



Life stories and presentations from

The 1st Discussion Group

The experience of young people who have belonged
to working children's organisations

Life, Work and Dignity:
Voices of experience





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Working materials
No.4

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Hecho el Deposito Legal en la Biblioteca Nacional del Perú: 2014-10458

Photography: INFANT archives

Printed by / Impresión: Editora Diskcopy S.A.C.
Jr. San Agustín 497 – Surquillo, Lima

1era Edición
500 copies
Lima, July 2014 / Julio 2014



This book is dedicated to:

*The new generations of NNATs
in the cities, the countryside, the Andes and the
Amazon
to continue affirming with dignity
that our stories, however harsh and difficult,
do not determine our lives.*

Foreword

The first discussion group, entitled “ Life, Work and Dignity: Voices of experience”, was held on June 25, 2010 in Lima, Peru, ten years after the creation of the Working Children's Training Institute (INFANT) “Nagayama Norio”, to provide an opportunity for dialogue and reflection through discussion. The young people who took part in the discussion had belonged to working children's organisations and shared their experience. Those who were NATs very early in their lives were able to have a dynamic, open and frank discussion of the experience, conduct a retrospective analysis and rethink the role of children and of their own contribution to society.

To commemorate an event is to remember it, and to remember it is to return to the memory of what is at the heart of the reason why we are here together, and to think about how the fact of why being a working child did not lead to a private life with dignity and nobility. Nor indeed to joy or happiness.

For this reason, the aim of this first discussion group was fundamentally a chance to meet, think and rethink this experience with those who were directly involved and were the first to defend their rights.

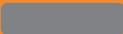
This first discussion group was a major milestone because of its political significance in a world in which private interests come first and the life of the community is undermined. Organised working children have helped to renew hope in solidarity and in politics. Their story has revealed their great ability for looking beyond their own interests and achievements and putting these at the service of the needs and expectations of all children.

INFANT's relationship with the children is based on affection and mutual learning and has led us to believe in them, because of their ability to transform their lives and our own.

This link is about developing solidarity and social and political responsibility. Children do not want to be just the object of adult responsibility. They want to share the responsibility. We cannot forget these lives because their stories have taught us to recognise forms of resilience in the face of difficulties which they have been obliged to – and continue to - surmount.

We hope to guarantee a second discussion group on “Life, Work and Dignity”, to continue offering new generations of NNATs a new vision, the strength of hope and confidence in themselves.

Esther Díaz
Director
INFANT

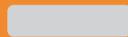
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CHILDREN AND WORK, ORGANISATION AND THE CHALLENGES OF GLOBALISATION



Aladino Valdiviezo Alegría



My name is Aladino Valdiviezo Alegría. I am 21 and I was born in Peru's eastern jungle in the town of Pucallpa. I am reading Anthropology, Politics and Economics in the United States at the College of Idaho. I also attended the United World Colleges (UWC) in Norway, where I studied for the International Baccalaureate for two years. I am from a very large family, of three boys and five girls. I am the fourth, and so far I am the only one that is finishing a university degree.

I was seven when I started working. I would help my father selling cleaning materials on the streets of Pucallpa. My father had a small business and came from Piura. He bought products from the big companies in Lima for a low price and then sold them to the small shops and offices in Pucallpa. At first I just went with my father at weekends. Both he and my mother worked and earned well, and there was no need for us – their children – to work. But my father always told us that it was important for us to start to learn about the economic movement of his business, because we would take it over when he was no longer there. In that stage of my life, work for me meant a way to learn how to make the most of my abilities: I stopped being shy when talking to people and I developed my own way of talking, which I used to convince people to buy from me.

Above all, it helped me get to know my father and spend more time with him. Sadly, my father died in 2001 and I had to work and to work hard. We all had to work day and night to pay off the debts he had left in the town and at the hospital. The worst of it was that my mother was expecting twins and they were born seven days after my father died. We found ourselves in the midst of a great dilemma, facing death and life at home at the same time. It was then that I started to take care of my brothers and sisters, and I am still striving so that my family can get ahead in life.

**“ F O R E A C H N A T ,
O R G A N I S A T I O N H A S B E E N
T H E W A Y T O D E V E L O P
T H E I R B E S T A B I L I T I E S , A
F O R M O F P R O T E C T I O N A N D
A N I N S T R U M E N T F O R
R E P R E S E N T I N G O U R O W N
I D E N T I T Y ”**

That is what I was doing when I found the Pucallpa Working Children's House (CANAT), which had been created by MANTHOC and then guided by the Catholic Church in Pucallpa. There I met adolescents in similar or worse situations, and because of them, and with them, we built up a spirit of defiance, though with flexibility and humility. I

made my most important network of contacts with NATs and collaborators there, which helped my education. Because of them I have declared a pact of honour: “When I have finished my studies, I will go back and work in Peru”. Because together with them I have discovered that I am made for this, to struggle and shape a bright world with dreams and hopes, which is what makes us human. To defend the rights that is almost always stolen away by others. We have set off on an exodus leading towards the dignity of life and the emancipation of Peruvians, who are increasingly oppressed.

In my life, MNNATSOP has meant the spirit of childhood, love and hope, and I am sure that this feeling has become more powerful with all who have gone through similar experiences. My experience demonstrates that when NATs have the chance of finding somewhere where they are appreciated and respected as children and workers, and an organisation where they can think, reflect and develop a critical and self-critical attitude, then NATs progress and have no reason to envy other children. Organisation has been the way to develop their best abilities, a form of protection and an instrument for representing our own identity.

In the circle of culture one is not taught, one learns through reciprocal action. Children work to contribute to the reciprocal efforts of their families. In our indigenous Amazon cultures, children learn to live helping in the subsistence activities of the community. Man does not create the chance of being free, he learns to exercise freedom and make it effective. The organisation offers a platform where NATs meet others with the same dreams and feelings, and on getting to know them they get to know themselves.

Working children are not people to be rescued or saved. They are subjects who must define themselves responsibly through organised dialogue. Their work as NATs and their reflection together in the organisation are one and the same thing which should not be divided, because words, the result of a constant quest for solutions to the daily frustrations they face and of a critical and committed dialogue, are not hollow or empty, but a current of opinion that brings with it the power to transform life itself.

Organisation, unlike school, stimulates genuine thinking. School can see children as 'ignorant', lacking in knowledge, and hence it must transfer information and values to them. The organisation promotes companionship. It sees NATs as subjects and not objects in the world. Schools see education as making a deposit in the child's mind; but for the organisation, education is working through the problems the NATs

have in their work and in their lives. Children are not educated as individuals but in community and the organisation is the means. The role of the collaborator is to provide, together with the NATs, the conditions for further learning.

The organisation is not for indoctrination, it does not aim to change the mentality of the NATs, or deposit in them certain information, as the ILO states; it aims to show the NATs the incredible power they have to rebuild the world. To do this, first we must understand and study the problems we have as people in the world and with the world; we must sense the challenge and recognize our role in the world and have the tools to meet our obligations.

**“ORGANISATION,
UNLIKE SCHOOL,
STIMULATES GENUINE
THINKING”**

In the societies of today, adolescents are judged by the number of things they possess, their race and their family's material power. But what is hardly ever recognized is what is in their minds, the love in their hearts and the strength of their spirit. People grow through being motivated to transform what is organic into what is inorganic, seeing life mechanically, as if people were all objects and not living beings. Feelings and values become things you can handle which can be bought with money. Having and not being is what is important!

When individuals lose possession of things, they lose contact with the world. Today more than ever, companies see children as the object for the consumption of their products: cell phones, computers, MP3s, cars and all types of junk that modern technology invents. Children today love their computer controls more than their own siblings. But they do

not realize that humanity's worst crimes were made possible thanks to modern technology. The culture of work, of sacrifice and love are being replaced by the culture of consumption and control. We young people who have had the experience of being NATs reaffirm our will to combat that mentality, for the wellbeing of the coming generations.

BUILDING IDENTITY, SOCIAL ACTION, CLASS COMMITMENT AND SOCIAL SERVICE FROM MY EXPERIENCE AS A WORKING CHILD



Alex Iván Aquino Chilón

Carpenter, cabinet-maker, ninth semester sociology student at Cajamarca National University, youth representative at the Regional Coordination Council (CCR) 2009 –2010. Manager of the “SAYARI MAQTHA” small business, militant of the Christian Worker Youth (JOC) and volunteer collaborator with MANTHOC.

“We are working children who have organised as a movement. We stand for working and living with dignity. That is our hope.

We stand in solidarity with and are committed to our community and the people where we live. We fight poverty and injustice. Hence we are organised not only nationally but internationally (...) we are not the problem, but rather part of the solution (...) we cannot eradicate poverty but we can help to improve the situation”¹

I remember how I started in life, when at the age of six I entered the world of work helping my mother selling fruit in the market. By the time I was nine, I was working alone. I sold jelly and newspapers, and when I

.....
1 Summary of the presentation “Work and Education” made at the International Youth Hearing for Justice and Peace (Weljugendtag), 2005, Cologne, Germany. “Visions of Catholic youth for building a just and peaceful world”. Published in four languages by Deutschen Katholischen Jugend (BDKJ).

was 11 years old I decided to work as a barrow-boy in the market. At 16, I started to work as a carpenter.

These jobs helped me to pay my school expenses, help my parents and brothers and sisters and feel I was a useful part of the family and someone who contributed to the country's economy. That is why it makes me angry that the government makes the self-employed pay taxes while the transnationals get tax stability, their debts are condoned and they are asked to give a "voluntary payment" - like the mining companies, instead of being made to pay their taxes.

I stopped being a working child, an organised NAT, five years ago. I feel that now I have developed as a worker, intellectually and as an active member of my community, and I know that I can work with no difficulty in any activity, because as a child I learned the value of working, not just in the economic aspect but in my personal and social development.

When I finished serving as a MANTHOC national delegate, at my farewell party with my fellow delegates, I remember at the closing ceremony of the NATs and collaborators' assembly I said I would devote my life to the "principles and perspectives of MANTHOC". If I were asked today to give an account of the commitment I made, I would say that I have really tried to fulfil it, but I am still not satisfied, and so I spend my spare time accompanying working children. They feel the same affection, and the same indignation towards social injustice. So day by day, we nourish each other's hope for a better world, and we develop as people through assuming our role as protagonists in society, as our government is in the hands of a lot of politicians who have created an inefficient and corrupt bureaucracy that traffics the interest of the people, which has deepened poverty and reproduces it, with the justification of economic growth, whatever the cost.

The crisis in representation in Peru has led to political disaffection, but because of my experience in organisation I feel a real passion for

politics, because the social change we aspire to depends on this, and our political action need us to apply our integrity, honesty, transparency, solidarity and establish the common good and not our own personal wellbeing as the overall goal.

When I “came of age” I started to think about the new phase of my life, and I had to choose a career. Obviously I had developed a vocation in MANTHOC and wanted to choose a career in social service, so my first try was to study theology, but there was too much red tape. So I decided to apply to read a degree in social sciences. I decided to read sociology, because I wanted to be part of the intellectual work of some great friends whom I admire and respect greatly, like Alejandro Cussianovich, Giorgi Schibotto, Manfred Liebel and others, and also because I had begun to hear about and read the theory of sociology by sociologists like Marx, Lenin, Gramsci, Mariátegui, Germána and Anibal Quijano. My first book was a gift from an Italian friend; it was *Global Village* by Noam Chomski, and it was these books that strengthened my interest in the social sciences. My courses have broadened my view of the world, of interpretation and the unveiling of problematic reality which can make us afraid, as Pierre Bourdieu said in reply to the question “Does sociology make us afraid?”: “Yes, because it unveils things hidden and sometimes repressed”. I feel the challenge is just as great, but I do not want to speak about unveiling things and writing essays, I want to go beyond that and do what Marx meant when he said “Philosophers have done no more than interpret the world in different ways; but the point is to change it”. From this perspective, we should recreate theory, validate it against reality and make that transition towards the transformation of the conditions of our lives.

So I had to use the praxis of my formation and experience which I had acquired in the organisation where I internalized values, such as solidarity, social awareness, cooperation and the democratic values which are a part of our organisation. That is why I want to take part in plenty of areas in the public domain which demand views and proposals

which are different, projective, realistic, coherent, tenable and sustainable, and this has strengthened my role as a protagonist and a citizen.

I was elected as a representative to the Regional Coordination Council (Cajamarca, 2009 – 2010), and I assumed the role with a great sense of responsibility, conviction and with no hesitation, besides participating in the Cajamarca University Federation and in the creation of the Regional Youth Council (Cajamarca), where I and my colleagues have pooled our experience to make this organisation, as far as possible, broad, plural and independent from political parties which would make it lose sight of its original purpose.

I had to take part in the fight against corruption and its system which corrodes our institutions, weakens organisations and buys off consciences, provoking divisions, distrust and desperation in Peru. This is why the team we set up in Cajamarca, the students of the First Anti-corruption School, promoted by Proética, decided to take on corruption in the education sector, and to date our advocacy has produced some good results.

I am also the youth representative on the Fight Against Poverty Round Table, and the citizens' movement '*Para Que No Se Repita*' and others.

"I AM FROM CAJAMARCA, AND I COULD NOT BE INDIFFERENT TO THE PROBLEMS PEOPLE HERE SUFFER, ESPECIALLY THE FARMING PEOPLE, WHERE I HAVE MY ROOTS".

I am from Cajamarca, and I could not be indifferent to the problems people here suffer, especially the farming people, where I have my roots. The socio-environmental conflicts arising from mining led me to take part in the environmental protection fronts and jeopardize my freedom. Sadly, the protest against the pollution of our water, land and

air has been weakened by the repression of the leaders and by dishonest environment defenders being bought off.

I believe that the organised working children of the 1970s, those who came after and those who are currently in the movement, see from their condition as workers the recovery of the value of work in the wider sense (it leads to greater humanity and dignity) and do not reduce it to an economic activity. This is expressed in the critical appreciation of children's work, an approach built and reaffirmed on the basis of our experience. Marx heralded this in his works, in the famous passage in his "Letters to Kugelmann: Every child knows that any nation that stopped working, not for a year, but let us say, just for a few weeks, would perish" (Marx, 1868:180).

" I BELIEVE THAT THE ORGANISED WORKING CHILDREN OF THE 1970S, THOSE WHO CAME AFTER AND THOSE WHO ARE CURRENTLY IN THE MOVEMENT, SEE FROM THEIR CONDITION AS WORKERS THE RECOVERY OF THE VALUE OF WORK IN THE WIDER SENSE (IT LEADS TO GREATER HUMANITY AND DIGNITY) AND DO NOT REDUCE IT TO AN ECONOMIC ACTIVITY"

In their quest for fairer conditions and laws that protect them from labour and economic exploitation, the NATs themselves have developed labour alternatives they themselves manage. I am a young worker, and the demand is the same: work with dignity. While we now have legal recognition and the problems are different, labour exploitation is no less aggressive. This is why we need to generate new labour alternatives for a more just and more human economic model. This is why some friends and I set up the micro-business "SAYARI MAQTA", to create jobs, in the form of the solidarity economy, and this is now up and running.

The working children who have been part of the organisation, those of us who were fortunate enough to be made delegates for our local branches, to ensure local, regional, national and international

representation, in response to the trust placed in us strove to represent children like us, the most vulnerable sector, excluded and stigmatized by certain powerful strata of our society, and the directors of international organisations and NGOs. They have not had to face the difficult circumstances which we have faced with constant solidarity, active, responsible, critical participation and by raising awareness. We have forged a solid social fabric, able to build where there are disasters, to bring hope where there is extreme poverty and where hardship has caused many to lose their human dignity and move into the world of crime.

This is why our organisation and all the people in it that maintain it have safeguarded the great heritage received from former working children, who are now parents, community leaders and business men. These experiences cannot today be written off as exceptions, as many would like, in order to conceal the role work has had in transforming us into active citizens. We have only to look at our neighbouring countries and other continents where our organisation has expanded with its message of freedom from economic and labour exploitation and the social inequality that we want to change.

Many current working children and former working children know about poverty and what a satisfaction and comfort our work is, and about the experience of changing the conditions in which we live. By discussing our experiences we simply want to walk the same way as those who are building their country across Peru and the world. Today, one of our great challenges is to safeguard the natural world as far as possible; we must encourage every child to care for the environment, to learn different habits in order to respect and safeguard the environment and to avoid the acceleration of global warming.

I would like to express my gratitude to the collaborators who gave their time to give us a comprehensive education; to our parents whom we have worked alongside, our work mates with whom we sketched out our goals in life and which we are now approaching.

To all new working children, I would say that you must have faith and hope that another world is possible, and to build it we must not allow our dreams to be defeated: together let us build – with good will, conviction and fortitude – a Peru and a world with greater justice, humanity and solidarity.

WORK, POVERTY AND DIGNITY: RESILIENCE IN WORKING CHILDREN



Francisco David Estigarribia Barreto



I am Paraguayan, and I am reading social work at the philosophy faculty at the University of Asunción in Paraguay.

I am currently working at the National Children's Secretariat in the President's Office.

My link with the NATs' organisation: I accompany the National Working Children's Coordinating Committee (CONNATs Paraguay).

I wish to thank INFANT for making possible this meeting between those of us who have had the privilege of the experience of being part of the working children's organisation, and who are now active in the various places wherever we are, but without forgetting everything that that it meant and means for our lives.

I am the fifth of nine brothers and sisters. We lived in San Antonio, a city very close to Asunción. All my brothers and sisters worked, at home, in the neighbourhood or away.

As a NAT, from the age of six I sold pasties near my house. My mother made them for my brothers and me to sell, with fruit and vegetables that she bought at the market. I went on to work with her in the market. We left the house very early, and while my mother bought the goods I picked up the damaged fruit that the shopkeepers threw away. Then

we went to the bus terminal to sell our things. I would work with her to midday because after that I went to school. Actually, I always say that I learned maths at work, because it was not for an exam, it was real life, as I had to give and receive money at work. Everything I earned went on school, materials, uniform, and snacks and as at home we all worked, I just spent a small amount on general expenses.

I also cleaned windows; I sold candy, soft drinks, and all sorts of things; I worked as a gardener. I did all kinds of jobs, which kept me busy, helped my family and meant that I felt useful because I could go to school and help others.

All my brothers and sisters were organised working children. Bruno, my elder brother, was also a national CONNATs delegate. I joined the Asunción bus terminal shoe-shiners' organisation when I was ten or younger, and at twelve I was the shoe-shiners' representative. There were 50 of us and we worked in two shifts, some in the morning and some in the afternoon.

I worked in the afternoon shift, and when it was over I worked at my mother's stand where she sold foodstuffs. I waited there till about 12 midnight and then we would go home together; the next day I had to be at school at seven in the morning. That was hard, because I was tired, and sometimes I didn't go to school, and I didn't study hard. While I was doing all this, I would do the organisation work with my friends, Purita, Joel, Carol, Eliezer, Mariela, David, Ignacio, Maria, Enrique and Dani. A great team. Fortunately, my family gave me a lot of support in that, as they always understood the responsibilities and duties, and because my mother was in the NATs Parents' Organisation. They usually accompany us in the work of the organisation. They helped us organise the national meetings, demonstrations, public activities, and they even accompanied us to the delegates' activities, and sometimes our mothers came with the groups of NATs.

Here, I want to mention some things that the NATs' organisation gave to our lives.

Today, thanks to work and the organisation, besides my personal efforts and my family's support, I am reading social sciences at university.

I would not have been able to sit here with you today and tell you about my life if I had not been in the NATs' organisation. I was given the chance of finding things out, learning and travelling thanks to the organisation and to being a worker.

“I BELIEVE THAT WE ARE ABLE TO THINK CRITICALLY ABOUT THE WORLD WE LIVE IN, AS GOOD OR BAD, BECAUSE WE HAVE HAD THIS EXPERIENCE”

I believe that if we are able to think critically about the world we live in, as good or bad, it is because we have had this experience.

Finally, I think that if we really take this on board, then we have an obligation to demand the right to be workers, but fundamentally it seems to me that we have a debt to the Working Children's Movement, and that should make us act coherently and responsibly and, wherever we are, to exercise that protagonism that we have demanded and tried to build, together with our friends and families, and always maintain our commitment to our communities and people.

THE EXPERIENCE OF FORMER NATS AN EXPERIENCE LEAVES ITS MARK



Qualification: Technical Certificate in
Small and Micro Business
Administration and Marketing

Jover Enríquez Quispe

Ladies and gentlemen of the Working Children's Training Institute, the organisers of this magnificent event "Life, Work and Dignity: Voices of experience"; ladies and gentlemen representatives of the NATs' social organisations, fellow speakers and members of the public, I would like to express a fraternal greeting on this afternoon of a transcendental meeting of players and activists in the defence of human rights.

Before making my presentation, I would like to thank the organisers for inviting me to this important discussion group. It is worth saying that it is a good way to assert our rights as young people who have the experience of being working children, taking an active part in the various scenarios that affect our identity and respect as former NATs. Today once again, on coming together we refute the senseless arguments of those who do not believe in organised NATs. We can tell them that it is thanks to our work that today we can tell each other about the success of our experience.

Since I joined the Working Children's Association (ASJANTs, Huancavelica), I have had the chance to learn about the social problems we experience at work, at school and in the community. Since then, as a family, we have tried to raise awareness among community organisations and local authorities and to assert our rights as working children. From that time, we have been working in coordination with the national NATs movement, where I learned that the responsibility of being a national delegate is a challenge and an opportunity, because we represent not just the region we come from but a number of organisations in the country. It was there that I learned to appreciate the diversity of cultures and the activities of the NATs from different areas of Peru.

Thanks to the experiences and opportunities which I had in the national movement and other forums, I was able to describe my experience in the various local, national and international scenarios, wherever I was.

When I was at Sergio Arboleda University in Colombia, those of us with scholarships from the IALS – IDB programme had a commitment to carry out community activities in our spare time, and so I volunteered in several foundations: FUNDEHUMAC, Construyendo Futuro, Pro Niño and other entities.

When I started my work as volunteer at the Fundación Pro Niño (Children's Foundation) in Santa Marta (Colombia), I realized that almost all the people working there thought that children who work on the street are children who have no chance of getting higher education, children with no future. These ideas had encouraged me to go on working as a volunteer in the various areas where the Foundation works.

Wherever I worked, I told people about my experience as a former NAT and tried to help them understand that being a working child does not

mean dropping out of school, on the contrary, it is a tool for educating yourself and for improving the conditions in which you live in the face of government indifference. A month after the Foundation had asked me to visit schools and communities, the staff asked me to describe my experience as a NAT and support the Children's Network in the Magdalena department (Colombia). This was the most important experience for me, because it made me happy that the staff at the Foundation had understood that children's work is not dangerous, it is exploitation and abuse which are a danger to children; and that children's work is a cultural right, and that institutions should promote better working conditions for children.

“LEAVE YOUR MARK
WHEREVER YOU GO, A MARK
OF SUCCESS AND TRIUMPH”

I would like to speak to all the NATs in MNNATSOP and friends who are at this table. The success we enjoy today are simply the efforts of our organisations, our successes are not just our own but all of theirs. But this success will always be solid and when our experiences are synonymous with teaching new generations: leave your mark wherever you go, a mark of success and triumph. Finally I would like to thank someone who has been important to me in my life, and I know that is true for all of you, too: I am speaking of our friend, companion and teacher, Alejandro Cussiánovich, “Chito”, thanks to whose teaching I am able to share this part of my life's journey. Thank you, Chito, for teaching me that the protagonism of MNNATSOP is always in our hands, and thank you for letting me make my own mistakes, thank you for sharing your time, thank you for continuing to teach the NATs.

Thank you very much.

POVERTY, DIGNITY AND CHILDREN'S WORK



Narcizo Gomez Pillaca



I am 21; I am in the fourth year of my literature degree at San Luís Gonzaga University in Ica. At the moment, thanks to my formation in the organisation, I am in the top third at the university and I am standing for the position of councillor in my district. I would have liked to stand for mayor but I thought about it rather late.

It would be easy for us former NATs, most of whom come from humble backgrounds, to go speech-making about our poverty and personal and home misfortune because we were working children, at school, and the children and brothers and sisters of an often large family. But that is not our aim, it never was, we did not do that as organised children. We used to speak of our lives and struggles in the organisation, at work and at school. I think that I feel a personal commitment to tell people about my experience as a NAT because I heard that people say that those of us who used to be working children may as adults have mental problems and that we are the cause of the underdevelopment of the region. I would like to start by sending my greetings to those gentlemen who, all high and mighty, seated in their crocodile-skin chairs, with fat wallets thanks to the enormous salaries they get for implementing pointless projects, to the detriment of millions of working children worldwide, launch offensive and denigrating arguments against working children today, those who used to work and those who will.

It is true, I have to admit, I was not always happy to work, I wasn't

strolling through the fields picking flowers and putting them in a basket to take them to my granny. I have to accept it; I was exploited, mistreated and badly paid most of the time. If you doubt it, ask the adult workers in the agro-exports companies in Ica. If for them the labour rights monitoring system functions through bribery and oiling palms, the system of protection for the children who work in the countryside does not even exist, simply because we have no right to work. We are illegal workers, so for the law we are ghosts, and the agriculture businesses take advantage. I remember one day seven of my friends and I were spraying the maize of a small-holder who lives near us. We went to the fields and worked from seven in the morning till three in the afternoon; we finished the work and went to get our pay. He told us to come back the next week. We went back a week later and he didn't pay us and when we insisted he said "You know what lads? Go and complain wherever you like, I haven't any money and I cannot pay you, if you want, you can wait for the harvest". So we said to each other: "There are seven of us, what shall we do, we can smash his car windows or his door, but then he'll go and buy the new windows with our money", so we decided not to wait for the harvest and to harvest some of the maize early, which in the end was useless because the maize was not ripe and we couldn't sell it or water it, or anything. So we ended up getting paid but without being able to enjoy it. This is just one of the many such experiences I have had and I am sure others here have too.

I have worked as long as I remember, and I didn't start to feel the dignity of work, until I found the organisation. When I was five, I started working because there were seven of us of school age, and only my mother who, heaven knows how, fed and clothed us. I have always thought she must have been a witch because she managed to get all seven of us and herself fed from a quarter of chicken. I started working because I wanted to buy myself a uniform and a pair of shoes for school and some good exercise books to take notes in and for my homework. If there was one thing I was sure of when I started to work, it was that I wanted to see the world and study literature and build a house for my mother, and the only way I was going to do that was by going to school,

and the only way to stay at school was working in whatever work there was.

I started to pick cotton with my sister, from 5 am to 4 pm or until we finished picking all the cotton in the field. My sister made breakfast at 3:30 am, we'd leave home at 4:30 am and we'd get to the fields at 5 am or later. It was fun because we were all friends and we would usually be chatting and had competitions to see who could earn more money by the weekend or payday, which was generally Saturday. It was all fun, except the pay, which was like a bad joke and still is today. We worked in those jobs in the summer time, until school started. That used to be in April, but now it is March, because the brilliant minister of education decided to announce that if children are to learn more, they must study more, and affected nearly four million NATs who do odd jobs through the summer (and many all year round) to cover the cost of going to the free state schools.

Working wasn't always fun, because sometimes people would shout at us or threaten to lay us off or say they wouldn't pay us unless we worked fast and in silence. I still didn't know the word dignity, or this expression, which turns out to be philosophical: "work with dignity", until I was invited to join a group of working children. At first, my mother let me go on one condition, my "mission", that I had to tell her if my sisters were after boyfriends, so that she could slap some sense into them, stop them deceiving her, she said. But in the end, I forgot my "mission" and I was fascinated by this expression that the collaborator announced so clearly, "work with dignity", and I wondered what it meant: a job is a job, it doesn't matter what it is, it's a job. But it wasn't easy to understand, because I had to tell my mother all about it and in the first few weeks I just listened but didn't understand, because I was preoccupied with my mission. I think I pretended that each of my sisters had a boyfriend, because they had given me very little for my week's work and my mother gave them a real beating to teach them not to be deceitful. I went on working for a while like that, wondering what working in decent conditions meant, what did such a complicated sentence mean? I was nine, and I couldn't understand until I went to a meeting where I

understood that work with dignity is not a concept but a right.

It means working in good conditions, with no one shouting at me, where I didn't feel like a pack animal, a job with the right to finish the day at the right time and be well paid. From that day on, I thought that cotton-picking was one of the worst jobs a child could end up doing. First, because there is absolutely no health protection from contamination by chemicals; second, because the eight-hour day does not exist in picking cotton; third because what you get paid is a bad joke.

But I still had my dream of studying literature and travelling. It was always clear as daylight to me that the only way out of poverty was studying and striving to realise my dreams. That's when I decided to go into business and set up my own business selling high-quality frozen products, iced lollies and soft drinks. At that time, CODEH-ICA had a NNATs programme that helped children who wanted to have a business. I went to the NNATs centre and they gave me a polystyrene box for my high-quality frozen products. So I went home, mended an old bike and went out to sell my goods in places where I used to work. At the start things went well, and I managed to save enough in a month to buy a shirt and trousers for school. But after a while, I went bust: the crisis hit me early, I could only think about how pretty the fifth year primary teacher was and I neglected my business, and my attempts to go into business failed. So I had to go back to my old job because there weren't many options and I couldn't not work, because if I didn't I couldn't have gone to school; well, I don't know if I really couldn't have, but I would have gone without a lot of things I needed for school.

I did a bit of everything as a working child, I worked in the fields, I had a business, I helped at a garage, I watched cars, was an assistant cook, lawyer's messenger ... these experiences have been fundamental in my life for building my character and for forging my personal ideal of striving for a more just society for all women and men. Work has been an alternative school, which while it doesn't teach you to read and

write, does teach you to live, and leaves you wondering why we are not taught to work at school, as they do in a small school in the highlands of Puno.

So I need to say it, admit it and answer sincerely that even now, after having worked my whole life, I do not feel that I am going mad or having difficulties in my relations with society, quite the opposite, work has enabled me to develop perhaps not different, but alternative abilities in comparison with young people today who study and never once in their lives have had their feet on the ground and had to work or help at home. This might sound judgemental, but work has strengthened my ability to think and suggest solutions, working has made me wonder why the heck education in Peru is of no priority for the government, when the only way to get out of economic poverty is by investing in education.

It was not easy to be a working child, but I have no regrets. On the contrary, I am very proud of having worked since when I was a child, because my brothers and sisters and I have helped my mother get ahead, despite all the problems we faced. I have to say, all those jobs, exploitative or not,

have also taught me a lot. I had a different education, it was through working that I learned to be honest, I learned to hold on to my dreams, and one of the most important thing work taught

“WORK TAUGHT ME THE WORD 'DIGNITY', THE VALUE OF LIFE AND FIGHTING FOR A DREAM, FOR A PERSONAL IDEAL, IT TAUGHT ME ABOVE ALL TO TELL MYSELF THAT POVERTY IS NO EXCUSE FOR NOT HAVING DREAMS OR THE WILL TO TRIUMPH IN LIFE”

me was to value myself as a person, it taught me the word 'dignity', the value of life and fighting for a dream, for a personal ideal, it taught me above all to tell myself that poverty is no excuse for not having dreams or the will to triumph in life.

I think I need to say clearly that school, as it is conceived here, is a real waste of time. I mean that I have wasted eleven years of my life trying to understand the educational system and what I was supposedly taught there.

The NATs are not the cause of the problems in the world; the causes of the world's problems, the true causes are the unjust distribution of justice and wealth in society, the lack of interest in education and a few countries' thirst for colonialism.

WHEN CONVICTIONS AND ACTIONS ARE THE PRODUCT OF EXPERIENCE



Nimia Morán Fernández

I would like to begin by thanking INFANT for letting us share our stories and experiences, stories of many people that nevertheless are hardly ever heard, but above all, stories that many identify with. I am Nimia Morán Fernández; I have a degree in obstetrics from the University of Tumbes and a Master's degree in Social Policy with distinction in Children's Promotion from the University of San Marcos.



My story begins 25 years ago in the north of Peru, in the Tumbes region where I was born. I am the last of five sisters, the daughter of farming people who had crops and animals. In our family we were not made to work but we did so in solidarity, with commitment and responsibility. My father was a farmer and drove tractors. My mother was a farmer and seamstress, and we daughters shared the housework, raising the animals, and we went out to work from time to time. So work was part of our formation, responsibility and contribution to the family. While we were not paid at all, this work meant that our parents could make the money to improve our standard of living.

However, when I was 12 I decided to go out to work to make some money for myself and help make ends meet, which despite our efforts, was hard to do. So I started to sell iced fruit juice, iced lollies called "marcianos", in Lima. I made and sold them and the whole family also

made and sold traditional fish dishes, maize pasties, apart from the housework and farm work which we didn't get paid for, as in our communities it is normal that everyone works, it is part of everyone's personal development and learning; it is a contribution to the family and the community.

Work involved organisation. This was part of the family, because my parents and sisters have taken part in district and regional organisations. I started to be involved by an accident of fate.

One day, as I was walking to market, Mr. Paredes called to me: "Hey, you! Come to my office!" he said, and when I went, he invited me to take part in a National NATs meeting held by MNNATSOP in Lima, because the organisation in my town at that time had disintegrated and he didn't want us to lose our representation.

Another boy and I took part in the meeting, and it was such a surprise ... I met so many working children who belonged to MNNATSOP. That was the time that shaped and defined the direction my life was to take, as it made me re-think myself as a working child, from a perspective which does not limit this to just economic reproduction of work but the reproduction of the dignity of life itself, of children's lives, the lives of their families and their communities.

It was then that a friend called Kenner and I decided that our participation - which in the NATs meeting called by the director of the district children's defence centre was symbolic - should be real participation as protagonists, so that we could re-evaluate our role as social and political players in our district. That is how we set about the adventure of remaking our organisation, the Working Children's Association of the district of Corrales (ANATDIC), and together with other NATs' organisations in Piura and Tumbes set up the Regional NATs Movement (MORENATs). Both are organisations run by the NATs themselves, where we can spend time together, talk, think and learn - not only from the adult who accompanies us but from each other, from

our actions and our experience. We although thought out again the value of solidarity and responsibility, opinions and identification with others; in which the common denominator was the human condition, we realized that the organisation was the only tool we had to make ourselves visible, to be heard and recognized as social subjects, and it was the legitimate place to look at the problems of the condition of life of the minority, which in fact is the majority.

So all of us built up our organisation, which became somewhere where everything that sounds good in declarations about freedom comes real and authentic through the NNATs' daily actions. It was there we learned not only to know our rights but to exercise them, but above all it allowed us to develop our initiative and creativity, and support actions to deal with the violation of rights and social injustice, of both our brother and sister NNATs and the people of our country, who were there at our birth and saw us grow, and to build the world where we could all enjoy the full exercise of our rights.

While the NNATs were building the organisation, others were saying that "Children who work do not go to school; one more child at school is one less child at work;

children's work: the cause and effect of the perpetuation of poverty; a working child suffers mental deficiency as an adult". These and other statements are often made by international organisations that want to eradicate children's work. And so I ask: why is school seen to compete with work? In reality, NATs often go to school thanks to their work. Why are education and work considered antagonistic? Might it be that we recognize that school does not get people ready for life, unlike work? Is it because our curriculum does not correspond to reality and the needs of the NATs? Is it because school is no longer the place where children are given teaching and love, and instead they are treated violently and humiliated because they are NATs? Is it because school is where adult power over children still prevails, ignoring their participation as peers? Is it because we can build a world for them, but without them? We cannot go on globalizing the situation of exploitation and crime that

denigrate the integrity of children, and then pretend to determine the future of millions of NATs throughout the world!

In MNNATSOP, the work of the organisation is not divorced from formation; to the contrary, they necessarily complement each other. In my case, neither of my parents finished primary, despite making a great effort to go to school, simply because the conditions of their lives did not permit it. Nevertheless, we made every effort to ensure that their history was not repeated in our lives. In so many of the conversations we had about injustice in the world, my mother would say: "You have to be better than us; you have to be a professional, that's the only way you can get ahead and change this world..." This is a principle that guided our formation: and by combining work, organisation and formation, I was able to finish my university degree.

Originally I wanted to read medicine, but it was too expensive; so I took my second option, obstetrics. I went to university at 17, and I stayed on with great effort and dedication, but above all hand in hand with my work, as this is the only way we poor people can get on in life. In my professional training I saw pre-natal care, obstetrics emergencies, normal and complicated deliveries, advice and guidance for pregnant women and teenagers and community work. This helped me to think about the way professional people see children, how the government acts towards children

"IS IT BECAUSE WE CAN
BUILD A WORLD FOR
THEM, BUT WITHOUT
THEM?"

and their health priorities and needs. It made me rethink my role as a professional in obstetrics, while being a social and political actor, who helps to promote children. So it meant rethinking how to act and my role as a professional, and I decided to stop working for a while in a lab or with the premature rupture of membranes, deliveries, the care of the newborn and emergencies and monitoring in hospitalization. After analyzing and evaluating my role, my social and political action and above all my contribution to humanity, I decided to stop working in a

hospital, which is where people in my profession generally work, and to start working externally and with children, by promoting them and rethinking children and their joint role with adults in society.

This is why I decided to read the Master's in Child Promotion at the University of San Marcos, so that, using my experience, I could strengthen my work with children, and especially working children.

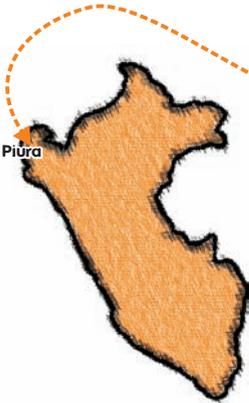
On the basis of my experience, I would invite you to rethink our actions in whatever role, occupation or profession we have, always seeing ourselves in the other person, creating and recreating our relationship with children so that we can build with them, not just for them, the world we dream of in which we can all enjoy the exercise of all our rights to the full.

Thank you.

A BLACK PEBBLE REVEALED LIFE TO ME



Orlando Macharé Marcelo



Twenty-two years old. Second-year sociology student in the Social Sciences Faculty at the University of San Marcos. Working child from the age of 11, and MNNATSOP national delegate, 2004-2006.

I have witnessed how my town has grown exponentially towards the sea. We are separated not just by a plain but by the way we look at each other, those who live above the plain and those who live below it. Some in poverty and others (foreigners) drawn by the black gold rush, boasting of better standards of living because they are in oil drilling.

I am from a town which has everything and has had nothing. Sea, ports, oil, fish dishes, dry forest filled with carob trees, and cortarrama birds, now about to become extinct because of our environmental negligence; a land both blessed and sacked: Talara.

I wanted to begin my presentation with a description of my town because I am convinced that it is the land where we are born and not just where we grow up that leaves in us an indelible and colourless mark on our lives, whether we work, go to school, take part or simply live. We almost always long for something from the land of our birth that we

cannot find elsewhere. And we almost always achieve elsewhere what we longed to do as children.

I was lucky at home to share a table and my dreams with several brothers and sisters. We shared nightmares too, when we saw in the shadows of cupboards the goblins and headless men who were coming to get us, because we had not said our prayers or thanked God, after supper, or because we hadn't cleaned our teeth. We shared the sounds and fears of the machinery my father drove all his life, as a workman for the local municipality; and the plates full of rice and fish, which my mother always gave us for supper.

These memories and all the tumult of childhood are just a stony field, it passes by during the discovery of life, it is an uninterrupted conquest of the experience of life as a child, working like a teenager and thinking like an adult out of necessity, for fun or simply growing up. I am not sure how old I was when I began to work, but I do remember when I became aware of life, life beyond the houses in my neighbourhood, through some black pebbles that always scratched my hands and left my hair the colour of smoke. I would say that a black pebble revealed life to me. It was that moment when a neighbour came to the door and asked for a lad to help her in her grocers shop, that was when I realized what work is and what it is not, I realized what satisfaction work gives and that you get paid for it. My first responsibility – for the neighbour – was to fill up 1kg coal bags with 900g of coal. “No one notices, lad”, she said.

As everyone has said, if you work as a child you have many jobs, a lot of fun and good stories. Killing chickens and plucking the feathers for ten Sols, early in the morning; or emptying a neighbour's rubbish bins and carrying buckets of fresh water to the neighbour's daughter, for eight Sols or more. The experience of working is like creating life and we enjoy it, thinking that it is an adventure that gives a child a bit of power and some independence from others.

But work is a much more interesting adventure when it goes hand in

hand with school, with books and the time spent trying to do the two things at once. I always said that I joined the working children's organisation by chance.

If I had worked and gone to school apart from the organisation, my life would probably have been a routine combination, of being underestimated and having no rest. But I was doing the two things when I learned about the organisation (my school has a branch of the NATs) and I enrolled in it as the most important adventure of my cultural and social education.

The organisation, although I joined by chance, was an all-round experience, the chance to look at myself without shame, to express myself naturally; it was somewhere full of happiness and life, full of deep social links and values that have crafted me as a person and as a militant. It taught me a language that was completely unlike what I was used to, and I have taken hold of it, interpreting and practicing protagonism, exercising shared power, solidarity, participation, social and representative strength, indignation at injustice; rethinking the human condition of the child, the new culture for relating to adults: the social fabric that calls for democracy.

Taking part in MNNATSOP meant I was able to develop culturally. The nature of the organisation, the people and its humanity have had a tremendous effect on me and have made me into someone who found freedom and understood how to put it into practice, sharing it with the others, working, laughing, crying, going to school, speaking and staying silent. The organisation has a before and after: the excitement of belonging to a group where you find a sense of belonging and identity, all part of the working class, but from different cultures; of having almost the same problems, but also of sharing the same solutions, although in different ways; or of feeling the same indignation at injustice in the country, but expressing it with your voice or gestures or views.

Much has been said about us working children. Much has been spent, much earned, any amount of laws passed, agreements reached and so on, in the name of the protection of working children. But we are witnessing a paraphernalia of conservative positivist politics, not programmatic proposals for attacking the problem at the root: the vertical culture of adults subjugating children; the scourge of a fragile democracy which has not included children as citizens and the institutionalization of immorality in the form of corruption, the vicious circle of poverty and the poor.

But this vicious circle is just a circle that has always neglected children, their dignity and their chances: the perverse circle² of what is wrongly called child labour, in which it is alleged that our work is the cause of poverty, it produces and perpetuates underdevelopment, that leaves our country ineligible; that it causes mental deficiency, that it is the root of exclusion and gender inequality, that it hampers the achievement of the millennium goals, and that, together with the organisation, it turns us into an immediate danger to society.

This interpretation, as we can see, is indisputably discriminatory and has a culturally neo-colonial view of what we understand as work. It approaches ignorance and intolerance when it uses symbolic violence, branding us as dangerous.

However, they are far from understanding what our experience has really meant to us, over recent decades, because we feel that work is a social and political product, a cultural pattern which predates mercantilism, that work and education are a social combination which rewrites the human condition of the NATs, they are inseparable practices. To start with, work is a right of all human beings; education is a tool for liberation that rebuilds the dignity of children; it is not a privilege. The organisation does not make us dangerous, for us it is a tool to achieve social and representative strength, which allows us to

2 "El círculo perverso del trabajo infantil", in: Análisis y Reflexión: Una mirada otra sobre trabajo infantil, N° 22, June 2010, IFEJANT

discover things for ourselves; and because through work we exercise our citizenship, participating and as protagonists, reinventing it. Protagonism gives us a holistic view of what we are and how we can be related to our cultures, to each other and to adults. And protagonism is about solidarity, tolerance, respect, the exercise of power, identity and participation without judging or manipulation.

My experience has among other things meant that my thinking took longer to form. If you are in the organisation your proposals and opinions undergo a profound process of ethical reflection, of responsibility and commitment.

This is why I think that we have to reinvent and reinterpret ourselves (as an organisation and as persons) to tackle the challenges of economic crises, the crises in values, which are not our fault, but we suffer them all the same.

The organisation is a tool (and it evolves) not just to have social and representative strength, but as a means to develop cohesive forces: the necessary link with the demands of other children's movements, student movements, academics and researchers, feminist movements, union movements and human rights movements.

“THE ORGANISATION WAS AN ALL-ROUND EXPERIENCE, THE CHANCE TO LOOK AT MYSELF WITHOUT SHAME, TO EXPRESS MYSELF NATURALLY; IT WAS SOMEWHERE FULL OF HAPPINESS AND LIFE, FULL OF DEEP SOCIAL LINKS AND VALUES THAT HAVE CRAFTED ME AS A PERSON AND AS A MILITANT”

This brings me to the importance of linking up with critical academic communities (the social sciences and literature for example), committed academic researchers, or with former NATs (and their

professions or vocations) to forge a vanguard generation, to be the theoretical support to the proposals of the NATs social movements, nationally and internationally.

In a nutshell: the importance of being prepared for the challenges of globalization, through formal or non-formal education. Education is no longer just a right we should all enjoy, without distinction, and which makes our struggle legitimate (a right that the state should guarantee, but the situation is a tragedy, due to the institutional crisis of this government and other political negligence); but should be an emancipatory process that rebuilds, and reinterprets the NATs' social and political life, and one that re-establishes dignity as the human condition in the face of the challenges of capitalism and globalization.

The false dichotomy between work and education establishes Western criteria for non-Western cultures like our own (translated into national policy, legislation and standards), in which work is a cultural pattern and a right; and education is a right and a way to tackle poverty, so this unnecessary separation is belied by NATs' experiences such as our own.

I believe that the NATs' organisations produce human capital, which they should never give up (their members bring their social and political message to all aspects of their lives), and this involves a responsibility to bring about the conditions for education, of generosity towards the organisation. Giving back in turn should not be a condition, quite the contrary, it must be a full commitment in daily life and in all situations.

I think that the NATs' organisation must take care to renew its message, not its true essence or its principles or convictions, but in its communications, to be infused throughout society, and that means ensuring that the movement is always in the hands of the NATs, renewing the generations but preserving its memory. It should use the arsenal of technological innovations (social networks), software, social impact campaigns, to spread the discourse, multiple debates; and promote research and committed social researchers, etc.

If work has enabled us to tackle poverty, and education has given us a continuous formation for life, then let us unflaggingly lend our experience and organisations to social demands, unswerving struggles, yearning and dreams; demands for justice and thirst for dignity; to dream of a more equitable world, in which we can all look at each other without fear, and which, fair and square, will grant us the whole kilo of coal and not just the 900 grams.

Don't worry! There will be no more neighbours lying to us!

A WORKING CHILDHOOD: SPEAKING FROM EXPERIENCE



Tania Edith Pariona Tarqui



I am Tania Edith Pariona Tarqui, of the Quechua people, from the Cayara community, Víctor Fajardo province in Ayacucho. I belong to the Ayacucho Quechua Children's Organisation (ÑOQANCHIQ). I am also a member of the Children of Cayara Residents' Youth Association in Huamanga.

*kuyaq ñanay, turiykuna, yachachiqkuna, rimakullaykichik
llapaykichikta, ancha anchatam Cusikuni kay hatun quñunakuypi.*

*Dear companions, brothers and sisters and collaborators, greetings to
you all, I am very happy to be at this great meeting.*

I was ten when I found out about ÑOQANCHIQ, through the cultural affirmation workshops, a project run by the Peruvian Centre for Indigenous Cultures (CHIRAPAQ), with children and households displaced in Huamanga because of political violence. It was there that I learned to make the Ayaicho altarpiece, to appreciate the use of natural dyes, and in doing so, to this day, to recover my language, to

strengthen my identity as a Quechua and to build a commitment to my people and the indigenous peoples.

Belonging to ÑOQANCHIQ also helped me to get to know and spend time with the NATs of Peru organised in MNNATSOP. I think these were the two places where I learned to look at my own experience, to understand and to make a critical analysis of the situation, theory and practice; the world of law; the world of working children, and our values, our contributions, our actions, our dreams, our demands as working children and today as young people.

As a NAT I had a number of jobs: I sold iced lollies (“marcianos”), groceries in the market with my mother; garlic, clothing at fairs with an aunt and so on. I became the regional and then national MNNATSOP delegate and then Latin American delegate. I read social work at the University of San Cristóbal de Huamanga, and now have a bachelor's degree.

I worked on an intercultural education project with CHIRAPAQ, in the work with children and school teachers and communities on the subject of the indigenous peoples' cultural identity and their rights. Now I am helping to strengthen the organisation of ÑOQANCHIQ, developing training and opportunities for children and young people to participate in round tables, interacting with other youth networks for local advocacy for child and youth policies.

In Ayacucho we have started to consolidate the indigenous organisations through the Indigenous Regional Platform, accompanied and coordinated by CHIRAPAQ.

As in most of our homes, the role we take on from when we are very young is to help with the housework and things at home. If my mother went to fairs and markets to sell garlic, clothing, cheese and so on, one of my brothers or sisters had to go with her. If sowing time was

approaching (September – November), my parents and brothers and sisters all had to go to Cayara (my village), and as we did, we almost always had maize, wheat, sweet corn, potatoes and other tubers. We marked the animals as well in what we call 'qeru wantu' during the festival of the village's patron saint.

On Sundays, one of us would go to the market instead of my mother, because it was the only day she could “rest” – I didn't see her resting, she would start knitting, embroidering, toasting amaranth or quinoa for breakfast or toasting maize (cancha) for the rest of the week.

Working helped me develop abilities, like learning how to run a business, how to deal with the public, to be responsible myself, not to lose the value of “ama qella” which means “do not be lazy”. In the Andes, when your grandmother, your parents or uncles and aunts say “qella” to you, it is practically an insult, because it is as if they were calling you lazy or good-for-nothing.

Going out to work for pay helped me see different realities and situations. Once for example, I was not paid what we had agreed; But I also learned to be considerate and friendly and to share, and of course, it helped me cover some expenses, like school uniform and school materials.

In my village, my grandparents get up at three or four in the morning and arrange the day's work. They are thinking of the things you can help them with, saying: “Tania can go and bring in the sheep, or could help me take the food”, and if there is nothing particular for you to do, you help with the general work; if they are harvesting, sowing, earthing up potatoes, weeding, then that is what you do. If you are still small you are not given a job, you just learn as you play how to winnow the wheat, select the seed and so on. Children learn from their elders, they learn by doing and trying things out. A child is not isolated, children are immersed in the collective activities and linked to their ayllu, which

“IN THE ANDES, WHEN YOUR GRANDMOTHER, YOUR PARENTS OR UNCLES AND AUNTS SAY “QELLA” TO YOU, IT IS PRACTICALLY AN INSULT, BECAUSE IT IS AS IF THEY WERE CALLING YOU LAZY OR GOOD-FOR-NOTHING”

covers everything, and it is a family in the broadest sense, which is why everyone is an uncle or aunt, nature, the deities and the animals.

I have heard teachers, and some parents as

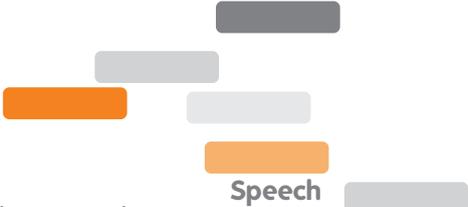
well, say that a child is not going to school because he or she is busy sowing or harvesting, and that their parents would rather make them work than send them to school. And I wonder, doesn't the school stick to the community agricultural calendar? Is this school part of the community? Does the teacher include community knowledge and wisdom in school work? Does the school understand the way the community works? Or is the teacher's knowledge alien to reality, making the children and parents think that it is better to learn other things, because they will serve them in future and that we must be in tune with the demands of the globalized world, and what they know is not mentioned, is not appreciated, not taken into account.

I went to a school like that, where if you spoke Quechua you were inferior, where your people's experience was not visible, where you had to deny where you came from and who your parents were if you wanted to avoid discrimination.

I wish that all working children's experience were like ours, as part of an organisation, with the chance to learn something new, learn leadership, establish networks and be aware of everything we can achieve with our experience as NATs. But the facts show us that there are a great many working children who are exploited and in conditions that do not allow them to develop mentally or physically. What should we say about that?

The movement's challenges are even greater, and I think one of them is to build concrete and viable proposals to improve the working conditions of working children, a proposal formulated with and for children who are being exploited, and strengthen grass-roots organisations nationwide, so that all children can have access to a tool which will teach them how to develop as social protagonists.

Pay ñañay, turiykuna (Many thanks, brothers and sisters).



TAKING OUR DISCUSSION ABROAD AND THE IMPORTANCE OF RENEWING OUR COMMITMENT TO THE NNATS MOVEMENT



Yim Rodríguez Sampértegui

Earlham College
Department of Neuroscience, Pre-Neurosurgery

*I have been impressed by the urgency of doing.
Knowing is not enough; we must apply. Being willing is
not enough; we must do.*

Leonardo da Vinci

Truth is the outcome of experience; there is something which is indisputably true in the different experiences of boys and girls, adolescents, parents, teachers and collaborators in the NNATS movement. It was an experience which changed and continues to change our lives. The NNATS movement not only affects a particular social scenario, but also our personal way of life, that of our friends, those who work and those who do not, and that is where its strength lies.

As the relationship between collective experience and personal experience is one of mutual learning, we have a responsibility for renewing our commitment with working children and children in general.

There is an ever-pressing need to renew our commitments. In my own experience, this was the motive for holding the “First Discussion of life stories: the experience of young people who have belonged to working children's organisations – Life, Work and Dignity – Voices of Experience” in June, 2010. This need is not one of desperation; it is an opportunity to renew the convictions held in the struggle which began 35 years ago.

The discussion proposed a minute-by-minute learning dynamic. We looked forward with great excitement to meeting up again, and although the heart of the discussion was our experience as delegates, collaborators, friends and parents, we had another important reflection after the formal discussion, about what we could do with the experience we had accumulated.

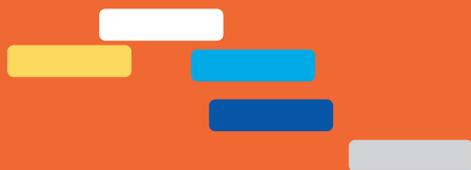
Of one thing we are convinced: the NNATs movement in Peru, as in other countries on the Latin American continent, has given the world hundreds of experiences which should now be brought together. Many of us have been able to study abroad, and from the moment we set foot in strange lands, that experience has accompanied us and opened the doors to other experience in our fellow countries with the sole and original purpose of establishing the subject of children, and especially that of working children, in a genuinely global discussion. As we know well, nothing venture, nothing gain.

For many of us this renewed commitment began at the discussion, and must be used to gain more ground for discussion where none exists. This could mean universities and other academic circles in which many of us are involved, including those abroad. I realised that a lack of discussion and information often aggravates differences, and this means we must change our strategies, avoid radical and extremist positions and opt for one which is more proactive and bases its strength on the experience which the movement has forged over decades: truth springs from experience.

The “First Discussion of life stories: the experience of young people who have belonged to working children's organisations -Life, Work and Dignity - Voices of Experience” was a tribute to what we have learned

and lived, to our difficulties and achievements and, rather than to the movement itself, to the fraternity born of and developed from our often material poverty, from human needs like freedom of expression and others, or from our own ignorance. All of us come from different situations, but this also gave us the opportunity to go on thinking about new social ideas not just for Peru, but for Latin America, because the situation requires this of us and because the movement has the international resources for generating discussions in other countries around the world. We need to start a discussion about children at international circles which many of us attend, such as foreign universities, to share the NNATs' experience and offer what we have learned, creating a circle of mutual learning. We have had this experience, and this puts us in a privileged position which must be strengthened by the renewal of our commitments.

Historias de vida









Historias de Vida



**Abel Daza Monteiro
Daniel Sangama Panduro
Edgar Gonzales Boza
Giovana Bendezu Aquino
Ioannys Lesly Padilla Paico
Jorge García Paucar
José Luis Raymundo Pulache
Patricia Cruzado Muñoz
Yesenia Huamanñahui León**





Abel Daza Monteiro

WORK GAVE ME A MORE CRITICAL VIEW OF MY SOCIETY AND MY ROLE IN IT

I was born on February 12, 1991 in the city of Iquitos, in the Loreto region of Peru. I went to the Sara Alicia Saberbein Pinedo, N° 61006 primary school in the district of Belén, and to the “Mariscal Oscar Raymundo Benavides” secondary school in the city. I started working when I was eight years old in the Belen market, in the street where I live.

From when I was very young, work helped me see society and my role in it differently and more critically. I learned to respect values, above all to value myself and my work, to have dignity and the strength to keep going.

At the age of fourteen, I heard about an organisation called the Movement of Working Children, Children of Christian Workers (MANTHOC) and I joined. They talked about things like children's rights, participation and organisation. I was elected delegate. That was the start of my experience of organisation.

As MANTHOC is a member of the Peruvian Organised Working Children's Movement (MNNATSOP), I was also elected to be a national delegate. MNNATSOP in turn is part of the National Children's Network (REDNNA), for which I was also a national delegate.

At the moment I am studying English and in the future I want to be a great systems engineer.

Daniel Sangama Panduro



WHEN I WAS 22 YEARS OLD

I am entitled to state that the work I did as a child gave me a start in life, and the chance to be in the fifth year of communications sciences in the city of Iquitos; to meet friends to share the happy times, the sad times and the struggles that made us feel sure of the things we thought or planned in the organisation we belonged to (MANTHOC).

Any person who can relate a whole life's experience knows how to tackle the situations they have had to face. My name is Daniel Sangama Panduro. I was born in the neighbourhood of Belén in Iquitos, the youngest of eight brothers and sisters, and I worked in the local market from the age of eight. I am one such person.

"TOTELLYOUWHATWORKIDIDASA CHILD, FIRST OF ALL I WANT TO SAY THAT IN MY FAMILY WE ALL WORKED, BECAUSE MY PARENTS ALWAYS TAUGHT US THAT WORK GIVES A PERSON DIGNITY"

To tell you what work I did as a child, first of all I want to say that in my family we all worked, because my parents always taught us that work gives a person dignity. So I worked with my parents in the Belén market, where we sold bananas, pineapples, fish and stapes, which helped me develop abilities like solidarity with my market workmates (boys, girls and adults) and commitment; and above all I discovered the adding, subtracting, multiplication and division we used in selling things that I was to develop in the classroom. I also learned that negotiating the price of products helped me develop the capacity for negotiation to quite a competent level.

The experience of belonging to an organisation began to change the lives of those of us who belonged to it. We are all from plain, working families, who can reverse the poverty we never chose.



Edgar Gonzales Boza

LEARNING IN ORDER TO TEACH OTHERS ...

I am Edgar Gonzales Boza, and I come from the Castrovirreyña province of the Huancavelica region.

Well, I will tell you a bit about how I began to work and how that experience helped me in my life, from then and till now and, I think, until the day I die.

“NO ONE FORCED ME TO WORK AND MY PARENTS NEVER MADE ME, I WORKED FOR THE SHEER PLEASURE OF IMPROVING THINGS AT HOME”

I began to work when I was seven, selling iced lollies; then I started selling toasted maize; and then spices in bags. I used to mill and bag them myself, and sold them walking from shop to shop. Then I started selling sweets and fruit. From when I was seven, I wanted to work and go to school.

I was a good student in primary, and in secondary too. I never failed to do my homework. No one forced me to work and my parents never made me, I worked for the sheer pleasure of improving things at home.

While I was working I met a friend, Cristian, to whom I am eternally grateful, because it was he who encouraged me to join in the Working Children's Organisation (NATs –Huancavelica), the organisation I love, and there I learned the meaning of friendship. We held workshops there, and sports, we even elected our representatives, and I will never forget the discussions we had at the regional and national meetings that MNNATSOP organises; these are very important opportunities for NATs from different cities and realities to get to know each other.

My most unforgettable memory is going camping in Palca. It was great. After two days together, we had got to know each other and like each other, and we all became friends. We didn't know each other, but after camping we were like brothers and sisters, and we used to hold activities together. This meant that the NATs' organisation was more united and began to be well-known. We were acknowledged by society and the public authorities of Huancavelica.

All of the activities I had the luck to take part in contributed to my personal formation and my choice of career.

Thanks to my friends, the collaborators and the formation I received as a NAT, I found the meaning in my life. Every day I recall the things we did, and I am going to finish my degree in law and be one of the best of lawyers, to continue making a contribution to children, and particularly to the NATs, in Huancavelica or anywhere in our beloved Peru.

The only thing I would ask of those who read this, is that when they see NATs working, do not look at them in pity or with contempt. On the contrary, look at them as citizens, with rights and responsibilities, who will be more aware of the reality we live in and that they are ready to improve it.

Giovana Bendezu Aquino

I ADMIRE THE NATS' ENTHUSIASM, ENERGY AND COURAGE

My name is Giovana Bendezu Aquino. I belonged to MANTHOC, where I worked as the national delegate, 2006 - 2008. I also belonged to the Children's Committee of the Children's Department at the Ombudsman's Office, which was the most wonderful experience of my life.

As a child and adolescent I was involved with a lot of movements of NATs and children from very different realities, and this awoke in me the spirit of the social struggle for a better Peru.

The situation that the NATs still suffer today is troubling. All that international and government pressure which does not solve anything, it just brings repression for children who work in order to get ahead and pay for the bare essentials like food, health and education. Children who are not to blame for the current economic system which prevents their parents from providing what the family needs.

I admire the enthusiasm, energy and courage of the NATs of today. They are not scared by laws or repression, they offer to debate matters to improve this situation.

I feel – and I believe – that all of us who have been through this experience are more aware of the true reality of

“I ADMIRE THE ENTHUSIASM, ENERGY AND COURAGE OF THE NATS OF TODAY. THEY ARE NOT SCARED BY LAWS OR REPRESSION, THEY OFFER TO DEBATE MATTERS TO IMPROVE THIS SITUATION”

Peruvian children, and we can help society change. This should not simply finish with achieving a position, or be just one more experience in our lives.

In my ten years as a NAT, I learned to hold on to my dreams, not to give up for any reason and to be the protagonist in my life. I understood that life is made up of failures which we must learn from, but also of triumphs and victories. I am very happy that this meeting is being held in the name of all of us who believe that the NATs' right to work with dignity should not be a light that fades, but should shine for others.



Ioannys Lesly Padilla Paico

MY WORK HELPED ME TO DEVELOP IN LIFE

My name is Ioannys Lesly Padilla Paico. I am studying audiovisual journalism and am in the final year. I am also a member of the Santa Cecilia liturgical choir and belong to the Young Christian Workers organisation. I am a collaborator with the working children's social movements. I am 24.

My childhood was the best time in my life. It was a time of dreams; of having a lot of toys; of discovering the other world possible with peace, justice and equality. I learned that things come at a price and that is why you appreciate them more. I began to work with my mother when I was five, selling ceramics. Then we sold sweets at the gate of my primary school. My mother taught me to work when I was very small, she told me: "You must learn to work, so that you will make something of your life". From when I was a very small child I had to make the effort because sometimes we had nothing to eat.

"THE GOVERNMENT NEVER PROTECTED ME WHEN I WAS A CHILD, THEY JUST WAITED UNTIL I WAS 14 FOR THE CHILDREN'S CODE TO GIVE ME FORMAL RECOGNITION OF MY RIGHT TO WORK. BUT SINCE I STARTED WORKING, I MYSELF HAVE EXERCISED THAT RIGHT, SHOUTING FOR IT AT THE TOP OF MY VOICE IN OUR DEMONSTRATIONS"

I live in the Yerbateros neighbourhood, San Luis district, where migrants live, where in the 1980s and 1990s the terrorists wrote graffiti on the walls. I joined MANTHOC when I was eight, in the Working Children's

Centre, and it was there that my story of organisation in defence of children's rights began, especially those of working children.

After school, I would go to the community kitchen for lunch and do my homework or make handicrafts. On Saturdays we would meet up to evaluate and plan the week's activities. After that, I worked in a number of ways, selling iced lollies, filling water tanks, baby-sitting. In general, they were jobs that turned up and I could do, without coming to any harm. By working, I was able to help my mother at home and buy books, which were very expensive. When I finished primary, my mother decided we should go to Bolivia, and we stayed there for two years. I went to school and worked selling hamburgers and as a domestic help together with my mother. When I was 13, I came back to Peru, carried on going to school and being active in the organisation.

I had a difficult adolescence, because I was very rebellious, and the word 'struggle' made me feel proud of myself. I started working in Gamarra, in a company. I was a salesgirl and I sold jeans. At the same time I became national delegate of the Peruvian Organised Working Children's Movement (MNNATSOP). I felt proud because I gave every moment of my life to my organisation, school, the church (I was in confirmation classes), and I finished secondary school. Every evening I helped my mother sell beauty products to her clients. I was very responsible at school, and stayed up all night getting my homework done.

Work is part of my life; my mother taught me that work was part of education. I've often felt unhappy when we faced discrimination as working children and poor people. The government never protected me when I was a child; they just waited until I was 14 for the Children's Code to give me formal recognition of my right to work. But since I started working I myself have exercised that right, shouting for it at the top of my voice in our demonstrations.



Jorge García Paucar

THIS IS THE TIME TO TELL OF MY EXPERIENCE IN MY CHILDHOOD ...

Most people who read about my own experience will probably say that work is not for children.

When I was seven, I already knew what work was, honest work, as my family didn't have enough money. I give thanks to my mother, may she rest in peace, for giving me something I will never forget: the knowledge of how to work to keep myself and my family. My mother taught me about life in these harsh circumstances, she taught me to keep myself through work, and that is why I began working, selling limes in the Huancavelica region wholesale market. But I never neglected school, as I only worked on Saturdays and Sundays, when I would earn 20 New Sols, and I remember clearly that that amount of money was for buying kerosene fuel and a few kilos of groceries.

When I was eight I had been to the regional market, and to buy my products cheaper, I went with my mother to Huancayo to bring back not just limes but vegetables to set up a vegetable stand.

"I GIVE THANKS TO GOD AND MY MOTHER FOR GRANTING ME THE GIFT OF BEING A WORKER DURING MY CHILDHOOD"

At 12 I was working selling cotton in Cañete, where I started the first year of secondary school, which I paid for with the money I earned selling the products. Then I stopped selling cotton, and started selling rubbish bags in the Imperial and San Vicente markets, and delicious red apples and toasted

maize on the beaches of Cerro Azul. I was a really hard worker, and incredibly with the money I earned I could meet my needs, just imagine, I could even buy clothes for my mother. But life is cruel, and takes from us those we love most in this world. I suffered when I lost my mother, she taught me so much about life, so that I would never be a burden to society. I wonder what would have happened if my mother had not taught me how to work and see things as they are? I might have become an offender, a drug addict, or worse, an alcoholic? How many boys and girls or teenagers who lose their mothers or fathers go hungry and need to work? Forgive me for saying so: it is through the ignorance of adults that these children or teenagers starve, just because they are not allowed to work.

I am grateful to the NATs' National Movement, who at the worst time of my life, when I lost my mother, opened their doors to me: they took me in and gave me the loving home that all NATs need.

I am 20 now, and I am a university student. I give thanks to God and my mother for granting me the gift of being a worker during my childhood. Today, thanks to my work, I am at university and I get top marks.

Finally, ladies and gentlemen, open the doors of your hearts and ask yourselves who will feed the children if they do not work. Are you going to give them a plate of food or something to wear? Work is the greatest weapon there is to meet our material or spiritual needs.



José Luis Raymundo Pulache

WORK HELPED ME IMPROVE MY STANDARD OF LIVING

My name is José Luis Raymundo Pulache. I am 23 and I am an IT teacher. I am working for MNNATSOP, as a promoter of the project 'Strengthening Working Children's' Capacities for Defending their Rights (2010).

I was born in the shanty town called La Curva, in the Aguas Verdes district, Zarumilla province, in the Tumbes region, on June 12, 1987. My father is a docker and my mother a housewife. My parents separated when I was five, so my mother started to take in the neighbours' washing.

She could not send me to nursery school, but I went to primary school in the shanty town where I lived, Jorge Guimac Bonifaz, N° 128.

I started to work when I was seven, selling iced lollies, helping my mother as much as I could. I was very unhappy because my father had left us, and because sometimes we had to work very hard and were paid very little.

When I was nine, some friends I had made when I was working told me about the Colibri Programme, and I joined. It is run by the police force, the service that provides protection to working children, provided meals and coaching for school.

In 2000, I became a member of the programme's board of directors, and then we were invited to a working children's meeting in Sullana, and I went with some others. There I learned more about my rights as a working child.

I had a very hard time in secondary school, but thanks to my work I finished. Sometimes I had to decide whether to go to work or to study for an exam, even if I had to walk there as I had no money for the bus fare. Later on, I was elected regional delegate of the Piura and Tumbes Regional Working Children's Movement (MORENATs). Shortly afterwards, because of the experience this gave me, I was elected to the MNNATSOP National Assembly, as a national delegate 2002 – 2004. There I learned a lot about organisation as a fundamental tool for achieving our aims; and it helped me plan my time to include work, education and recreation. I also learned my rights as a NAT and to become aware of Peru's reality.

My struggle continued after I finished secondary. In 2005, I was accepted at the 'José Antonio Encinas' teacher training college to study computer science and IT. As the result of long hard work, I managed to finish my course. I should say that I had the support of the Working Children's Training Institute, which gave me a NAT grant.

The experience of organisation that I gained as a working child has been of great service, but I do not understand why government and some organisations so stubbornly want to eliminate NATs, while lacking proposals which would help build a different world in which all children are considered as social actors and subjects of rights.

The work of the NATs is not synonymous with poverty, on the contrary, in my case it helped me improve my standard of living, my house and to install basic services.

So I would say that what people should be thinking about is helping the working children's social movements and organisations so that they can continue to fight for the rights of all children.

ORGANISATION PLAYED A FUNDAMENTAL ROLE IN MY PERSONAL FULFILMENT

My name is Patricia Cruzado Muñoz, and I began to work when I was nine. It was important to me to contribute to my family's income as we were going through some very hard times. I remember my first job, which was selling pasties; then I sold iced lollies with my friends Rocío and Karina. The three of us were inseparable, we worked together, we went to the same school and we loved dancing, and that is how we began to go to the Niños Unidos organisation promoted by PRODEI, an NGO that works with peasant farmer communities and working children.

The organisation played a fundamental role in my fulfilment as a person. I found somewhere where I could say what I thought, be a protagonist, learn about my rights and responsibilities, propose solutions and fight against exploitation at work.

"I FOUND SOMEWHERE WHERE I COULD SAY WHAT I THOUGHT, BE A PROTAGONIST, LEARN ABOUT MY RIGHTS AND RESPONSIBILITIES, PROPOSE SOLUTIONS AND FIGHT AGAINST EXPLOITATION AT WORK"

In 1996, I represented my organisation at the VI National Meeting of Peruvian Organised NATs. As we all know, this meeting established a precedent for the NATs' organisation because it was there that MNNATSOP was founded and the first National Delegates Coordinating Committee was elected. I was given the chance to be part of the committee. I am now the mother of a beautiful baby who is my strength and inspiration for continuing in the fight. I am at the end of my course in law and political science at Inca Garcilaso de la Vega University.

Yesenia Huamanñahui León



LIFE IS BUILT ON WORK, ORGANISATION AND EDUCATION

I am Yesenia Huamanñahui León. I was born on October 8, 1988 at the Guillermo Díaz de la Vega hospital in Abancay, Apurímac. My parents are Vicentana León Paucar, who is from Huancarama in Andahuaylas and Walter Huamanñahui Chiclla, who is from Cachora in Abancay. These two places are in Apurímac, and so I know that in my veins runs the blood of the Chancas and the Incas, a rather strange mixture. As far back as I can remember, I helped my mother with the housework and going to market.

Sometimes I would buy coffee, sugar, rice and other things while my mother finished selling breakfasts and making lunch

"I STARTED TO GO TO ONE OF THE FIRST GROUPS THAT APPEARED IN ABANCAY, THE COLIBRÍ PROGRAMME RUN BY THE PERUVIAN POLICE FORCE"

to sell. I always went to the market with her, as my friends did, because this is where we would meet up.

I finished pre-school at five, but was not allowed to start primary because I had to be aged seven. So to make sure my schooling didn't stop my parents decided to send me to Pachachaca, a farm very near Abancay where my grandparents lived. I went to school with my uncles and aunts, and we only had one satchel for all our exercise books and a bucket for our food. We left very early because the school was an hour and a half away from the house and there were no buses, and if there was one it was expensive, so we just had to walk. In the afternoons we would help on the farm, mainly at sowing and harvest time, and I went because I didn't want to be left alone at home.

Two years later I went back to Abancay to go to the first year of primary. It was different, and by then I had a little brother, who I had to look after while my mother was serving her customers at the market and my father worked as an employee at the Abancay municipality. Then I went to school and had to concentrate hard in class, because my mother couldn't help me with my homework as she had only finished third year of primary and my father the sixth year of primary, but as often as they could they gave me exercises to do: they were always saying that I had to have a real profession and not live in the same circumstances that we were living in.

I have had a number of jobs. I've sold balloons at Carnival time, I've sold prickly pears, alfalfa, barley water, vegetables and breakfasts and lunches. When I started selling goods in a grocer's, I joined one of the first groups that appeared in Abancay, the Colibrí Programme, run by the Peruvian police force. In 2003, I had my first experience of organisation, when I joined the Peruvian Organised Working Children's Movement (MNNATSOP) as a national delegate, in charge of the secretariat together with a team of delegates.

I am now a student at Inca Garcilaso de la Vega University, reading a social work degree. I am in the third year and am also part of the INFANT team.



1st Discussion Group
Young people with experience of being organised working children

Universidad del Pacífico
June 25, 2010

Published by:



Life, Work and Dignity:
Voices of experience

