

# Rural Child Labour in Andean Countries: problems and solutions



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# Introduction

Most working children in the world are found on farms and plantations, not in factories, sweatshops or urban areas. If we want to eliminate the worst forms of child labour, greater effort needs to be made to address child labour in agriculture. (International Programme on the Elimination of Child Labour - IPEC)

According to the latest global report *The End of Child Labour: Within Reach*, the ILO estimates that 218 million children work world wide, of which 126 million in hazardous working conditions [ILO 2006a]. Of all child labourers the vast majority work in rural areas; SIMPOC/ILO estimates that 69% percent of all working children work in agriculture, 9% in industrial sectors and 22% in services [idem]. In Latin-America 5.7 million children are involved in child labour. Also here the majority, as much as 70%, work in rural areas.<sup>1</sup> Rural child labour in many Latin-American countries has been the subject of research and policy measures, except for in the Andean region. The Andean region, which is one of the poorest regions of Latin-America, is therefore of exceptional interest; Bolivia and Peru specifically.

According to the results of the National Enquiry on Living Standards and Poverty, in 2001 more than one quarter of Peruvian children below the age of 18, or almost 2 million children, were involved in economic activities, mostly in rural labour [INEI & OIT 2002:33]. Of all working children in the age category 6-17, 1.4 million children are stated to work in the countryside [idem:26]. Also in the Bolivian context the vast majority of child labourers can be found in the countryside. A 2006 study by the US Department of Labour concluded that in the age category 7-14, the majority of working children were found in the agricultural sector (76.3%), followed by services (18.8%), manufacturing (4.2%), and other sectors (0.7%) [U.S. Department of Labor 2007].

Given the fact that rural child labour statistically forms the majority of the child labour problem, it is striking to note that the theme has received so little attention. Studies on rural child labour are few. In Bolivia there have been some studies on child labour in the sugar cane sector [ILO & Unicef 2004; Baas 2008] and Brazil nuts [Escóbar de Pabon et al. 2008]. There are no specific studies available on child labour in traditional agriculture.<sup>2</sup> In Peru there have been two studies on child labour in traditional agriculture [Alarcon 2001, 2006], but none on child labour in the commercial agricultural sector.

This lack of information is paralleled by a lack of interventions. Although the majority of child labourers are found in rural areas, the majority of both NGOs and governmental interventions are directed to improve the situation for urban child labourers. In Bolivia there have been some interventions to improve the situation for child labourers in the sugar cane sector as part of the

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<sup>1</sup> [http://www.iin.oea.org/2007/Noticias\\_pasadas\\_2007/Noticias\\_julio\\_2007/noticia5ingles.htm](http://www.iin.oea.org/2007/Noticias_pasadas_2007/Noticias_julio_2007/noticia5ingles.htm)

<sup>2</sup> There is one study on semi-slavery and the bondage system in rural areas in Bolivia in which is mentioned that children take part in economic activities [Bedoya Garland & Bedoya Silva-Santisteban 2005]

governmental child labour eradicating program CEPTI. In Peru interventions regarding children in rural areas are above all directed towards education; no intervention specifically targets rural child labour. By focusing on child labour in traditional and commercial agriculture, this research project fills the information void and will hopefully stimulate new interventions as well as improve existing ones.

Bolivia and Peru have both signed international conventions regarding child labour, such as the International Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) and ILO Conventions 138 (minimum age for employment) and 182 (on the worst forms of child labour). Some of these international agreements have been translated into national child labour laws. Both Peru and Bolivia have Child and Adolescent Codes, which set the minimum age for employment at 14 years of age. In Peru, young workers of 12 years old are only allowed to work when it concerns “light activities” (which are unfortunately not specified). There are also particular rules regarding child labour in agriculture. In Bolivia, the activities of some rural sectors, such as the sugar cane and Brazil nut sectors, have been identified as Worst Forms of child labour, which makes the minimum age for admission into these sectors 18 years of age. In Peru, traditional and commercial sectors have not yet been identified as Worst Forms sectors, but the Child and Adolescent Code has set the age of admission for commercial agriculture at 16 years of age (instead of 14) because of the “special labour conditions”. Neither Bolivia nor Peru have yet complied with setting up a specified list of worst forms, which is an obligation after signing the 182 Convention. Both countries did, however, comply with the obligation to create national committees that implement projects for the progressive eradication of child labour and monitor the progress. In Bolivia this committee has been responsible for two projects to eradicate child labour in the sugar cane sector. In Peru this committee has not implemented specific plans to improve the situation for rural child labourers, but has prioritised the issue.

One of the aims of the IREWOC research project on rural child labour has been to identify the Worst Forms of child labour within the rural agricultural context<sup>3</sup> and contribute in this way to the plans of the national committees for the eradication of child labour and the construction of national Worst Forms lists.

Besides identifying the Worst Forms of child labour, the research project focussed on the following central questions:

- In which agricultural sector and regions do children work in the research countries?
- What are the living and working conditions of child labourers and their families in rural areas of the Andes Region?
- Why do these children work? (What are the specific cultural notions towards child labour?) What is the impact of their work on their physical, emotional and cultural development?
- What is already being done by governmental and non-governmental organisations in the field of child labour in rural areas?
- How can pro-active policy concerning the situation of child labourers be improved?

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<sup>3</sup> In comparison with the 182 Convention we identified those forms of rural child labour that “by its nature or the circumstances in which it is carried out, is likely to harm the health, safety or morals of children” (Article 3, d of Convention 182).

The study has been comparative in nature; child labour in Bolivian rural areas was compared to the Peruvian context, and child labour in traditional agriculture was compared to child labour in modern agriculture. Anthropological fieldwork was carried out in several agricultural sectors in different regions of Bolivia and Peru. The researchers lived in the rural communities for extended periods of time; they participated in the daily lives of the rural families, especially those of the children, by visiting the schools, helping them with household chores and various agricultural activities, and playing with them in between these different responsibilities and duties. In addition to the participant observation, formal interviews were held with the children, their parents, community leaders and teachers. The researchers also examined several interventions by visiting projects and documenting the views of representatives from NGOs and state organisations.

In Bolivia the first fieldwork period was carried out in three indigenous Guaraní communities in the Cordillera province in the department of Santa Cruz. During this fieldwork period specific knowledge was generated about children from captive communities working on large corn plantations and about children working on family plots, in the communities of Itakuatía, Irenda and Pozo Potrerillo. Subsequently, fieldwork was carried out on large commercial sugar cane plantations in the regions Bermejo and Santa Cruz.

In Peru the specific objective was to make a comparison between child labour in traditional rural indigenous communities and child labour in the commercial agricultural export sector. Research was first carried out in two small rural indigenous communities in the department Cusco: Ccasacunca and Cusibamba. Subsequently, fieldwork was carried out in the agricultural export sector in the department Ica, specifically in and around the villages of Santa Cruz de Villacuri and La Venta.

To gain access to the different sectors, and to the children and their caretakers, the researchers were thankfully aided by several local NGOs. They not only kindly made initial contact, but were also willing to have their own child labour initiatives scrutinised. We would like to thank LABOR, the departmental office of the Ministry of Labour in Bermejo and OASI in Bolivia, and CESIP and CODEH-Ica in Peru. We would also like to express our gratitude to the working children and their families for their time and sharing of ideas. Their voices are at the core of this project and we hope that the results will contribute to an improvement of their working and living conditions.

# Rural Child Labour in Guaraní Communities in Bolivia

## Laura Baas

Worldwide more than 70% of child labour can be found in agriculture. This is also true for Bolivia where most working children between 7 and 13 years old are employed in rural areas doing agricultural jobs. There are several types of child labour in agriculture, including labour in the family context and labour on commercial farms and plantations [ILO 2006b:5]. Family farm child labour means that children work on their parents' or family members' fields, often after school hours or during the weekends, from an early age onwards. Child labour on commercial farms often involves long working hours, heavy or dangerous work and few possibilities to combine work with formal education.

The ILO categorises certain types of child labour as the *worst forms* of child labour; these in turn are divided into the *unconditional worst forms* and *hazardous forms* of child labour. Article 3(d) of C182 refers to the *hazardous worst forms*, activities that are damaging either because of their nature, or because of the conditions in which they are performed; these are further defined in ILO Recommendation 190 [ILO 1999b]<sup>4</sup>. The countries which have ratified the Convention are required to introduce new legislation and policy instruments accordingly. The Code for Children and Adolescents<sup>5</sup> (CCA) for Bolivia sets the minimum working age at 14 years (Law 2026, Art. 126, 2004)<sup>6</sup>. The Ministry of Labour has a special department for the eradication of child labour, called the Commission for Progressive Eradication of Child Labour<sup>7</sup> (CEPTI). CEPTI is working through a 10 year plan that runs from 2000-2010 and focuses on three groups, including children working in the *worst forms* of child labour.

One particular difficulty with the implementation of the plan is agreeing on the exact type of work involvement by children that is to be considered as hazardous. Child participation in agricultural activities is often condoned with the argument that it belongs to tradition and that it is not exploitative. This research generates insight into the question to what extent child labour in agriculture in Bolivia can be labelled a *worst form* of child labour. Field work was carried out among indigenous Guaraní communities in the eastern lowlands of Bolivia. The main question to be answered in this report is: *to what extent can child labour in agriculture in eastern Bolivia be categorised as worst form of child labour, taking into account child labour within the family context and child labour on plantations of ranch owners in the region?*

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<sup>4</sup> ILO Recommendation 190, available from <http://www.ilo.org/ilolex/cgi-lex/convde.pl?R190>

<sup>5</sup> Código de Niños, Niñas y Adolescentes

<sup>6</sup> Legislación juvenil en Bolivia, available from: [www.cinterfor.org.uy/public/spanish/region/ampro/-cinterfor/temas/youth/legisl/bol/iii/index.htm](http://www.cinterfor.org.uy/public/spanish/region/ampro/-cinterfor/temas/youth/legisl/bol/iii/index.htm)

<sup>7</sup> Comisión de Erradicación Progresiva del Trabajo Infantil

## Regional background

The Guaraní population in Bolivia is composed of some 80.000-90.000 people. Of all Guaraní people, 72% lives in the department of Santa Cruz, 13% in Chuquisaca, 7% in Tarija and 8% in other departments [Bedoya Garland & Bedoya Silva-Santisteban 2005:75-76]. Several hundreds of indigenous Guaraní families still live in conditions of semi-slavery at large-scale plantations in the southern departments of Chuquisaca and Santa Cruz. The fact that many Guaraní communities are located on the properties of other land owners creates a permanent tension between the indigenous group and the land owners<sup>8</sup>. During the first six months of 2008, this situation resulted in conflicts between both groups during which many got hurt in riots and blockades.

## The research communities

The “captive” community<sup>9</sup> of **Itakuatía** (region of Alto Parapetí) is located on the property of a ranch owner, who in total owns about 4.000 hectares of land in the region. According to a census of one of the Guaraní representative bodies in 2007, the community of Itakuatía had 56 families. The community is characterised by severe poverty, with few opportunities to work; the houses are made of mud with roofs of leafs, and there is no electricity or potable water. Most people in the community are allowed to use one or two hectares of land of the ranch owner to grow different crops like corn, beans and yucca. The community has a primary school until 8<sup>th</sup> grade, in which 69 pupils are enrolled. The nearest health centre is located at one hour walking distance.

The community of **Irenda** (region of Ipaguasu) consists of 48 houses and has water taps close to all houses. The village lacks electricity; so too does the one very small health centre. The education centre in Irenda offers primary school until 8th grade but there is no kindergarten. There are five teachers for 105 pupils. The community of Irenda used to be situated on the terrain of a ranch owner but this situation changed when the NGO CIPCA, about 22 years ago, bought part of the terrain and donated it to the (indigenous) people living there.

The community of **Pozo Potrerillo** (region of Ipaguasu) consists of about 300 families. Electricity and running water are lacking; people drink water from the wells in the community. Pozo Potrerillo has a health centre with one nurse attending and an education centre which offers full primary school (until 8<sup>th</sup> grade), but no kindergarten. There are six teachers in the school for 107 pupils. Since 1987, when the NGO CIPCA bought part of the terrain from the land owner on which the community of Pozo Potrerillo was located, the Guaraníes have been living freely on the land of which they are now the owners.

## Current (development) projects

The **Guaraní People’s Assembly (APG)** is currently implementing a 3-year anti-child labour project in rural areas, given impulse by the NGOs **Development and Self management (DyA)** and the **Swiss Red Cross**. The project started in November 2007 and its main objective is the elimination of the

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<sup>8</sup> [see for example: Bedoya Garland & Bedoya Silva-Santisteban 2005; Guerrero Peñaranda 2005; Deutsche Entwicklungsdienst 2008]

<sup>9</sup> More information on the notion of “captive” communities, see: Press Release Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR) concludes visit to Bolivia, Retrieved June 14 2008 <http://www.cidh.oas.org/Comunicados/English/2008/26.08eng.htm>



worst forms of child labour through improvement of education. The project covers 114 communities in the departments of Chuquisaca and Santa Cruz. The project is related to the Program for Eradication of Child Labour of the governmental CEPTI and also relates to the Transitional Inter Ministerial Plan (see below).

**Projects for Development of Areas (PDA)**<sup>10</sup>, financed by **World Vision**, supports, among others, the community of Itakuatía by offering school-going children utensils like pens and notebooks and sports clothes. The parents are very glad to receive this help, many of them mentioned the contribution of PDA they received last year and had high hopes that the organisation would grant materials again this year. The teachers also appreciate the help given by PDA, but feel that many supplies are still lacking.

The **Transitional Inter Ministerial Plan** is meant to improve the situation of Guaraní families and is executed through cooperation with the APG and local governments. Eradication of child labour is not a specific part of the *Plan Guaraní* but activities to improve the educational situation and to install more regional offices of the Ministry of Labour inadvertently help to improve the situation of the children. The contingency program of the *Plan Guaraní* includes the improvement of education especially directed towards liberated communities: communities that have obtained the land rights of their territory.

The oil company **TOTAL** started seismic testing for natural oil resources in the Guaraní region and some 800 people - almost exclusively men - from the Guaraní communities were employed by the company. A contract was signed between TOTAL and the APG, which states that the company will pay a certain sum of money to the Guaraní organisation as a way of compensating possible damage done to the region.

## **Child labour in Guaraní communities**

### **Corn harvest - Children's participation on the family fields**

The three Guaraní communities visited during the field research are mostly dedicated to growing corn, which is sown in the months of October through December and harvested June through August. The families grow two types of corn: *colorado* and *blanco*. To dekernel the *blanco* corncob one needs to put the corncobs in a well-sealed bag and hit the bag hard with a heavy wooden stick for about one hour. Conversely, the kernels of the *colorado* can quite easily be removed by hand. Children participate in both methods. The work is very tiring because the stick is heavy and the kernels don't come off easily. Like one boy mentioned: "You have to hit the bag very hard; if you don't do that the kernels don't come off. I do this in the afternoon but I take a rest once in a while because it is heavy, I get very tired quickly." Besides sometimes helping out on the family fields, girls are often responsible for bringing lunch or dinner to their relatives who are working on the plantations.

Children who have completed primary school often don't continue their education and choose to stay home to help their parents on the fields or start working for someone else. School-going children - mostly boys, but also some girls - participate in the work on their parents' fields in the

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<sup>10</sup> Information based on an interview with a World Vision employee, held June 11 2008.

afternoons, after they finish classes in the mornings. Besides dekerneling, children and youths participate in **sowing, weeding, harvesting and selling** the corn. Thirteen-year-old Joel, who is in 7<sup>th</sup> grade, works with his parents on the fields in the afternoons: “I help on the fields from 2:00 to 5:00 in the afternoon, today I will go harvesting. What I usually do is weeding but now it is harvesting time so I help harvesting the corn and peeling off the leaves and the kernels.” Children work as part of their upbringing and their work is rarely prioritised over school attendance. Children helping out their parents, like Joel, usually work only a few hours a day, and don’t suffer serious health problems from their tasks. Children consider weeding as light work; they tend to like this work as it doesn’t make them tired. Dekerneling, however, is a job that children tend to dislike because it makes their hands hurt.

Most of the interviewed Guaraní children ‘help’ their parents with different household or agricultural chores that take place within the family realm, and don’t receive a fixed salary for their help. About a third receive between 10 and 30 Bolivianos (1-3 Euro) per week, some because they are studying in other communities and need the money for their expenses. About a quarter receive pocket money: between 0.50 and 2 Bolivianos (0.05 - 0.20 Euro) per week. Twelve of the interviewed children and youths receive money from a ranch owner, varying from a salary of 8 to 30 Bolivianos (80 eurocents to 3 Euro) per day.

### **Working for ranch owners**

The twelve interviewed children and youths who work for ranch owners are all boys of 11 years or older. Only occasionally do girls work for plantation owners: exclusively during harvest time. The young boys receive a daily salary and work on a very irregular basis. Primary school-going children attend classes in the mornings and work in the afternoons or weekends, sometimes failing to go to school for a few days because of work. The older children, who don’t attend school, work fulltime during the period in which they are contracted and don’t work at all during other periods. The youngsters claimed to be earning between 8 and 30 Bolivianos (80 eurocents to 3 Euro) per day, but even they were not entirely clear on how much exactly they were earning.

The boys do various kinds of jobs like harvesting corn or peanuts, cutting trees or taking care of animals, and can be contracted in different ways. During the work youths use tools such as machetes, knives and axes, which sometimes result in injuries. They don’t wear any protective clothing other than gloves, although sometimes these are also lacking. Most boys working for ranch owners mentioned that they find their work ‘heavy’ and ‘tiring’. The nature of the work involves one walking through the fields all day, cutting, reaching for the crops to be harvested, carrying heavy bags of corn or peanuts and doing other more or less tiring tasks. Work usually starts around 6 or 7 am and ends at the end of the afternoon. In addition, the youngsters often have to walk a long way to get to their work.

Peanut plantations can be found around the community of Itakuatía; the peanut harvest takes place during the months of May and June and entails harvesting by removing the peanuts from the roots of the plants. Male harvesters tear the small peanut plants out of the ground using a spade and leave the plants lying in piles for the women to then sit down and remove the peanuts by hand. The men earn around 30 Bolivianos (3 euro) per day, while the women and their children are paid per unit (a 50 litre can of peanuts). Children start to help their mothers with this work at about 5 years old.

Currently, because of the conflict, people tend not to work for the ranch owner anymore. Natalia (14) is one of the youths who don't work in the peanut harvest anymore. Between the ages of 10 and 12 she harvested peanuts with some 20 to 30 other children, for which she was paid 1.50 Bolivianos (15 euro cents) per can, at an average of 10 cans per day.

## **Why do children work?**

Parents as well as children value the work done by children from an early age onwards, at least within the family context, but often also outside. This appreciation particularly applies when children learn to do the same activities as their parents or when they dedicate themselves to activities which are typically done by children. The leader of Pozo Potrerillo, for example, repeatedly emphasised how much he had appreciated the fact that his children who, all except for one, had already left the parental home, had never been lazy and had always helped him and his wife on the plantations and in the household. As he stated: "because we taught them to work and study and always be active, they are all doing very well now and know what life is about". However, some work goes beyond mere socialisation and life lessons; work on the plantations of neighbouring ranch owners is mostly undertaken by malnourished children and youths who work out of economic necessity.

Parents also often mentioned their respect for formal schooling as well, because it provides their children with better negotiating possibilities in future jobs. Having to work or 'help out' in the family realm doesn't mean that children don't attend school; children are often capable of combining their labour activities with school. Youths who work for ranch owners, however, are more likely to skip classes every now and then. Many children who manage to finish primary school don't attend high school because their parents don't have enough money. Most of the adolescents who manage to go to high school also manage to complete their secondary education. Still, according to the one high school principal, "about ten percent of the youths drop out before finishing fourth grade". He ascribed this dropout percentage to economic reasons. Another reason for children and youths not to attend classes is a lack of motivation from their parents. Generally, however, the motivation of the children themselves to study is quite high; of the 85 interviewed children, 75 emphasised their desire to continue studying.

## **Conclusion and recommendations**

The work of children in the family realm can hardly be categorised as a *worst form* of child labour because their tasks don't seriously affect health, safety or morals (see ILO Convention 182 [1999a]). The facts that children participate in these tasks for only a few hours a day, are able to combine their tasks with school attendance and are usually accompanied by older family members, contribute to the work not being dangerous or damaging to their well being. The educative factor of work within the family context is the most important reason for children to be participating in these tasks. Children tend to be able to combine their work in the family realm with school attendance.

Working for ranch owners, however, can be risky and arduous. Cutting trees down to prepare fields for growing crops is exhausting work and carries the risk of injuries. Harvesting corn involves extremely long hours and walking through the fields, reaching for the crops and carrying bags filled with corn are exhausting activities and the youths confirmed that they find their work heavy and

tiring. Some complain, whilst others justify the hardship with the need to earn money. In addition, difficulties to continue their studies make it somewhat logical for the youths to start working fulltime. The fact that labour opportunities are scarce results in youths participating in work that can be labelled as *worst forms* of child labour. The nature of the work itself, and the detrimental effect of their work on schooling, means that these youths are indeed involved in a *worst form* of child labour.

The conflict between ranch owners and the indigenous community, at the time of research, hindered the progress of the fieldwork as both sides were suspicious and weary. As a result of the conflict there were also, compared to “normal” periods, fewer children working on the peanut plantations.

In order to improve the situation of youths living in Guaraní communities in Santa Cruz, Bolivia, policies should focus on the improvement of education. Educational opportunities and facilities, including direct help to parents, should be strengthened in the region, so that children are able to not only complete primary education, but to also continue into high school. Many teachers and parents suggested the construction of secondary schools in the communities with the facilities for youths to stay there during the week. Furthermore, in order to make sure children actually finish primary school, parents should continue to receive help from institutions like PDA, which grants school utensils and sports clothes for pupils in primary school. Parents were very thankful for this help and often mentioned that more scholarships were needed to be able to keep their children in school and possibly even let them continue to high school. In November 2007, the NGO DyA started a project in the region focussing on the elimination of child labour through improvement of educational opportunities (see above). Project results were not available yet because of the recent start of the project and the conflict in the region hindering the start-up of the project.

# Rural Child Labour in the Bolivian Sugar Cane Harvest

## Laura Baas

Convention 182 of the ILO in broad terms defines certain types of child labour as the *worst forms* of child labour. These in turn are subdivided into the *unconditional worst forms* and *hazardous forms* of child labour. Article 3(d) of C182 refers to the *hazardous worst forms*, activities that are damaging either because of their nature, or because of the conditions in which they are performed; these are further defined in ILO Recommendation 190 [ILO 1999b]<sup>11</sup>. Fieldwork was conducted in the sugar cane regions of Santa Cruz and Bermejo in October and November 2008 in order to generate information on the nature of child labour in the sugar cane sector in Bolivia, to discover whether it can be classified as a *worst form* of child labour and to explore the various interventions that have taken place to eradicate children's work from the sector. The two central questions are: 1) *To what extent have interventions aimed at the eradication of child labour from the sugar cane harvest been effective?* 2) *To what extent can children's activities in the sugar cane harvest be categorised as a worst form of child labour?* Fieldwork was carried out in localities that had earlier been the subject of research by the ILO [see: ILO 2002].

## Regional background

Although estimations vary, according to the different sources, in both Tarija and Santa Cruz, between 2000-3000 children and adolescents participate in the sugar cane harvest, with estimates for Santa Cruz lying towards the higher end. The activities within the sugar cane sector have been identified as damaging to the well-being of children because of their nature [Van den Berge 2007:appendix E]. The Code for Children and Adolescents<sup>12</sup> (CCA) for Bolivia sets the minimum working age at 14 years (Law 2026, Art. 126, 2004)<sup>13</sup>, but article 134 specifically mentions the sugar cane harvest as work that is prohibited for persons younger than 18. The Ministry of Labour has a special department for the eradication of child labour, called the Commission for Progressive Eradication of Child Labour<sup>14</sup> (CEPTI). CEPTI is working through a 10-year plan that runs from 2000-2010 and focuses on three groups, among which children working in the *worst forms* of child labour, like the sugar cane harvest.

## The economics of the sugar cane sector

Sugar cane is an important agricultural crop for the Bolivian economy. The raw sugar cane is processed into sugar and alcohol in large processing plants. According to ILO and UNICEF, in 2004

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<sup>11</sup> ILO Recommendation 190, available from <http://www.ilo.org/ilolex/cgi-lex/convde.pl?R190>

<sup>12</sup> Código de Niños, Niñas y Adolescentes

<sup>13</sup> Legislación juvenil en Bolivia, available from: [www.cinterfor.org.uy/public/spanish/region/ampro/-cinterfor/temas/youth/legisl/bol/iii/index.htm](http://www.cinterfor.org.uy/public/spanish/region/ampro/-cinterfor/temas/youth/legisl/bol/iii/index.htm)

<sup>14</sup> Comisión de Erradicación Progresiva del Trabajo Infantil

there were four processing plants<sup>15</sup> in Santa Cruz that in total produced 7 million *quintales*<sup>16</sup> of sugar, accounting for 110 million US dollars. The one plant in Bermejo produced 900.000 *quintales* of sugar with a total value of 15 million US dollars [ILO & Unicef 2004:8-9]. The sugar cane sector is the principal source of income for labourers in the Bermejo region as it generates a multitude of activities in its production chain. [Universidad Autónoma "Juan Misael Saracho" 2005:12]. The sugar cane industry of Santa Cruz is bigger than that of Bermejo and production is large-scale. In Santa Cruz you find small (0-20 ha), medium (20-50 ha) and large plantations (>50 ha), but there are also many large plantation owners with several hundreds or even thousands of hectares of sugar cane. In Bermejo many plantation owners grow on even less than 10 hectares.

Both Santa Cruz and Bermejo attract migrant workers from the departments of Tarija, Potosí, Chuquisaca and Santa Cruz. About 60%<sup>17</sup> of the sugar cane harvesters are temporary migrants. Whereas harvesters in the sugar cane region of Santa Cruz earn between 20 and 25 Bolivianos (2-2.50 Euro) per tonne cut sugar cane, in Bermejo the harvesters earn around 50 Bolivianos (5 Euro) per tonne.

## The harvester camps

The **Chorobi Camp** in the **Las Gamas region** (Santa Cruz) houses about 20 harvesters, half of whom have come with their wives and children and others who have come alone. There are about 20 children in the ages of 0 to 18, most of whom are under 6 years old. Five of them are of school-going age but don't attend school and three male adolescents are working as *cuartas* (helpers). The families live in self-constructed tents made of plastic and wooden sticks. Some families share a tent. There is electricity, potable water and showers, but there are no toilets.

The **Okinawa 1 Camp** in the **Chira/Nueva Esperanza region** (Santa Cruz) houses thirteen harvesters, four women and five children of under 6 years old; there are no children of primary school-going age. Apart from the thirteen contracted harvesters there are four *cuartas* of under 18 years old. One of the cooks is a 14-year-old girl. There is no electricity and no water in the camp; to fetch water people have to walk 300 meters. There are no toilets or bathing facilities. People live in self-constructed tents and cooking takes place on wood fires in the open air.

The **Primero de Mayo Camp** in the **Arrozales region** (Bermejo), owned by the sugar cane processing plant in Bermejo, offers better living conditions than the camps owned by private sugar cane producers. There are 100 harvester families and the camp has electricity, potable water, 30 toilets and showers, and places to wash clothes. The houses are made of brick stones with corrugated iron roofs. People have to construct their own 'kitchens' which are poorly covered by some aluminium plates. A nurse is present in the camp from Monday to Saturday. The harvesters also have health insurance provided by the company. The children in the camp attend classes at the school adjacent to the camp; next to the school is a governmental child care centre (PAN), which offers day-care for children aged 0 to 5.

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<sup>15</sup> Currently there are five processing plants in the department of Santa Cruz.

<sup>16</sup> A quintal is about 45 kilograms.

<sup>17</sup> The other 40% consist of permanent residents of the sugar cane region or cities close by such as Bermejo, Santa Cruz and Montero.

The **Porcelana Bajo camp** in the **Porcelana region** (Bermejo) houses ten harvesters accompanied by their wives and some of their children. There are fifteen children under 18 years old, half of whom are in school, whilst the others work as *cuartas*. The dormitories are made of brick with corrugated iron roofs. Cooking facilities are non-existent: people have built their own wood fire 'kitchens' with bricks, plastic and aluminium. Electricity is installed in all dormitories. The camp is supplied with only one water tap which people have to use for bathing, cooking and washing clothes. Toilets are not present. Most children of school-going age attend classes at the school in Porcelana, one kilometre away, and there is a governmental child care centre (PAN) opposite the school. There is also a PAN centre in the Porcelana harvester camp itself.

The **Campo Grande camp** in the **Campo Grande region** (Bermejo) houses fifteen harvesters, their wives and most of their children. Six children attend classes in the school near the camp; some ten children under 6 years old stay in the camp and twelve under-aged *cuartas* work on the fields. The dormitories are well constructed and are supplied with electricity. There is only one water tap and a small bathing facility that doesn't have a door. The health centre and the primary school are adjacent to the camp.

## Child labour in Bolivia's sugar cane sector

The sugar cane harvest roughly takes place during the months of May to November. Children of different age groups participate in various labour activities. The ILO research estimated that in Santa Cruz nearly 50% of the workers belonged to the 9-13 age group, while in Bermejo some 60% would belong to this group [Dávalos 2002:iii]. IREWOC research estimates that those percentages have gone down considerably. The ILO report mentions a participation of twice as many boys as girls; this remains unchanged.

In some cases, adolescent boys younger than 18 work as **contracted harvesters**. The work they do is the same as that of adult harvesters and consists of burning, cutting, de-topping, piling and loading the sugar cane. Loading is done either mechanically or manually, depending on whether they work in respectively Santa Cruz or Bermejo. These adolescents working as contracted harvesters earn a monthly salary of between 1.000 and 4.000 Bolivianos (100-400 Euro) by working full time (6 days a week). As in the case of Zenon (15): "I earn between 100 and 150 Bolivianos [10-15 Euro] per day. I can harvest some 5 or 6 tonnes of sugar cane per day and they pay us 21 Bolivianos per tonne".

Girls and boys, aged 12-17, work as **helpers (*cuartas*)** for the contracted harvesters, on a daily basis, in Santa Cruz as well as in Bermejo. Most *cuartas* earn between 300 and 800 Bolivianos (30-80 Euro) per month. *Cuartas* who help family members, however, are often unpaid. Daysi (12) works as a *cuarta* with her sister: "I came here with my sister and I help her and her husband in the harvest. My sister helps my husband and I help my sister. At the end of the harvest she will pay me, she hasn't paid me anything yet. I don't know how much it will be, I have no idea".

Younger boys and girls, between 7 and 12 years old, who are still in school, help their parents in the sugar cane harvest after school, in the weekends and/or during holidays. School-going children of 11 and 12 years old participate in the same activities as older permanent helpers, including cutting, de-topping and stacking sugar cane. In Bermejo, some of these children (only boys) also participate in the extremely heavy task of manually loading sugar cane. In addition, girls often work as cooks in the camps. The youngest working children, between 7 and 10 years old (girls as well as boys), in

Santa Cruz as well as in Bermejo, help cutting, de-topping and piling sugar cane on non-school days, but don't participate in loading sugar cane because they are not strong enough yet.

## **Reasons for children to work**

Adolescent boys working as contracted harvesters as well as youths working as *cuartas*, mainly work for economic reasons. They come from regions that are lacking in job opportunities and the sugar cane harvest provides a more or less stable income during 4 to 6 months a year. When boys from poor families are about 14 or 15 years old, they are considered old enough to earn money and contribute to the family income. At this age, most youths don't attend school anymore; for poor families, especially in remote areas, primary school usually is as much education as children get. Secondary schools are too far away or too expensive. Girls and boys from this age group start working fulltime in the sugar cane harvest as helpers; girls also work as cooks. Children who go to school in the sugar cane regions, and only help their parents on non-school days, are present in the sugar cane sector because they have no place else to stay during the harvest.

## **Risks for children and youths to participate in the harvest**

Adolescents who work fulltime in the harvest, either as contracted harvesters or as *cuartas* are at risk for various health problems. Because cutting, de-topping, stacking and loading sugar cane are heavy tasks, extreme tiredness is the most prevalent consequence of the work. Like Francisco (15) complained: "I am really tired from the work and I have become much thinner since I came to the harvest: the heavy work really makes one lose weight". The young harvesters also complain about cramps in their muscles, caused by dehydration. Manual loading, conducted in Bermejo, makes one's shoulders hurt because of the heavy pile of sugar cane one has to carry. Loading manually is also very risky because one has to ascend a wooden ladder which is unstable and there is nothing to hold on to. Furthermore, the most common risk of working in the sugar cane is cutting oneself with the machete. Almost all young harvesters have cut themselves at least once. During the ILO research in 2002, there was still a great risk of being bitten by snakes while working on the plantations; currently this risk has diminished significantly because the harvesters burn the sugar cane before harvesting, which results in all animals fleeing the fields.

## **Educational situation of the children**

Migrating to the sugar cane harvest implies that children have to change schools. This instability is a very particular feature of children in sugar harvesting. When they go to various camps, children have to change schools more than once. When there is a school close to the camp, most children of 6 years and older in the camps do go to school. In Arrozales, Porcelana and Campo Grande in Bermejo there are schools close to the camps and almost all children who have not yet finished primary school attend classes. In the Okinawa 1 and Chorobi camps in Santa Cruz, on the other hand, the children are not in school because the parents consider the schools to be too far away. The older children and adolescents who participate in the sugar cane harvest, working as contracted harvesters and *cuartas*, don't attend school. They work fulltime and have finished only primary school until 5<sup>th</sup> or 8<sup>th</sup> grade. Most youths don't consider a continuation of their studies as a real option; some don't desire to continue studying, but many others feel frustrated by not being able



because of financial problems or by schools being too far away. Girls experience the same difficulties as boys.

## Interventions

The NGO **LABOR** in Santa Cruz organised workshops in the migrant camps about child labour and labour rights of the adult harvesters. During the project, workshops were held in 21 camps with over 1.300 participants<sup>18</sup>. Despite the importance of the issues, people tended not to remember much of the contents of the workshops. The radio show broadcasted by the Federation of Harvesters, in cooperation with LABOR, is listened to by many harvesters and acquaints them with the issues of child labour, labour rights and the importance of education. This does create some enduring awareness, but more important are the agreements between harvesters, producers and authorities on the issues of salaries and child labour, which have been reached during tripartite meetings organised by LABOR. They are a useful point of reference for all interventions and all discussions.

The Organisation for Social Assistance of the Church<sup>19</sup> (**OASI**) carries out a health project in the sugar cane region: a medical brigade consisting of a doctor and two nurses tries to visit each of the migrant camps in the Warnes province every month during the harvest period. The health brigade of OASI in Santa Cruz was valued very positively by the harvesters and their families. People felt well attended to and were happy to know that the brigade would visit them regularly during the harvest, especially since health posts tend to be far away. The OASI project doesn't directly contribute to a decrease in the number of children participating in the sugar cane harvest, but is directed towards the improvement of the health of the migrant children and adults and does help to extend the available labour time of the adults.

The **CCIMCAT** project in Bermejo that focussed on strengthening women's income generating capacities and organisational abilities was remembered very well by the participating women and was valued very positively. After this first year of the project, the women and their children have received more information about why child labour is prohibited and the importance of hygiene and education. Because the pilot project has only run for a year during 2007, it may not have led to a perceptible decrease in the number of children working on the sugar cane plantations.

Another example of a project in which people were actively participating is the extra classes or *aulas de apoyo*, organised by the **Ministry of Labour** in Bermejo. This very direct way of taking action against child labour resulted in a number of children attending the *aulas de apoyo* instead of accompanying their parents to the fields on Saturdays or on weekdays after school. These educative events were made more attractive by combining them with sports activities and games. This alternative worked very well and did keep most young children out of work on the plantations on non-school days. Some older primary-school youths, however, continued to participate in cutting sugar cane on the weekends.

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<sup>18</sup> Source: Notes of evaluation workshop on the project "Awareness raising and promotion for the progressive eradication of child labour from the sugar cane harvest - LABOR

<sup>19</sup> Organización de Asistencia Social de la Iglesia

In 2008, OASI<sup>20</sup> in Bermejo supported the Federation of Harvesters' negotiations with the Federation of Sugar Cane Producers and the board of the sugar cane processing plant (IAB) about increasing the price per tonne of harvested sugar cane. The support of the NGO OASI during the demonstrations and the strike of the harvesters in Bermejo was instrumental in the setting up of a communal cooking system during this period. After six weeks of struggle and negotiation, an agreement was reached on a better price per tonne of harvested cane. Indirectly, better salaries for adults supposedly lead to fewer children working and the support to the organisational strength of the workers therefore appears to be a helpful strategy.

### **Fewer youths in the harvest because of school?**

Some people claim there are fewer youths participating in the harvest than a few years ago; comparing the situation with data from ILO (2002) there is indeed a noticeably significant decrease in child labourers. ILO [2002] showed that 50% and 60% of the harvesters in respectively Santa Cruz and Bermejo, belonged to the 9-13 age group at the time of their investigation. Currently, of the fulltime harvesters in Santa Cruz about 10-20% are minors and in Bermejo slightly more; at least a quarter of the harvesters are minors because there are more helpers who are usually under 18. According to the testimonies of (young) harvesters, awareness has increased and the children and their parents appreciate the importance of schooling. One consequence of the increased awareness has been that more children and youngsters are staying in their hometowns in order to continue studying. The employee of the Ministry of Labour, Norma Alfaro, however, remarks that this awareness usually only holds for children of primary school age.

### **Concluding: worst forms of child labour**

Taking into account the health, safety and educational implications of the work in the sugar cane harvest, it is undeniably one of the *worst forms* of child labour. Youngsters run all types of health risks and actually get injured from time to time. Specific risks are cramps, dehydration, extreme exhaustion, aches in back, shoulders and waist, *machete* cuts, and illnesses caused by the unhygienic living circumstances in the harvester camps. Apart from risks concerning health and safety, the youngsters' right to education is violated. The school-going children who participate in the harvest experience an interruption of their school year while the older ones who work fulltime have no time to attend school. However, compared to the situation described by ILO in 2002, which had only 8.3% of girls and none of the boys in school, the situation has improved significantly. Currently, younger children, more or less until the age of 12, are usually in school. Adolescents working as *cuartas*, however, are still out of school. Different strategies have been implemented in order to either improve the context situation, by providing better income or improved healthcare, or to keep children out of work by organising extra school lessons.

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<sup>20</sup> For a description of an intervention by OASI aiming at the eradication of child labour from the sugar cane harvested, implemented in 2004-2005, see [Baas 2008].

## Recommendations

Good progress has been made and lessons can be learned from the intervention programmes. On top of this, however, in order to eradicate child labour from the sugar cane harvest altogether, it might be better if children are not present in this sector at all. This way they will not become accustomed to the work or be exposed to camp life. To reach such a situation the following recommendations can be made:

- There should be more personnel and financial resources available for inspections in the migrant camps and on the plantations.
- The prohibition of child labour should be accompanied by the active exploration and implementation of alternatives for youths, such as schooling.
- Projects should be related to each other, better coordinated, and be of a long term nature. Because interventions require awareness raising and changes of life patterns of the harvesters their results might only become apparent after five years or more.
- It remains important to organise awareness raising activities for the harvesters in the camps about child labour, labour rights and the importance of education, as was carried out by LABOR during 2006-2008.
- Because adolescents work in the harvest for economic reasons, interventions should offer youths economic alternatives or schooling alternatives that are free of all costs, including opportunity costs.

# Child Labour in Rural Areas in Peru

Marten van den Berge

The study of *Rural Child Labour in Andean Countries: problems and solutions* was undertaken in order to get a clear view on the different forms of rural child labour, the consequences of the work and possible modes of intervention in the Andean countries Bolivia and Peru. The conclusions and recommendations in this specific summary are based on fieldwork carried out in Peru. In the Peruvian context the objective was to make a comparison between child labour in traditional and commercial agriculture. Research was first carried out in two small rural communities in the department Cusco: Ccasacunca and Cusibamba. Subsequently, fieldwork was carried out in the agricultural export sector in the department Ica, specifically in and around the villages of Santa Cruz de Villacuri and La Venta. In order to get a better grasp of the possible solutions, the interventions by two NGOs in the research areas were also studied.

According to the latest statistical study, more than 2 million child labourers were registered in the 6-14 age group, which accounts for 29% of all children in this age group in Peru [INEI & OIT 2002]. The statistics even suggest that child labour is on the rise: between 1993 and 2001, child labour in Peru tripled in numbers. Of all these working children, 70% (1.4 million children) are stated to work in the countryside. The majority of them are the younger children between 6 and 13 years of age. Given the fact that rural child labour statistically forms the majority of the child labour problem, it is striking to note that the theme has received so little attention. Studies on rural child labour are few, and where available relate to rural child labour in traditional agriculture [see Alarcon 2001, 2006]. There are no studies on child labour in the commercial agricultural sector in Peru. Also in terms of policy programs, there are only a small number of interventions. Both government programs as well as child-centred NGOs tend to centre on child labour in the urban contexts. By focusing on child labour in traditional and commercial agriculture, this research project fills the information void and intends to stimulate new interventions as well as improve existing ones.

## The research communities: traditional and modern

The rural communities of Cusibamba and Ccasacunca are located at an isolated 3600m altitude in the Peruvian highlands (*altiplano*). Both communities have fewer than 250 families. Agriculture and life-stock farming are the main means of production, primarily for self-subsistence. Only a small percentage of the yield is sold at nearby markets. Additionally, inhabitants still practice traditional reciprocal labour relations to help families in need and to contribute to the overall development of the community ('solidarity labour', called *minka* and *ayni*). The family is the central entity of production and wage labour does not exist. To be able to pay basic costs in the monetary modern institutions, such as education and healthcare, inhabitants are forced to migrate to find a paid job in nearby villages.

The average income in the communities is less than one dollar a day and all families can therefore be categorised as (extremely) poor. The living conditions in the communities are precarious because

of a lack of clean running water and sanitary services and, in the case of Cusibamba, an absence of electricity. The poor quality of educational facilities is remarkable; several classrooms are in a deteriorating state and basic services such as electricity, running water and sewerage systems are either lacking or of inferior quality. Neither community has its own secondary school and so access to secondary education is highly problematic because of large distances. Access to healthcare is also a problem as services offered are very basic. The combination of poverty and inferior basic services is reflected in the poor health condition of the population, particularly the children. Especially alarming in this respect is the level of undernourishment: 43% of the children enrolled in the primary school in Ccasacunca and even 100% in Cusibamba<sup>21</sup>.

On the other hand, Santa Cruz de Villacuri and La Venta are two villages located in the heart of the agricultural export sector, in the desert area of the department of Ica. Whereas the communities in Cusco had only several dozens of families, Santa Cruz de Villacuri and La Venta each have several hundreds. Estimates are difficult as many inhabitants are (temporary) migrants from the poorer regions in Peru, mostly from the highland provinces. Both villages, especially Santa Cruz de Villacuri, are mainly inhabited by labourers who work as wage labourers on the surrounding export plantations. In contrast with the traditional agricultural context, the inhabitants don't own any land or life-stock. Economic poverty, however, is less, since the average income of a day labourer on the plantations is around 5 euros a day. Nevertheless, the living conditions can be called precarious because of a lack of running water and sanitary services. Housing is currently also a problem because the 2007 earthquake destroyed many houses, which have since been reconstructed provisionally with cardboard. These villages also suffer from a poor quality of educational facilities. The 2007 earthquake also destroyed part of the educational infrastructure, of which only little has been reconstructed. Children are taught in temporary classrooms constructed from reed, and the electricity network, sewerage systems and sanitary facilities have remained in disrepair. Santa Cruz does not have a secondary school. In both villages only a basic healthcare post is present, but better equipped medical centres and hospitals are within relative reach (about 15 minutes by car in nearby urban centres) in comparison with the communities on the highlands.

## **Rural child labour in traditional agriculture**

Practically all children in the communities Ccasacunca and Cusibamba appeared to be performing agricultural activities on a daily basis. The early age at which children get involved was striking; children as young as 5 years old were found to be engaged in several agricultural tasks. The youngest children were mainly occupied with herding, bringing the animals to the community land in the early morning, watching over them and taking them back home in the afternoon. As children get older, they become involved in more physically demanding labour, performing heavy agricultural activities (sowing, harvesting and maintenance) on the family land. Also gender differences become more pronounced when children get older, with girls performing more domestic tasks than boys. Most children combine their working activities with education, engaging in agricultural activities before and after school hours. As a result, children get up as early as 4.00 a.m. to go herding or help out on the family land. Agricultural tasks increase during harvesting and

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<sup>21</sup> <http://escale.minedu.gob.pe/escale/consulta/infoIE.do?anexo=0&codigoModular=0204842>

sowing seasons, during which times these activities may be performed at the expense of schooling. None of the work is remunerated.

The labour activities in traditional agriculture have some physical consequences. Children reported that they sometimes sprain an ankle while running after animals, or are injured whilst separating fighting animals. Regarding working on the land, children and adolescents alike mentioned blisters and muscle aches as the most significant inconveniences. Few of these physical complaints were serious or frequent. Nevertheless, a number of aspects directly related to the work which they are doing has a negative impact on the development of the child and therefore need improving. The children mentioned that they worry because of the heavy responsibility of losing the cattle to predators. Cattle is one of the few economic assets of rural families, and watching over the cattle is therefore experienced as a major responsibility. At the same time children think of agricultural work as monotonous and boring. Additionally, the combination of the different activities children are expected to carry out (working tasks, educational tasks and domestic chores) in some cases form a heavy burden on the physical and emotional capacities of the children; children are often exhausted at the end of the day. Lastly, the most negative consequence of child labour in traditional agriculture is related to the educational realm; children miss classes because of participating in agricultural activities, especially during harvesting and sowing seasons. Also, because they are engaged in relatively demanding work in the mornings before going to school, children attend classes tired and report difficulties with concentration. Obviously this has negative effects on the educational results. It can therefore be concluded that, despite the lack of any serious physical consequences, the work in traditional agriculture, especially for young children, can in some cases form a threat to the “health, safety or morals” of children, as is specified in Convention 182, because of the negative effects on education and the burden of multiple responsibilities.

Cultural norms seem to be an important reason for children to work in traditional agriculture. Working (in agriculture) is part of the definition of being a ‘good child’ (*allin chicucha* in Quechua) together with values such as helping in the household and obeying one’s parents. Through their participation in agricultural activities, children are taught several values and practical skills which are considered important in the community. The value given to rural child labour was found to be most prevalent among the older generations; the younger generations would rather see formal education than the reliance on agriculture as the main condition for progress.

Paradoxically, the integration of these ‘modern values’ in the traditional communities has contributed to an increase in rural child labour. Sending children to school, especially when it concerns secondary and tertiary education, has high costs. In the village itself there are very few possibilities to earn a wage to pay for these expenses. Therefore, parents who want their children to have a good education are forced to migrate to be able to bear the expenses. Migration of one of the parents again results in an increase in the workload for those who stay behind, which usually are the mothers and children.

Economic deprivation in the community contributes to the prevalence of child labour in another way. Many families live off the production of their land. Sowing and harvesting are of crucial importance for the survival of the families. However, because of economic poverty, the families don’t have the money to pay for wage labourers to help them and the self-reliance on food makes

the families dependent on the labour force of the family, including the participation of the children.

Lastly, especially for girls, the limited access to secondary education influences their participation in domestic chores at home. Many families choose to keep their adolescent girls at home, performing domestic tasks, as they do not want them to walk for several hours to the secondary school. Parents are afraid their daughters might meet boys along the way, which might result in undesired pregnancies.

## **Child labour in commercial agriculture**

In the villages of Santa Cruz de Villacuri and La Venta, most children and adolescents were also found to be working in agriculture. However, in this area, the work is either directly or indirectly related to commercial agriculture in the export sector. Most children and adolescents work on plantations that sell a percentage of their production to exporting plantations. Through this system of outsourcing children and adolescents are indirectly involved in the export of several agricultural products to countries such as the United States and Holland. In addition, even plantations that export directly were found to employ children and adolescents.

In comparison with traditional agriculture, the age at which children start working is somewhat higher. On the small-scale plantations around La Venta, children start working from 10-11 years upwards. On the large scale plantations around Santa Cruz de Villacuri, adolescents get hired from 13-14 years onwards. Young children are often contracted alongside their parents or other older family members, in which case the adult family member receives the child's salary. The 15-16-year-old adolescents are contracted individually and receive their own wage.

Children and adolescents are active in planting, maintenance and harvesting work. The specific agricultural activities they work in depend on the crops being cultivated. In Santa Cruz de Villacuri, minors were reported working on a variety of different plantations, producing grapes, onions, paprikas, mangos, oranges and asparagus. In La Venta children also reported working on cotton plantations. Almost all children worked mainly during school holidays and occasionally in the weekend. Only in exceptional cases did children skip classes for work on the plantations. During these holidays children and adolescents work from 6 a.m. to 5 p.m. Outside school holidays, however, there is one activity related to commercial agriculture in which a dozen children were occupied: making *pension*. Making *pension* is preparing the breakfast for the labourers, who take it to the plantations. In this case children get up as early as 2.00 a.m. to help their mothers prepare these meals. Making *pension* takes place within the family context and is non-remunerated work.

The working conditions on the plantations are extremely demanding, especially because of the physical surroundings. As the plantations are located in desert areas, plantation work means being exposed to the burning sun and average temperatures of around 40 degrees Celsius. Additionally, one has to cope with the sand that constantly enters mouth, nose and eyes. In order to bear these severe labour conditions, the workers, especially on asparagus plantations, dress in long trousers, long-sleeved t-shirts, caps and even gloves to protect themselves from the sun. They also cover their nose and mouth with strips of cloth as protection against the sand. The protective layers help against the sun and sand, but increase the impact of the heat.

The actual activities have several negative physical consequences for the children and adolescents. Many children mentioned feeling sick, dizzy and experience headaches because of the burning sun, some even mentioned sunstrokes. Since the work on most plantations consists of standing bent over for extended lengths of time (cutting asparagus, picking onions, etc.) most complaints relate to sore backs. Carrying the heavy boxes of fruit and vegetables also results in many physical complaints such as sore backs and arms. Additionally, there were several complaints about the treatment by the supervisors. Children and adolescents reported that supervisors, especially on the large scale plantation, insult them, make sexual remarks, pressure them and make unfair cuts to their pay. Lastly adolescents, especially on the smaller plantations, were reported to come into contact with chemicals such as fertilizers. Considering these negative labour conditions and the impact on children and adolescents, the conclusion clearly is that working on the large scale plantations in Ica definitely harms the health and safety of minors and should therefore be classified as a Worst Form of Child Labour according to ILO norms. Consequently, the admission age for working on these plantations should be lifted from 16 to a minimum of 18 years of age.

The reasons why children and adolescents work in this sector were looked at from both demand and supply side. On the demand side, those responsible for contracting the children emphasised that they want to help them and their families by supplying them with a job, and therefore with an additional income. However, it appeared that behind these self-proclaimed altruistic motives, other, more commercial arguments play an important role; hiring children and adolescents is often preferred over hiring adults because they are cheap, docile workers and form an extra workforce in times of labour shortage. Regarding the supply side, poverty seemed to be an important factor of pushing children to work on the plantations. Indeed much of the income of the children and adolescents is spent on basic needs as parents are incapable of bearing all the costs. That is especially the case when young children are working. Parents generally consider plantation work an activity not suited for young children up to the age of 14 and allow their children to work only if dire economic circumstances force them to do so. However, adolescents from the age of 15 onwards are considered to have the responsibility to earn their own money and to provide in their own costs. Therefore adolescents are allowed and sometimes also stimulated by the parents to work on the plantations. Parents, children and adolescents mention the poverty of their families as an important factor influencing their decision to work on the plantation, but adolescents also mentioned they wanted to be in a position to buy luxury goods, which parents don't want to give them. Moreover, they consider working on the plantation as a more attractive alternative to staying behind in a deserted and boring village during the school holiday season.

## **Interventions**

In the communities of Ccasacunca and Cusibamba the Peruvian NGO CESIP tries to improve the situation for rural child labourers. Their main strategy is to improve the quality of rural education (*escuela amiga*) and to provide child rights education to the parents (*escuela de padres*). The assumption is that when the quality of education is improved, children will be stimulated to spend more time on education instead of work. Furthermore, by stimulating child rights education, children and parents will start to understand the basic rights of children and will hopefully put education before work.



Teachers, children and parents mention that the interventions of CESIP have improved access to and quality of education. It also appeared that the norms concerning education have changed. Especially the young generation is definitely more interested in sending their children to school, which is especially obvious in the case of girls. Earlier generations used to spend the time, which these children now spend in school and doing homework, working on the land or helping in and around the house. The changing norms, breaking with the traditional cultural patterns, have resulted in a decrease of child labour in traditional agriculture. The change in norms has partly been a consequence of the improved educational facilities and the child rights classes given by CESIP; some of the parents who attended the workshops mentioned that they have come to value education more than before. The new understanding of childhood and particularly the increasing importance given to education for boys and girls has also been stimulated by the migration of parents into urban areas where they are introduced to alternative ideas. Progressive community leaders, commenting on the value of education in the general assemblies within the community, have also influenced the norms concerning education in the community.

However, in spite of CESIP's efforts, there is still a lot of critique in the community about the functioning of the schools, which limits the role of education as a possible solution for child labour. The criticism especially concerns teachers using the Quechua language while teaching, while parents want their children to learn Spanish as soon as possible. Parents mainly blame teachers for not keeping to school hours, by leaving too early or not turning up at all, for making insufficient contact with the parents and for sometimes using physical punishment.

In addition, when evaluating education as a strategy against child labour, it is important to note that the increasing interest in education has had only a limited effect on the phenomena of child labour as it does not tackle some of the structural constraints and reasons why children work in traditional agriculture. These structural constraints mostly have to do with poverty in Ccasacunca and Cusibamba, and consequently migration, which again increases the workload of the children who stay behind. The low returns on agriculture make it impossible to hire outside labour, meaning that families must depend on the labour force of their children during harvesting and sowing seasons. As long as these structural constraints are not taken into account by intervention strategies rural child labour will continue to exist, despite improved educational standards and child rights education.

In the plantation sector, the NGO Codeh-Ica has implemented several projects to improve the situation of working children and adolescents. The approach was specifically directed towards improving the labour conditions of the child labourers. From their interventions it is clear that most of them have difficulties reaching rural child labourers, as the vast majority of working children participating in the projects are from urban contexts. The main reason seems to be that most projects are offered in the cities, which are difficult to reach for rural child labourers in terms of distances and costs. The intervention in which a relatively large percentage of rural child labourers participate is the project of "self-organisation". Through this intervention Codeh-Ica stimulates the formation of local groups of child labourers. These children learn how to participate, become educated on child rights and learn group values such as solidarity and friendship. At the same time it is supposed that organised children can defend their rights in child centred institutions and can claim better working conditions from their employers. The children and adolescents in these local groups had enthusiastic responses. The children were excited about organising parties and events,

holding official meetings with officials of child-centred organisations and also expressed a high level of knowledge of their rights. However, neither the children nor the educators could mention examples in which rural child labourers, through their self-organisation, had been able to improve their working conditions on the plantations. Children and adolescents actually mentioned that they often choose situations of exploitation and abuse over the risk of losing a necessary income: “No, I have not claimed my rights, the supervisor would fire me, and where would I find another job to pay for my schooling,” stated Berta, a 15-year-old girl working on an asparagus plantation, who knew of her rights but would not think of claiming them if it led to confrontation.

On behalf of the government, the labour inspection of the local Ministry of Labour located in Ica, is responsible to check if the export plantations implement national child labour legislation. The labour inspectors indicated that on their visits to the plantations they never encountered working minors below the legal age of 16. However, they also indicated the short supply of personnel and materials (such as cars) to be able to efficiently inspect the plantations.

The local chapter of the National Labour Union CJTP is also an important player. It takes a stand against child labour on the plantations, but in daily practice does not have a specific strategy towards the eradication of child and adolescent labour. Child labour in their view is related to the improvement of labour conditions of adults. Improving the wages of adult workers would decrease the need for children to work. They indicated that the attempts at improving the conditions of adult labourers has met with considerable resistance on the part of plantations owners, who have been using several strategies to discourage unionism, including physical violence, termination of contracts among the organised workers, and removal of them and their families from the plantations. If this happens to organised adult workers, the much weaker child labourers may stand even less chance of having their complaints heard and responded to.

## **Recommendations**

### **Regarding child labour in traditional agriculture**

- There seems to be a direct link between an increasing acceptance of education as the mainstay of childhood and a decrease in child labour activity. However, the quality of rural primary education remains a problem and schools do not function properly. The limited access to secondary education affects adolescent girls particularly. Thus more efforts are required to provide accessible and good quality primary as well as secondary education. Traditional norms are changing, but they can only be fully overturned if education offers a better alternative.
- Child rights education has been crucial in changing traditional norms on child labour. However it concerns only a limited number of parents; the vast majority of parents are not aware of CESIP’s interventions. CESIP’s work then is rooted in the local community context to only a limited extent. Effects of this strategy can be expanded if the interventions would be better integrated in organisational community structures such as the monthly general meetings of the inhabitants of the community (*comuneros*)
- The focus on education for all should be accompanied by plans to combat the structural and economic reasons why children work in the first place. Children work because parents migrate in search of an income. Mechanisation of agriculture and life stock breeding were options mentioned by the inhabitants of both communities to increase the

local income generating possibilities. This mechanisation would have the additional advantage of a decreased demand for the manual labour of children during harvesting and sowing seasons.

### **Regarding child labour in modern agriculture**

- Since the younger children appear to be working because of the dire poverty of the family, the possibilities of improving the labour opportunities of the adult plantation workers should be explored and the support to increase the countervailing power of plantation unions is an interesting option.
- Starting to work from the age of 15 years onwards seems to be a generally accepted norm. Awareness raising about the risks to physical and mental health and on child rights should be directed at the parents as well as at the adolescents to discourage them to work on the plantations. Additionally it would serve recommendation to explore the possibilities for creating alternative income generating activities for these adolescents.
- The first step to improve the inspection system and have the national legislation implemented would be to provide the labour inspectors with more personnel and material support.
- One of the reasons why children work is that there is usually not much to do in their communities during school holidays. It would thus be helpful to organise creative and educational activities during school holidays in the villages where the children and adolescent workers come from.

# Conclusion

## Living conditions influencing children's work

As we have seen, children's economic activities in rural areas are diverse and vary in levels of severity. Although not all, many rural activities can be labelled as *worst forms* of child labour. Not only the activity in itself contributes to work being damaging to children's health, safety and morals; the circumstances under which the activities take place also determine their impact on a child's wellbeing and development. Fieldwork was carried out in rural areas varying from remote indigenous communities in cold highlands to small villages in hot and dry lowlands; in temporary migrant camps in commercial agriculture and in precarious labourer towns close to large-scale commercial plantations. The isolated location of most of these communities results in problematic access to basic services, such as clean drinking water, sewerage, electricity, healthcare and schools. In Ica, the 2007 earthquake destroyed the infrastructure of many houses and schools, of which only a small percentage have been rebuilt. Not only the location, but also the temporary character of the living environment contributes to precarious living conditions. For example, in Bolivia many harvester families live in temporary self constructed camps, often without water, electricity and sanitary facilities. Harsh living conditions are also influenced by extreme climatic circumstances; both on the Bolivian sugar cane plantations as in the villages near the exporting plantation in Ica, people live and work in extreme temperatures of around 40 degrees Celsius. These circumstantial factors have to be taken into consideration when analysing the possible negative effect of children's labour activities on their general wellbeing.

## Rural labour activities of children and adolescents

In the context of traditional agriculture, within the family realm and mainly for self-subsistence, children and adolescents were found working in agricultural activities on a daily basis from a very early age onwards. Among indigenous Guaraní communities in the Cordillera province in Bolivia, children participate in household chores and on the family plots, mainly in corn production, from the age of 5 onwards. Also in the Peruvian highlands, in the communities of Cusibamba and Ccasacunca, boys and girls start to help their families in agricultural activities from this young age. At this young age, children mostly herd cattle and participate in light activities on the family land. The youngest boys and girls tend to do the same activities, but a gender division in tasks starts to become apparent from the age of 11-12 onwards. At this age generally speaking girls start to contribute relatively more in household activities, such as cooking and cleaning, while boys participate more in physically demanding agricultural activities and activities outside the house, like fetching wood and water and accompanying their parents to the local markets. Most activities are combined with schooling; children work before and after school hours and get up as early as 4.00 a.m. for herding duties or to help on the family land. Agricultural tasks increase during harvesting and sowing seasons, often at the expense of schooling. As this work is confined to the family realm most is not remunerated.

In the context of modern agriculture many children and adolescents were found working on commercial plantations of which several are directly and indirectly exporting to European and US markets. Children start working on small and middle sized plantations in Peru from the age of 10-11 years onwards; on the large plantations (*fundos*) they start working at about 14. On the other hand, in Bolivia children as young as 7 were found participating in the sugar cane harvest and at 11 they start to work in the corn harvest. On the commercial plantations in Ica, Peru, youths participate in a variety of activities for sowing, harvesting, and maintenance of the different crops. Children and adolescents mainly work during the two months of school holidays, and occasionally in the weekends. Only in very exceptional cases do children skip a day of school to work on the plantation. During the school holidays, they work long and exhausting days of 10-12 hours. In contrast to work in traditional agriculture these children do receive pay. Children and adolescents participating in the sugar cane harvest in Bolivia help to cut, pile and load the sugar cane. Working on corn plantations - often far away from home - entails harvesting the crop and carrying heavy bags of corn in extreme heat (35-40 degrees Celsius).

## **Reasons for children to work**

There are various reasons why children are involved in rural activities in traditional and modern agriculture. The involvement of children in traditional agriculture is closely related to specific cultural norms on childhood. According to these norms a 'good child' has the responsibility to help in the household and on the family land, in addition to their responsibility of attending school. Parents mention the importance of children not being lazy and the need for children to become responsible people. The working activities of children in traditional agriculture are also a form of socialisation through which children are introduced to certain values and practical knowledge, considered important in the communities. Therefore, children from an early age onwards are given specific tasks and share responsibilities with their family members. These traditional norms, however, are not static and change according to exposure to modern development. The new generation, for example, is of the opinion that their children must be prepared for life and employment in the newly emerging economy by spending more time in school. The exposure to modern development also takes place through the process of migration. Many people migrate, to be able to pay the costs of modern institutions such as official schools and healthcare, which increases the workload for those who stay behind, including the children. In most communities people earn less than one dollar a day, which makes it impossible to contract labourers to substitute the work of children.

While existing norms of involving children in economic activities play an important role in traditional agriculture, on commercial plantations the majority of children and adolescents work out of economic necessity. In Bolivia the work of children and adolescents is at the expense of their schooling. Children often blame their family's economic situation for their inability to continue studying and for the need to start contributing to the family's income or sustain themselves after having (almost) finished primary school. Youths in Bolivia migrate to commercial plantations far away from home because of lacking labour opportunities in their own communities. Young children, who participate in migrant sectors such as the sugar cane harvest in Bolivia, come along with their parents because they cannot stay at home alone. When there are no family members to leave the children with during the harvest period, parents bring their youngest children, who usually attend

primary school close to the migrant camps and then help on the plantations after school and in the weekends.

In Peru, children and adolescents mainly work during school vacations. Poverty appears to be the major reason for young children to work; most of these children come from broken families, one-parent families or from families with a sick parent. Once a child turns 15 he or she is expected to provide for his or her own costs and plantation work is seen as a legitimate way to do so. A lack of recreational possibilities in their own communities during school holidays is a reason to become plantation labourers, in search of some adventure. In addition to the push-factors, an unsatisfactory monitoring system allows plantation owners to hire under-aged labourers. The regional offices of the Ministry of Labour in both Peru and Bolivia are insufficiently equipped; a lack of personnel and financial resources make regular labour inspections impossible. Plantation owners, who prefer youths as a cheaper and 'easier-to-manage' labour force, can do so unhampered by the government inspection machinery.

### **Consequences of the work - *worst forms* of child labour?**

Agricultural activities of children within the context of traditional agriculture in Bolivia usually take only a few hours a day and mostly take place under the supervision of older family members. Subsequently, the activities need not interfere with a child's education. They appear to be considered a form of socialisation for the good of the child. Therefore, the conclusion often is that these types of activities cannot generally be categorised as a *worst form* of child labour.

In traditional agriculture in Peru, the herding activities and work on the land, as was observed during this research, don't have any severe or long lasting negative physical consequences. However, the working activities do interfere with the schooling of the children, especially during sowing and harvesting periods. Additionally, the combination of the different activities children are expected to carry out (work tasks, educational tasks and domestic chores) can in some cases form a heavy burden on the physical and emotional wellbeing of the children, resulting in exhaustion. The consequences for education and the burden of multiple responsibilities, means that work in traditional agriculture can in some cases form a threat to the "health, safety or morals" of children, as is specified in the Worst Forms Convention 182.

The agricultural activities of youths on commercial plantations are all damaging to the children's health, safety and moral development and must therefore be labelled as a *worst form* of child labour. Youths working on the plantations in Ica, Peru, as well as in the corn and sugar cane harvests in Bolivia, complain about the extreme climatic circumstances, with temperatures rising to 40-45 degrees Celsius, resulting in dehydration, fainting, sunburn and sunstroke. The nature of the labour activities, including standing and bending for long periods, carrying heavy boxes or bags of fruit and vegetables, loading the sugar cane, etc, result in physical complaints such as aches in backs, waists, shoulders and arms. The use of certain tools such as knives or *machetes* often results in physical injuries; accidents such as falling off ladders and trucks are not uncommon either. In the Ica region adolescents were reported to come into contact with chemicals such as fertilizers. Besides the physical injuries, youths mention cases of intimidation and even sexual harassment by the plantation owners or work supervisors. Payment, depending on the contractor, is often late, less than was agreed on or even nonexistent. Children and adolescents participating in the sugar cane

and corn harvest in Bolivia are unable to combine their work with schooling. Summing up, the work on commercial plantations should be categorised as a *worst form* of child labour if you consider the negative effects of the work on the health, safety and morals of the young workers.

## Interventions and recommendations

In all research areas we examined interventions by NGOs and governmental organisations that work to improve the situation of child labourers in rural areas. Based on our examination of these projects we propose several policy recommendations:

- The entrance of the children and adolescent into formal commercial agricultural sectors such as the sugar cane plantations in Bolivia and all exporting plantations in Ica, Peru are facilitated by a lack of labour inspections. Additionally, when inspections do occur they are carried out on a superficial level. Labour inspectors mentioned they are short-staffed and are unable to examine the hundreds of commercial plantations for the presence of child labour. Moreover, they lack resources such as transport. Supplying the local labour inspectors with more personnel and resources would contribute to the implementation of national child labour laws.
- Removing the children and adolescents from the agricultural labour process should be accompanied by the offer of alternatives, which might be found in education (e.g. activities during the holidays) and in the economic realm, so that prohibition is combined with solutions for the structural reasons why children work in the first place.
- In Bolivia as in Peru, several projects seek to improve rural education as a strategy to combat rural child labour. Examining these projects it appeared that improving the quality and access to education has reduced the amount of children involved in agricultural activities. In Bolivia the *Aulas de Apoyo*, temporary extra lessons during harvesting periods offered by the Ministry of Labour, effectively withdrew young children from entering the sugar cane sector. In Peru parents stated they tend to send their children to school more often now, even during harvesting and sowing seasons, because of improved quality and access through the project of CESIP. However, in the rural communities there was still a lot of criticism towards rural education, which limits the full potential of this strategy in eradicating child labour. Regarding quality in Peru, parents criticised the methods of teaching as well as the apparent lack of interest from teachers, evident from their regular absences. Investing more in good quality education is recommended in these contexts.
- In all research areas there was critique on a limited access to secondary education, which forced adolescents, especially girls, into work instead of school. Building secondary schools in the communities would help improve this accessibility. In Bolivia parents also suggested making scholarships available.
- The structural economic causes of rural child labour seem to be overlooked by most interventions. Most projects focus on improving education, which in itself is insufficient to neutralise the economic causes. Parents commented that an increase in their income would take away the reasons to have their children participating in agricultural production. The parents also suggested that the creation of income generating activities in their communities, or the mechanisation of their existing agricultural activities, would be interesting solutions. These income generating activities would diminish the high level of migration from traditional communities, which causes an increase in workload for the children who stay behind and an interruption of the school year of children who accompany their families to the commercial plantations.

- In commercial agriculture a partnership with unions would help to improve working conditions for adults (including increasing income). Self-organisation can be an interesting solution in the context of the informal sector as well; the organisation of the Guaraní communities of Bolivia would strengthen their claims to own land and therefore would take away the necessity for them and their children to work on surrounding plantations.
- As adolescents are mostly working on the plantations to cover their personal costs, generating alternative work specifically for adolescents would contribute to their removal from the dangerous working conditions on the plantations. More attention and long-term emphasis on solving the structural economic causes of child labour is recommended.
- Several strategies that are redirecting the positive traditional norms in favour of work by children towards education seem to have positive results in diminishing rural child labour. In Bolivia, the Radio program of LABOR together with the Federation of Sugar Cane Harvesters appeared to reach many sugar cane labourers. In Peru, child rights education for the parents in the project of CESIP (*escuela de padres*) seemed to have contributed in changing traditional values. However, caution is crucial in respect to the effectiveness of child rights education; an improved knowledge of child rights did not seem a guarantee that these are actually claimed, an assumption that especially lies at the basis of CODEH-Ica project. The contrary is in fact true; especially young children seemed to be working out of economic necessity and they actually mentioned that they often choose situations of exploitation and abuse over claiming their rights. They do not want to run the risk of losing a necessary income by claiming better working conditions from their employers. Instead of improving working conditions, protective measures such as removing children from the working activities seem to be a more realistic approach.
- Tripartite negotiations between landowners, NGOs and governmental officials organised by the NGO LABOR resulted in agreements on the prohibition of child labour in sugar cane plantations and better wages for adult harvesters. In Peru these negotiations might be an interesting option to reach similar agreements, which are in fact useful tools to eradicate child labour on the exporting plantations.
- Lastly, in both research settings many children entered the labour process as there were no attractive alternatives. In Bolivia, young children are taken to the sugar cane plantations as there are no possibilities to leave the children behind in the camps. In Peru, children and adolescents commented they often preferred coming with their parents or leaving to work on their own account, because there is usually not much to do in their communities during school holidays. It would thus be helpful to organise childcare and creative and educational activities in camps and villages where the children and adolescent workers come from.



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