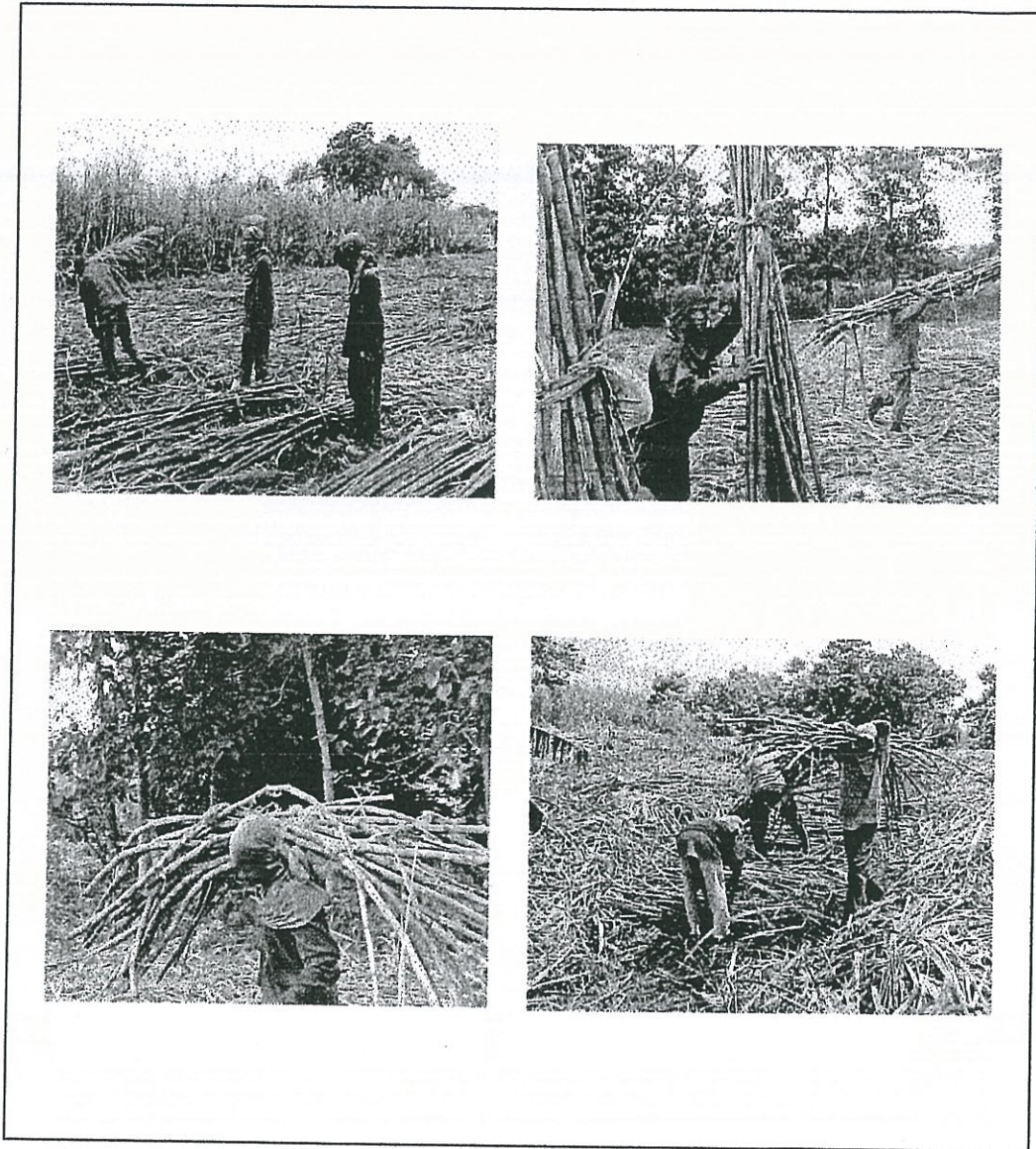
Sugarcane harvesters at work



Sugarcane harvesters at work



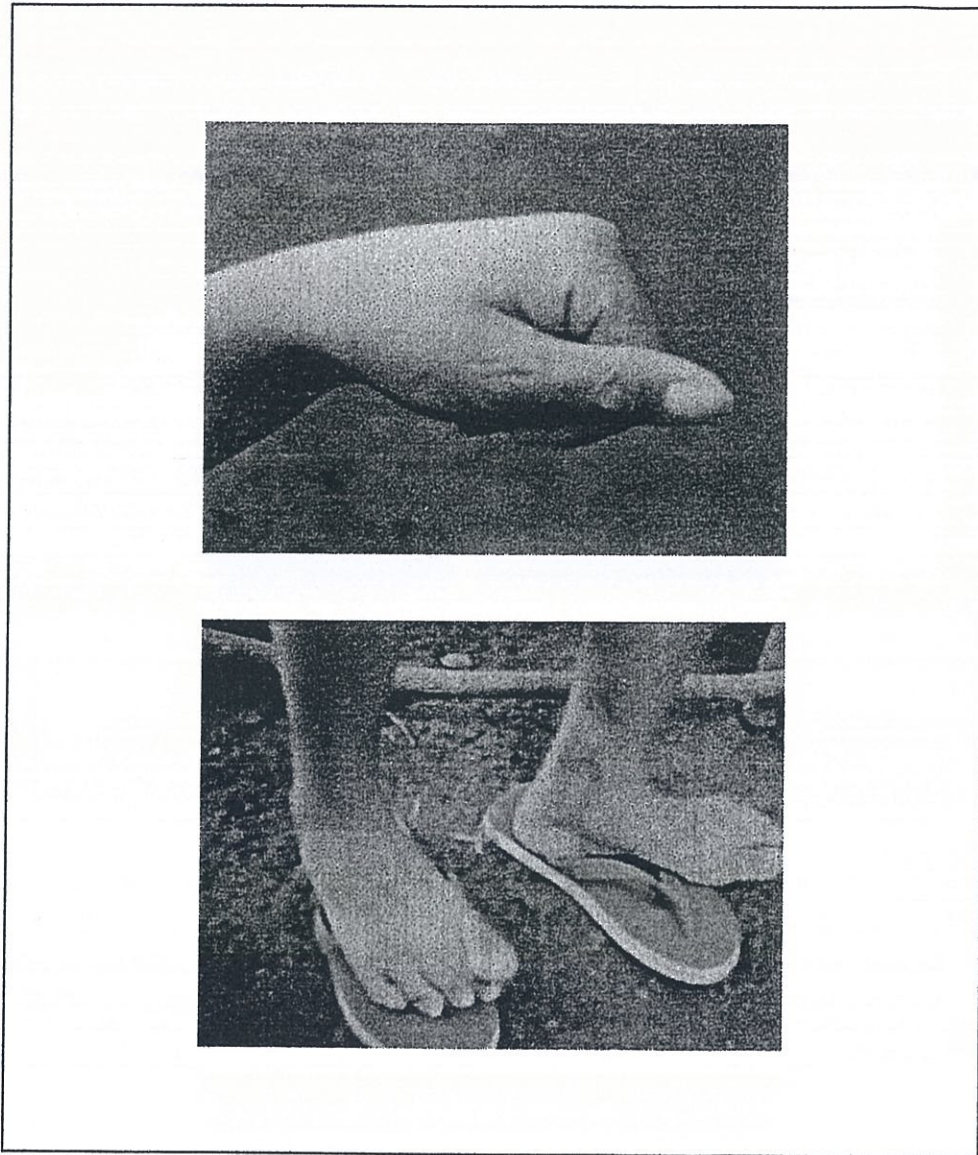
Workers including children doing "dipol" work



Sugarcane harvesters preparing sugarcane stalks for loading



Loading of sugarcane



Scars from accidents experienced by 2 Manobo children