

ILS Discussion Paper Series 10-2010

**Not Letting a Single Domino Fall:
Towards a Child Labor-Free
Philippines**

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INSTITUTE FOR LABOR STUDIES
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1

Youth employment and child labor: Revisiting the crucial link

The domino effect is the idea that some changes, small as it may, will cause a similar change nearby, which then will cause another similar change following a linear sequence. While this well-known metaphor has justified many geopolitical objectives during the Cold War period, it still has an important place in today's different policy debates.

For one, the Domino Theory can best depict the implication of child labor to youth and in turn, to the country's future workforce. As one child laborer, deprived from education can become that first single domino to fall, the chain reaction it can create will undermine the potentials of that individual, who could have helped his family, community, and consequently, the society in securing a better future. It is for this reason that Life cycle perspective and the promotion of inter-generational solidarity in the achievement of decent work for all cannot divorce youth employment from combating child labor.

Child labor is closely related to youth labor market outcomes. Early experiences in the labor market can significantly influence lifetime patterns of employment, pay and unemployment. With low levels of human capital, former child laborers are at a particular disadvantage in terms of finding and maintaining a place in the adult labor force.

School non-entrants and early-leavers is a particular policy concern, for with very little human capital they are especially vulnerable to undesirable transition outcomes. Dropping out of school at an early age leaves children less prepared to find productive jobs later in life. This proves that education has positive influence on occupational type. More-educated workers are much more likely to have employment and much less likely to be in unpaid work than their less-educated counterparts.

If there are many young people who do not have smooth transition from school to work, meaning with inadequate access to education, training and apprenticeship that matches labor market needs, engaging themselves to the worst forms child labor is often times the only means to survive. And by the time the child laborers have their own family to support, they again need to withdraw their own children from school to augment their family income. Child labor galvanizes the vicious cycle of destitution among the same people, making the escape from poverty trap even more difficult.

Child labor exacerbates the problem of youth unemployment, especially when the labor force is growing faster than what the labor market can absorb. Hence, while youth participation in the labor force is high, most unemployment is also among the young. It is often the case that child labor exists alongside youth unemployment. While children are at work rather than in school, the labor supply of young people goes unutilized or underutilized.

Addressing child labor can define the success of any interventions that will promote decent and productive employment for the youth. The solutions through skills trainings, entrepreneurship, employment facilitation and career counseling are essential components of preparations before entering the world of work. These interventions might be too little, too late as hazardous work crippled young workers even before realizing their potentials. Hence, it is neither wise nor efficient policy to have youth employment strategies compensate for the problems brought about by the indifference toward combating child labor, most importantly its worst forms.

2

Child labor in the Philippines: Figures and numbers

In the Philippines, children leave schools to work in order to cushion the family from social shocks and ensure that the households survive during difficult times. According to the study conducted by the National Economic Development Authority (NEDA) titled: *Macro Study: Causes and Consequences of Child Labor in the Philippines*, determinants of child labor at the household level are large family sizes and poverty, productive potential of members in domestic and market work, and substitution possibilities between child and parents' work.

According to 2008 Gender Statistics on Labor and Employment (GSLE) produced by the Bureau of Labor and Employment Statistics, there were about 2.1 million economically active children in the Philippines, aged 5 to 17 years. This constitutes 7.6% of the total population of children in the same age group. Majority of the working children are male, aged 15-17 years. (Figure 1)

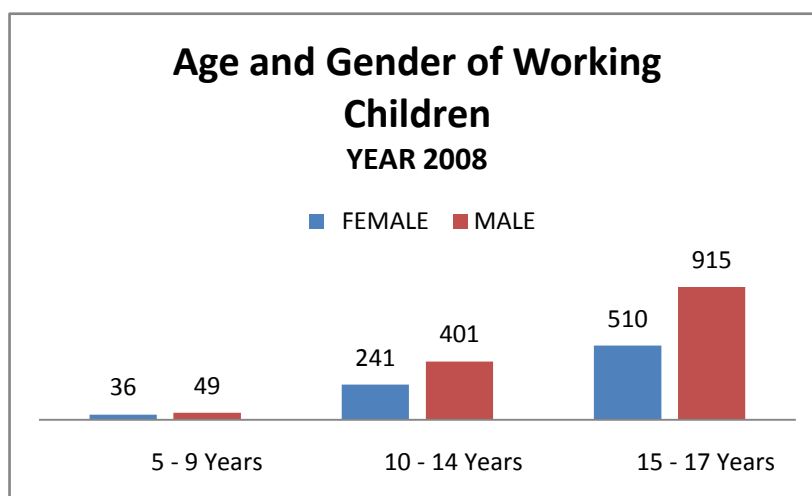


Figure 1: Profile of working children in terms of age and gender
Source: Bureau of Labor Statistics, GSLE 2008

The general trend of child labor in the Philippines is declining. The results of GSLE from 2006 to 2008 showed that more than 8% has been decreased in the number of working children both for male and female. This means that within a three-year period, an estimated 200,000 children already stopped from working across the different industries.

The highest decline among the working age group is 5-9 years old both for male and female, with 33% and 29% decrease, respectively. (Figure 2)

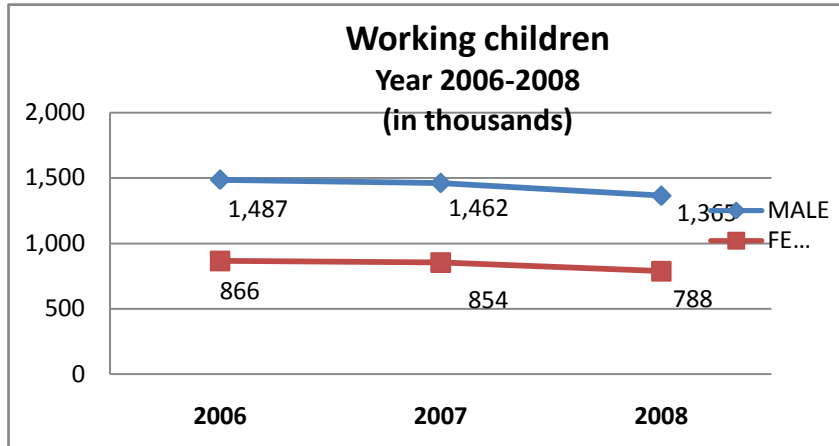


Figure 2: Trend in the no. of working children from 2006-2008
Source: Bureau of Labor Statistics, GSLE 2008

A deeper study of figures shows that across industries more than half or 55.6% of the working children were engaged in agriculture, hunting and forestry, 17% were in wholesale and retail trade, repair of motor vehicles motorcycles and personal and household Goods. The number of children in private households with employed persons was registered at around 201,000 or 19% of the total number of working children. Further, 5.6 % of working children were involved in fishing, while around 4.3% were in manufacturing enterprises. (Figure 3)

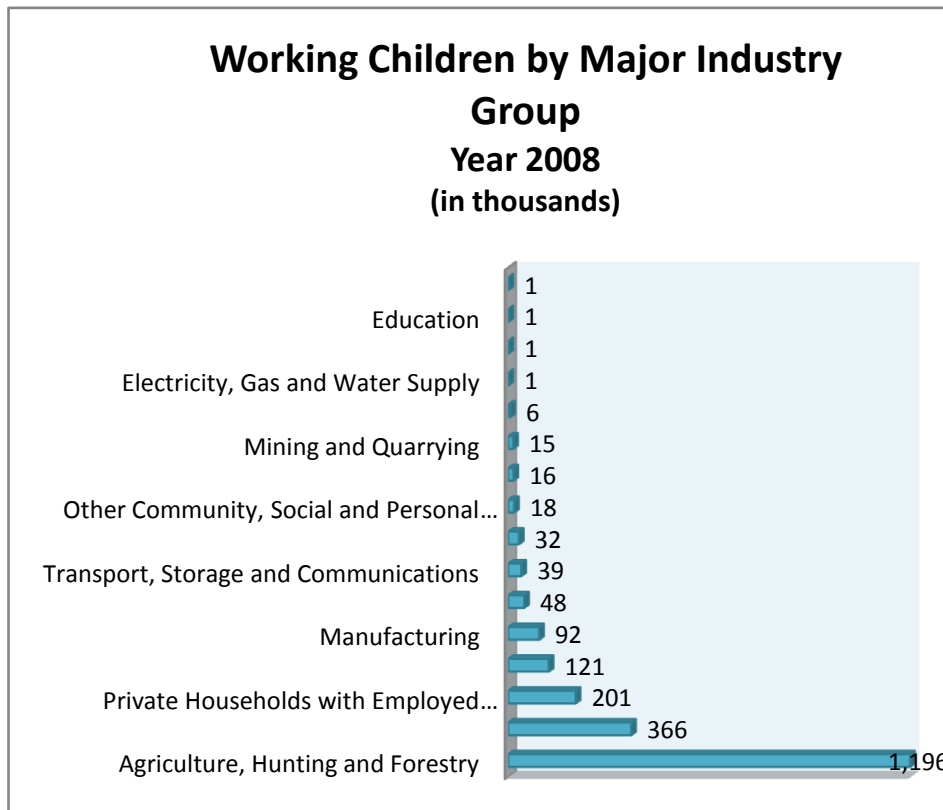


Figure 3: Distribution of working children across major industry
Working Children
Source: Bureau of Labor Statistics, GSLE 2008

It is a welcome development that the general trend in the number of working children in the Philippines is declining. However, a closer look at the type of industry where 2.1 million working children are still engaging, should cause some alarm to government and social partners.

It is evident that top industries, which include agriculture, fishing and domestic work, are not considered safe for working children. These industries may expose the children to unhealthy environment and difficult conditions like using dangerous machinery, equipment and tools, and handling or transport of heavy loads.

The same concern is depicted in terms of major occupation group of working children. Statistics shows that majority of them are working as laborers and unskilled workers. They are assigned with jobs that are most probably dirty, manual and physically strenuous. However, as they stay longer in this type of occupations, they also lose opportunities to develop more skills, which is crucial for them, to move to higher paying jobs.

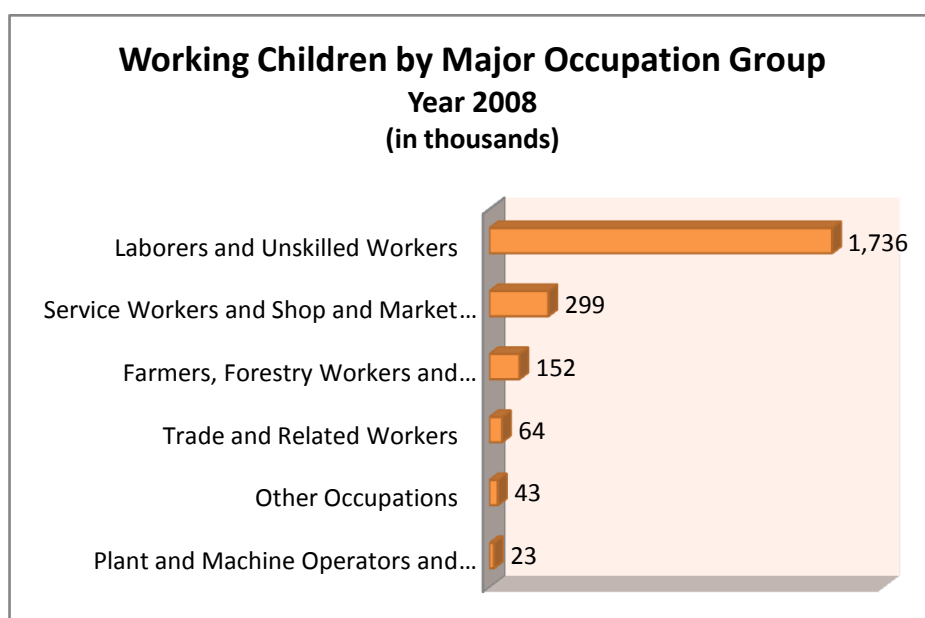


Figure 4: Distribution of working children across major occupation group
Source: Bureau of Labor Statistics, GSLE 2008

Ensuring that children are in schools and not engaging in any form of hazardous work is a known strategy to combat child labor but difficult to implement. The figures released by Department of Education revealed that for the last 5 years, dropout rate has only decreased by less than 1%. This means that every year, there are about 865,908 children who are leaving school, and therefore, missing the chance of having a productive and decent work in the future.

Further, educational opportunities are unequally distributed especially among the poor in the rural areas, where almost two-thirds of the workers failed to reach high school. Families that can afford to shoulder the cost of education are effectively subsidized, thus dissipating limited

government resources that could have been used for improving the quality of education and to support poor students. (ILO, 2008)

According to the 2001 NCS, almost one fourth of the working children reported that their work seriously interfered with school performance. This is particularly the case in the worst forms of child labor, like deep sea fishing, mining/quarrying and sugar cane plantations and prostitution. It is also evident that children involved in domestic work may have a difficulty in combining work with schooling. Work hazards are compounded by the fact that many children are found working in the informal sector where they are beyond the protective reach of labor legislation, inspection and enforcement. (ILO, 2008)

3

Child Labor in the Philippines: Six Case Studies

Statistics and figures provide a general picture about the status of child labor in the Philippines. However, since engaging children to hazardous work is illegal, better understanding of the different issues related to child labor can be provided by different case studies and documentation.

In 2006, through the Philippine Time-Bound Programme (PTBP) on the Elimination of the Worst Forms of Child Labor (WFCL), a baseline survey was conducted on the six priority target groups of child laborers in the Philippines: children in prostitution, children in mining and quarrying, children in pyrotechnics, children in deep-sea fishing, children in sugar-cane production, and children in domestic work. The following are heavily taken from the ILO-IPEC document: Time-Bound Programme Baseline Survey, Integrative Report, pages 5-9.

Children in Prostitution

Children in prostitution refer to children under the age of 18, whether male or female, who, for money, profit, or any other consideration, or due to the coercion or influence of any adult, syndicate, or group, indulge in sexual intercourse or lascivious conduct. This includes performing in obscene exhibitions or indecent shows, whether live or in video or film. Young girls are prevalently vulnerable to prostitution but the number of boys is increasing. Most of them are recruited from the rural poor to work in the urban areas of the Philippines or abroad.

On the supply side of determinants for prostitution, factors include: poverty, no money for education, out-migration from rural to urban areas; displacement arising from natural or man-made calamities; trafficking into prostitution, or the involvement of communities or families in gearing up children for the sex trade; and community surroundings characterized by gambling and drinking and dysfunctional families where children experience parental neglect, abuse and/or strained family relations.

On the demand side, factors include: unintended adverse effects of tourism promotion, promotion of sex tourism; prevalence of patriarchal tendencies, values and attitudes that further exacerbates the involvement of younger girls because of high premium placed on 'innocence', sweetness and virginity; recruitment by older sex workers, and careless and peripheral actors-customers (i.e., operators of establishments, malls, hotels, security guards, waiters).

The consequences of children in prostitution are grave: safety and health hazards from long hours of work, night work, risks of physical violence, STD and HIV/AIDS; economic exploitation; harmful psychological effects and development of distorted values that arise from abuse, lack of

love and affection, breakdown of family ties, isolation, sexual abuse and/or perversions; endangered lives if they decide to quit, loss of self-worth, dignity and self-respect as a human being.

The following regions have been reported as having high incidence of children in prostitution: National Capital Region (Manila, Caloocan City, Quezon City, Pasig and Paranaque); Region I (La Union, Baguio City); Region III (Angeles City, San Fernando, Tarlac, Nueva Ecija, Olongapo); Region IV (Laguna, Romblon, Palawan, Batangas) and Region VII (Cebu, Toledo City, Lapu-lapu and Mandaue).

Children in mining and quarrying

Small scale mining has become the leading mineral industry in the country. Using low-level technologies and methods, production is labor-intensive and hazardous. Children are involved in all phases, from extraction to processing, as well as collecting, sorting, cooking, cleaning and transporting aggregate under difficult conditions and in locations far removed from educational facilities and adequate social services.

Small scale mining and quarrying often operate in areas outside legal, regulatory or fiscal supervision. They are prone to problems arising from violation of land-use rights, ethnic tensions and social problems related to mining (prostitution, gambling and drinking).

Children who carry stones usually complain of exhaustion, muscle pain, respiratory problems and ear infections. Their physical growth is stunted. Their hands, feet or head could be smashed by the working tools they use. They face the danger of landslides, caving or of being rolled over by boulders.

The migratory nature of the industries and the short-term utilization of mineral deposits make it difficult to implement sustainable program interventions. It is crucial to address issues of occupational safety and health. Factors such as production methods, place of work and important environmental issues for the community all need to be further studied.

Children in mining are found in Camarines Norte, the gold mines of Aroroy, Masbate; Mount Diwata (Diwalwal), Monkayo, Davao del Norte; Gango gold rush areas; Libona, Bukidnon, gold rush areas of Mat-i, Surigao del Norte.

Children in quarrying are found in Misamis Oriental; Cagayan de Oro; Albuer and Ormoc City in Leyte; Lapu-lapu and Mandaue City, Cebu; Sta. Maria, Bulacan; stone quarries of Rodriguez (Montalban), Rizal; and marble quarries in Romblon.

Children in pyrotechnics

These children are exposed to highly flammable and combustible substances in the production of firecrackers. They suffer from dizziness, asthma, weight loss, sore eyes, backaches and breathing difficulties.

Enterprises lack safety policies and procedures. A recent CO-Multiversity study quotes community workers in Bulacan as saying that "on the average every year, 3 children die, 7 are injured and PhP2.7 million (US\$54,000) is lost due to explosions."

By preparing an average of 1,000 pieces of paper containers for baby rockets in a day, a child worker earns PhP20-100 (US\$0.4 – US\$2). According to the study most have to live away from their families, and live with their co-workers in their place of work. Many of them work 6-7 days a week, with an average of 8.78 working hours per day.

Demand for child labor increases as global competition and lack of technological improvements decrease market shares, pressuring companies to decrease cost of labor to absolute minimum. Laws protecting workers are designed for large companies, not for invisible and hard-to-monitor household –based enterprises that come and go as subcontracting arrangements are forged.

Children in pyrotechnics are found in several areas around the country: Region I (La Union, Pangasinan), Region III (Bulacan), Region IV (Batangas, Cavite), Region V (Camarines Norte), Region VI (Negros Occidental, Aklan), Region VII (Cebu), Region IX (Zamboanga City), and Region XII (South Cotabato).

Children in deep-sea fishing

Mostly boys, children in deep-sea fishing are exposed to physical, chemical or biological hazards. Furthermore, they are engaged in *pa-aling* and *kubkub* fishing, two hazardous deep-sea fishing methods, which expose them to even greater risks.

Pa-aling fishing is the successor of the more popular and notorious *muro-ami* wherein fishing expeditions are done in the South China Sea or in the Sulu Sea. Both these areas are quite far. Another deep-sea-fishing activity that extensively hires children is the *kub-kub*. According to the study conducted by the Community Unlimited Inc. (CUI), also commissioned by the ILO-IPEC in 2001, come night-time *kub-kub* child labor operations require the children to perform such tasks as *maestro pansan* (over-all in-charge of the nets), *pansan*, *tundero* (in-charge of service boat), waterboy, and other minor errands.

The most difficult tasks identified by the children were pulling the nets, lifting and carrying the coolers, pulling up the anchor, carrying ice to the boat, operating the winch, pulling up the weights or sinkers, harvesting or gathering the fish using large-scoop nets, and arranging the ropes.

The *kub-kub* study also reveals that children are exposed to work hazards; they get sea-sick, vomit the whole night, get dizzy, fear of falling from the boat and fear of the sudden upsurge of storms.

Aggressive recruitment practices work hand in hand with poverty, marginal fishing and farming conditions, chronic and continuing indebtedness among poor rural families as factors driving children to work in deep-sea fishing.

Adults and children alike normally work 12-15 hours a day, diving, scaring, pulling, sorting and storing fish. A normal working day starts at 3 a.m., with breakfast at 8 a.m., and ends at 6 p.m. *Pa-aling* fishing trips can last an average 9-10 months per expedition, for which the families are given cash advances as initial payments for the work of the children.

Children stop work due to maltreatment by their masters, harsh working conditions, low income and sheer exhaustion. They complain of body pain, cuts, wounds, skin diseases, sore eyes and hearing impairment, paralysis, body burns, exhaustion and fatigue. They suffer decompression symptoms, get exposed to harsh weather conditions at sea, and high levels of noise on highly mechanized boats. Because children are not as fit as adults would be, and neither are they properly trained nor attired for the task, fatal injuries and deaths are common, caused by drowning and other hazards under water.

Working and living conditions on board fishing boats are substandard. Sleeping space, sanitary facilities and health services are inadequate. Use of water is limited to cooking and drinking only. Loneliness and repetitiveness of life at sea are detrimental to them psychologically.

Child labor in this industry are attended by outdated methods of fishing, economic incentives for hiring children, and attitudes / perceptions in fishing communities viewing children in deep-sea fishing as a normal thing.

Children in sugar cane production and harvesting

More than 2 million children were estimated to be working in agriculture, based on the 2001 survey on working children. About 1.3 million of those were below 15 years of age. Work in agriculture is physically demanding for children (ILS Report, 1994:43-44) since they are expected to carry heavy loads, get exposed to various chemicals and fertilizers, as well as to the natural elements of rain, sun and strong winds.

Around 1.5 million children are exposed to hazardous situations. Around 690,000 of them reportedly suffer from work-related injuries. They also suffer from malnutrition, retarded physical development, skin diseases, infections, wounds, cuts and bruises, dehydration, headaches, fever and body pains, and respiratory complications. Serious ailments owing to exposure to extreme weather conditions and chemicals become visible only after years of working on the plantations.

Modern agricultural methods bring further dangers as the children are not given training nor any protective gear to work the equipment or use the chemicals.

Sugarcane is a major agricultural crop. While sugarcane plantations exist in almost all regions of the country, the single biggest concentration is in Negros Occidental, whose outputs equal 49% of total sugar production nationwide.

Child workers in sugar plantations are mostly children of sugar workers and peasants, living in or just outside the haciendas. Around 60,000 children work in sugar plantations doing cane growing, harvesting and hauling, under the supervision of a *kapatas* or foreman, who ensures that they work within a time frame.

While 64% of the children in the sugarcane plantations are studying, many of them dropped out of school during the year. During off-milling season, when there is no work in the plantation, aggressive recruiters lure the children to other places, particularly Metro Manila, where they may end up in other worst forms of child labor.

Sugar plantations are found in Region III (Tarlac), Region IV (Batangas), Region VI (Negros Occidental), Region VII (Negros Oriental) and Region X (Bukidnon).

Children in domestic work

A child domestic worker (CDW) is defined as a child working in an employer's household with or without wage. CDWs perform such domestic chores such as washing dishes, cooking, cleaning the house, and looking after young children.

They come from large farming and fishing families in poor regions, who work away from their families for extended periods of time, mostly adjacent or accessible to NCR. A large number of women and children that are later trafficked for labor and sexual exploitation are initially recruited as domestic workers. CDWs form a mobile group of children, always in transit and easily turned over from one employer to another, using ports as entry/exit points as well as land and air routes.

A CDW works an average of 15 hours a day, and is on-call 24 hours a day. Leave days are usually limited to one day each month; many have no day off at all. Freedom of movement is also limited, since many are not allowed to venture beyond the house gates, except when the employer sends them on errands or brings them along when their services are needed.

Most CDWs have no work contract or benefits, no access to health services. The exposure to verbal, physical, and sexual abuse is reported to be high.

Employers, who frequently view themselves as benefactors, tend to prefer child domestic workers to a diminishing adult domestic work force that tends to go abroad. Children are perceived to be more submissive and hard working, more easily ordered about anytime for any reason, and can serve as company for the employers' children. In turn, the parents of CDWs perceive their work as a guarantee for the food, clothing, shelter, and sometimes, education, which they cannot provide; and as an opportunity to raise family status for having a worker in the big city.

4

The next steps: The Philippine Plan Against Child Labor (PPACL), 2007-2015

Child labor in the country has been the concern of the National Program against Child Labor (NPACL) for more than two decades. To address its increasing growth, complexity and ramifications, the NPACL continues to work towards the elimination of the child labor, especially in its worst forms, and aims to transform lives of child laborers, their families and communities, towards achieving their self-worth empowerment and development.

In 2000, program partners of the NPACL, drew up the strategic directions and thrusts of the program for 2000 to 2004, formulating the vision, mission, values and guiding principles and goals of the NPACL. This became the NPACL Framework, 2000-2004. This framework was the product of the partners desire to pursue individual actions towards a common goal.

In 2001, the NPACL embarked on “putting flesh” into the framework, with DOLE spearheading the formulation of action on child labor covering the period 2001-2004, engaging the commitment of the stakeholders in recognition of their crucial roles in the fight against child labor. The Strategic Plan of the NPACL, 2001-2004 was a product of the efforts of various stakeholders from the national, regional and local levels whose inputs were used as bases for formulating the national plan. This plan became the blueprint for establishing priorities, activities and resource allocation for the NPACL.

Considering that the time frame of both NPACL framework and its corresponding strategic plan has elapsed, the National Child Labor Committee saw the need to identify new thrusts and directions of the NPACL. This initiative brought into fruition the new thrusts and direction of the frameworks and plans under its new name Philippine Plan Against Child Labor, 2007-2015.

As a network of mutually-enabling social partners, the PPACL aims to work towards the prevention and progressive elimination of child labor in the country. Through the protection, withdrawal, and reintegration of child workers into a caring society it hopes to transform the lives of many victims of child labor and empower families and communities toward a more inclusive development.

The PPACL has seven strategic goals guided by well-defined development principles, which include: child focused action; rights-based approach; good governance and decent work for all.

The first strategic goal is a functional multi-level information system. In order to ensure that there is reliable data on child labor, it is expected that all regions will maintain database system to help in the sharing of expertise and resources among social partners. Stakeholders are encouraged to conduct studies on child labor with the end in view of documenting and replicating best practices on combating child labor.

Second strategic goal is the institutionalization of strategic partnership from the national to the community level. By strengthening mechanisms for partnerships the roles of specific functions of PPACL will be identified, which is integral in realizing a more proactive and responsive National Child Labor Committee. It also hopes to engage international financial and development institutions, specifically in areas of capacity building for stakeholders.

The third strategic goal deals with the realization of community actions against child labor. The organized participation of the community can broaden child rights advocacy that is linked to gender, migration, trafficking and peace-building concerns. The development of critical mass mission-oriented anti-child labor advocates is instrumental to the elimination of child labor.

Increasing access to quality and integrated services is the fourth strategic goal of PPACL. Involvement of frontline service providers like teachers, social workers, health care providers, law enforcers and prosecutors in dealing the problem child labor can have a very positive impact in the attainment of the goals. The direct services that can be provided in terms of sustained educational assistance, provision for health services for child laborers, strengthened healing and reintegration system is a very crucial provision to make a positive dent in addressing the problem of child labor.

In order to prevent the rescued children to engage themselves into child labor again, the PPACL pursue the goal of increasing access by the families and communities affected by child labor to sustainable economic opportunities. With the parents and families of child workers being provided with skills trainings, and greater access to employment and marketing opportunities, the chance of ensuring children that they stay in school rather than to work is definitely high.

The sixth strategic goal is the mainstreaming of child labor agenda in development policies and programs at all levels. The fight against child labor can easily be won if the child-centered policies are institutionalized in development plans and annual investment plans at national and local levels. Dissemination of child labor laws including the capacity building of law enforcers and implementers will redound to a more effective implementation of these policy instruments.

Related to the sixth strategic goal is the strengthening of enforcement and compliance with relevant laws and policies regarding child labor. Through this strategic goal, more tangible support can be assured to anti-child labor initiatives in terms of funding and institutional mechanisms. Specifically the intensification of *Barangay* Councils for the protection of children through *Sagip Batang Manggagawa* Quick Action teams can result to a more coordinated and successful rescue operations.

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