

Lived Experiences of Tapaseros: Their Social-Economic Situation

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Abstract

This study aimed to find out the economic status of the workers known as Tapaseros in the sugarcane industry in the 4th District of Cebu. It highlighted the plight of the Tapaseros during off season in haciendas or sugarcane plantation and how they survived during that time. The results served as basis in devising a proposed Alternative Livelihood Program. This research applied the Phenomenology Qualitative method in determining the economic condition of the workers in the sugarcane plantation or Tapaseros in 4th District of Cebu Province. Ten informants were interviewed on their occupational problems and survival strategies during off milling season. Findings indicated that the life of Tapaseros was not easy, being often exposed to weather conditions especially in the midst of a climate change, as well as, a bad relationship between the management and the coworkers, thus, during off season they suffered poverty. It is recommended that the Local government through the support of non-government organizations and other private company to give an alternative livelihood program to the Tapaseros in the 4th district of Cebu.

Keywords

Social Science, Economic Status, Sugarcane Industry, Sustainability, Income Management, Job Satisfaction

1. Introduction

Hunger is very closely linked to poverty. Currently more than 1.1 billion people live in households that earn no more than P50.00 a day per person. Many of these poor people often cannot get enough food, either because they lack resources (e.g. land, seeds and tools) to grow enough food or lack the money to buy it. Hunger and malnutrition in turn impair individuals' performance in

school or at work, making it harder for them to break out of the poverty cycle. Poor people depend heavily on nature for their basic needs, including food, water and firewood. However, they are increasingly destroying the very lands they depend on to survive, through over farming or poor management.

Sugarcane is one of the major crops in the Philippines. It is cultivated in 19 provinces across the country. Sugarcane areas are divided into small farms with an average farm size of five (5) hectare. Thousands of sugarcane workers in the Philippines are facing hunger, catastrophic weather changes, and an economy in collapse. They call it tiempo muerto or dead season which is the time between planting and harvesting when there is no work in the sugarcane fields. For as long as they can remember, this yearly occurrence has stretched from April to September. This year, the season may never end to dumaan, the resident farm workers and the sacadas. The seasonal ones, means lean times for their families, which is a situation they have endured for generations. The locals refer to this as tingkiriwi, or pain, and tinggulutom, a time of hunger. In an average, a sugarcane worker earns a little over \$3 US a day which is less than half of the government mandated minimum wage. A seasonal worker earns roughly \$2/day. So, the global forces are putting pressure on the sugar industry, and jobs are becoming even scarcer. Landowners have started exploiting entire families through a system called pakyaw. The system employs a group of workers (including children) for farm tasks in a specific number of hectares in the haciendero's plantation. The pakyaw system earns them roughly \$1 a day. But as they see it, low paid work is better than no work at all. The situation is different during tiempo muerto, when all work stops for four to six months (Velasco, 2014).

Sugar was a passport to the good life, right up until the 70s. The sugar industry, which was once a pillar of the Philippine economy, spawned a culture of privilege among hacienderos. Even when sugar prices fell in the early 1980s, which caused a tremendous effect on the island, the hacienderos held on to the illusion of grandeur. According to a recent Philippine Center for Investigative Journalism report, the influx of cheap imported sugar will lead to the decline in the production of local sugar. This is the reality even the Sugar Regulatory Administration chief, Gina Martin-Bautista and the power circle of politician's members of haciendero clans elected into local and national positions known as the sugar bloc can do nothing about. The efforts aimed at softening this blow to the sugar industry range from shifting to other high yielding crops or planting ornamental flowers, to convert sugar lands into prawn or fish ponds. However, the quick fixes are yet to make significant gains in the Negros economy. Those who stood still in continuing sugar production have to deal with the effect of land reform. Farmers and millers get into sugarcane contracts to share the risks and benefits. However, most farmers feel short-changed as the miller banks profits from the by-products as the farmers only earn from sugar. Contracted farmers have also institutional problem of feeling that they are cheated as they believe they are weak in bargaining and negotiating for the contract on equal terms with the sugar company (Mosoti, 1997). Farmers have no say when payments are not de-

layed after harvesting sugarcane nor can they negotiate when the produce is sub-standard. They bear the brunt in costs as the miller still gets to deduct the cost of seed cane, transport and harvesting services offered as well as fertilizer.

Working in this industry is not easy since whether there is rain or the sun is shining, the workers still need to work, yet they receive very low salary or wage, which could hardly sustain the daily needs of their respective family.

Cebu had observed that most of the children of the workers in the sugarcane plantation cannot study and would just get married at an early age and also become workers in the sugarcane plantation or known as “hacienda”. This is the manifestation of the vicious cycle of poverty. Fortunately, there are some who sustain their children to study and obtain a college degree but only a minimal number. The poor working situation among the workers in the sugarcane plantation in the towns of Bogo, Medellin and Daanbantayan in the northern part of the Province of Cebu has caused many social and economic stigma to the aforementioned vulnerable groups in the society. Hence, this study intends to look into the real socio-economic conditions of this group of people to be able to craft an alternative livelihood program to cut the problem on the lack of income during the lean season and somehow address the problem of hunger and poverty that has not been overlooked by the economic planners of the 4th district of Cebu for a very long time.

2. Methodology

The researcher used the Phenomenology Qualitative method in determining the socioeconomic condition of the workers in the sugarcane plantation or tapaseros in 4th District of Cebu Province. This study was conducted among the three (3) towns in the 4th District of Cebu Province such as Bogo, Medellin, and Daanbantayan. Ten (10) informants who were interviewed on their occupational problems and survival strategies during off milling season. The questionnaire was translated in the spoken dialect in the study environment which is Cebuano Binisaya for further understanding during the gathering of data. The researcher asked permission to the hacienda owner or to the cabo or team leader, to conduct a study to their workers or the tapaseros. The focused group discussion was administered during their free time. After the interview, the data and information gathered were collected and analyze thoroughly.

3. Results and Discussion

The interview transcripts were coded and analyzed into themes to reveal the lived experiences of the informants in a study. The following discussions were organized into the themes that were gathered and analyzed:

3.1. Occupational Problems of the Tapaseros in the Sugarcane Industry in the 4th District of Cebu

Described in the next subsections were the subthemes under the occupational

problems encountered by Tapazeros in the Sugarcane Industry in the fourth district of Cebu. It consisted of the following: the nature of work of the laborers.

3.2. The Nature of Work of the Laborers

Historically, sacadas are the farm workers in the sugar plantations of Negros, but in Cebu they called they are called as tapaseros. The nature of work in the sugarcane field is really expected to be physically extensive. Moreover, labor is a very important resource. It is important that some noted economists postulate labor as the source of important hypotheses. Labor problems represent conflicts on social reality with social ideals that normally rise out of employment (Pagoso et al., 2006).

Sugarcane Planters, Cutters, and Loaders. This theme refers to the characteristics of the job of the people working in the hacienda, otherwise known as the tapaseros. Moreover, the tapaseros are migrant workers who render work usually during the milling season (October to May), particularly in the cutting and loading of sugarcane, land preparation, planting, and weeding are also done during this time. This type of job is seasonal, and they experience an off-season for six months.

Based on the inquiry on from the informants, a significant number of them answered the same statement about their work in the hacienda. These are the informants' significant statements:

Ang akong trabaho kay mananum ug mamutol ug tubo (Informant 1). (My work was to plant and cut sugarcane)

Ang akong trabaho kay mananum ug mamutol ug tubo (Informant 2). (My work was to plant and cut sugarcane)

Ang akong trabaho kay mananum ug tubo ug mamutol ug tubo. (Informant 3). (My work was to plant and cut sugarcane)

The following statements of the three (3) informants indicated that they worked as planter cutters and cutters of sugarcane or tubo that are widely planted in the hacienda or vast tract of plain land. Further, it can be noted that several tapaseros worked as loaders of the cut matured stalks of sugarcane that were put in a huge bundle to the truck for trans transport the harvested tubo to the milling plant. When I interviewed more informants, they gave the following responses:

Ang akong trabaho kay mamutol ug tubo ug mokarga ug tubo (Informant 4). (My work was to plant and cut sugarcane). Ang akong trabaho kay mamutol ug tubo ug mokarga ug tubo (Informant 5). (My work was to cut and load the sugarcane).

Ang akong trabaho kay mamutol ug tubo ug mokarga ug tubo (Informant 6). (My work was to cut and load the sugarcane).

Ang akong trabaho kay mamutol ug tubo ug mokarga ug tubo (Informant 7). (My work was to cut and load the sugarcane).

Ang akong trabaho kay mamutol ug mokarga ug tubo (Informant 8). (My work was to cut and load the

sugarcane). Ang akong trabaho kay mamutol ug tubo ug mokarga ug tubo (Informant 9). (My work was to cut and load the sugarcane). Ang akong trabaho kay mamutol ug tubo ug mokarga ug tubo (Informant 10). (My work was to cut and load the sugarcane).

There are different types of workers who worked in the hacienda or sugarcane plantation. The nature of their work in the hacienda includes sugarcane planters, sugarcane cutters during harvest season, and sugarcane loader, that entails services in transferring the sugarcane that had been cut to the cargo truck. Work is something that requires strength, physical disposition, and effort. Work is synonymous with survival, and it is almost an organic feeling. Therefore, they must be faced, never feared whatever the proposed or imposed task (Borsoi, 2010).

3.3. Common Problems

Laborers were asked of common problems in the sugarcane field. In the real world of work, there would always be problems that the workers or laborers will encounter and have to deal with.

Hard Labor under Extreme Weather Conditions. This theme describes the hardships that the tapaseros experienced in the performance of their job in the hacienda. As tapaseros or laborers, the nature of their work in the hacienda or sugar plantation entails them to be exposed to the scorching weather during summer and rain coldness during the rainy season. Exposure to something dangerous means being in a situation where it might affect the person physically, that would lead to health problems. Exposure is the harmful effect on a persons' body caused by freezing weather and the heat of the sun.

Dili lalim ang among maagian isip usa ka tapasero kay pwerte gyod nga in-ita sa adlaw (Informant 1). (What we experienced was not easy as a tapasero, because the sun was so hot).

Informant 2 collaborated the earlier statement of Informant 1, which goes that it is the intense heat of the sun was his most significant problem. So with pain in his heart, he said that:

Kainit kung ting init (Informant 2). (It is so hot during summer season).

Based on the experience of Informant 3, he shared that their job exposes them to more physical hardships when they become wet while doing their job. With sincerity, he said that:

Kung moulán dili sad lalim ang amo maagian kay pwerting basaa ug tug-nawa (Informant 3). (During rainy days, our experience was not because we will become very wet and feet intense coldness).

The same with the statements of the other informants, the usual difficulty that they experienced in planting, cutting and loading the big bundle of cut sugarcane stalks relates to the heat of the sun. Informant 4, narrated that:

Ang kasagarang problema among naagian mao ang kainit sa adlaw (Informant 4). (Majority of the problems that we encountered was the extreme heat of the sun).

Moreover, Informant 5 had the same bad experience while working in the hacienda. He further revealed that:

Ang among trabaho kay dili lalim kay among maagian ang kainit ug ulan (Informant 5). (Our worked was not easy, since we experienced the heat of the sun and the rain).

Likewise, Informant 7 was very frank in revealing that the problem that they experience in the working environment in the hacienda was the scourging heat of the sun. He bluntly shared that:

Pwerting inita naman jud (Informant 7). (It was really very hot).

During the interview with Informant 8 had the same experience in the working environment that might cause them with health problems. He revealed that:

Kasagaran among naagian kay ang kainit sa panahon (Informant 8). Majority of the problems that we encountered was the extreme heat of the sun).

Further, Informant 6 shared that the problem that he experienced while working was the physical pain of ensuring during extreme hot temperature and the coldness of the rain. He shared that:

Ang masugotan namong trabaho kay uwan ug init (Informant 6). (In our job we encountered exposure to the heat of the sun and rain)

Informant 9 had also the same hazardous experience that poses some threat to his health. He also divulged that:

Ang problema nga akong naagian mao ang kainit ug uwan (Informant 9). (The problem that experienced was the intense heat of the sun and rain)

To be able to accomplish their work in planting, cutting, and loading the harvested sugarcane stalks to the cargo trucks, they have to work under the scourging heat of the sun conditions from March to May. Another problem as well as the unbearable coldness when they still have to continue working even though it was raining. This working situation usually occurs from June to October. This undesirable working condition will often lead them to health problems such as fever, coughs, colds, and even pneumonia. This situation would also lead them to more hardships in life since their income could hardly enable them to buy medicines and consult a specialist when their sickness would complicate, considering that the services of the government-owned hospitals located near their place did not have adequate medical facilities and personnel who can provide them with proper medical treatment and care. There are many studies that highlight work productivity problems suffered by people who carry out physical work (especially agricultural work) when the workers were exposed to excessive

heat. When work conditions are very stressful and involve heavy work intensity, the workers adopt a self-placed defense mechanism. In these cases, the work productivity per hour gradually decreases with the increase in heat exposure and the work activity must be slowed down (Sahu et al., 2013).

3.4. Problems with the Working Environment

The problems with the working environment since, in the agricultural industry, the working environment is undeniably hazardous since the workers will have to work under the heat of the sun and even have to endure the coldness when they get wet when there is rain. So, this data means that the workers in the field are exposed to many work hazards and another conflict in the course of doing their work in the sugarcane plantation or hacienda.

Insufficient Wage. For any employee or worker, the pay is the reason why they toil hard. Another thing is they will use their income to buy their household and personnel needs. But for those who are earning meager wages, life could be tough for them. Since most of the workers in the hacienda are not highly educated, then they are vulnerable to possible fraudulent act of the middlemen and the management of the hacienda. Based on the experience of Informant 4 in the sugarcane hacienda, he uttered the following significant statements:

Ang among naagian nga problema sa katubhan mahitungod sa nagdumala mao ang dili pagtug.an sa tinood sa sakto sa timbang ug ilang tikason ang timbang (Informant 4). (The problem that we experienced was about the management who will not divulge the exact total weight and they will commit fraud on the correct/true weight).

Since the amount of pay received by the tapaseros depend on the quality and quantity of the sugarcane that were delivered to the milling plant, their common plight is that they will be able to receive less amount of share of the income since the management will no divulged the exact weight of the sugarcane that they planted, harvested, and loaded. So, Informant 4 further shared the following statements:

Ang kasagaran problema among maagian mao ang timbang sa tubo nga minos ra ug gamay ra ang bahinon sa grupo (Informant 4). (The common problem that we experienced is lesser weight of the sugarcane so the money that will be divided among the members of the group is not exactly given).

Another sad experienced divulged by Informant 5 is hunger due to insufficient pay that they received. With great passion, he said that:

Lisod ug kaagi ang mga tapasero labi na ug dili insakto ang kaon kay kuwang kayo ang sweldo among nadawat (Informant 5). (Our experience was very hard especially when our food intake is insufficient because the wage that we received is insufficient).

The insufficiency of the salary given to the workers in the hacienda caused

more hardships to them. Informant 6 divulged that:

...kuwang ang sweldo (Informant 6). (The salary or wage is not enough).

The meager income earned by the workers in hacienda could hardly be enough to buy the basic household needs. This is another sad reality in the lives of the tapaseros whose economic opportunity is really limited in the rural community. Informant 10 shared that:

Usahay dili insakto ang sweldo akong nadawat ug dili kaaigo sa gastuhanan sa inadlaw adlaw (Informant 10). (Sometimes the wage that I receive is not enough for daily expenses).

Based on the significant statements of the participants, it was crystal clear that their common problem was the insufficiency of the income or wage that they receive out of their work in planting, cutting and loading of the cut sugarcane stalks to the cargo truck to be milled into sugar. This is precisely the reason why those people who depend on their livelihood or suffer from intense hunger and poverty. Hunger is very closely linked to poverty. Currently more than 1.1 billion people live in households that earn no more than P50.00 a day per person. Many of these poor people often cannot get enough food, either because they lack resources (e.g. land, seeds and tools) to grow enough food or lack the money to buy it. Hunger and malnutrition in turn impair individuals' performance in school or at work, making it harder for them to break out of the poverty cycle. Poor people depend heavily on nature for their basic needs, including food, water and firewood. However, they are increasingly destroying the very lands they depend on to survive, through over farming or poor management (Velasco, 2014). The downward trend of the price of labor will only stop at the level of subsistence. This level is hypothetically placed where laborer just earn enough to keep their body and soul (Pagoso et al., 2006).

Exposure to Work Hazards. The work in the agricultural sector entails the workers to be exposed to various work hazards that will somehow cause any form of sickness and diseases and even death. The lack of social protection to this group of laborers makes them very vulnerable.

Working as loader of the harvested sugarcane that was arranged in big bundle had given Informant 1 the experience of physical hardship just to earn a living. He said that:

Bug-at kayo ang tubo alahon paingon sa sakyanan (Informant 1). (The sugarcane is very heavy in going to the cargo truck).

In addition, to the heavy weight of loading the tubo that workers have to carry, another problem that they must have to bear is the unclean working area when the sugarcane field will be burned after harvesting. Informant 3 shared that:

Kung masunog ang katubhan lain kayo itrabaho kay hugaw (Informant 3). (If the sugarcane will be burnt it's very hard to work because it would be

untidy).

The presence of snakes added in the sugarcane exposed the workers to more danger since the bite is poisonous deadly. Since they still have to work despite this danger, they have to be extra careful. Based on the experience of Informant 6, he said that:

Masunog ang katubhan ug nay daghan nga bitin (Informant 6). (When the sugarcane plantation is burned and there lots of snakes).

To expedite the work of the workers in loading the newly harvested sugarcane stalks, they will arranged them into very large bundle which is really very heavy to carry in loading to the truck. According to Informant 7, this work situation requires extra physical strength to them. He further shared that:

Bug-at kayo ang tubo inig pas.an (Informant 7). (Majority of the problems we encountered the difficulty of carrying the heavy weight of the sugarcane).

Based on the responses of the participants, the laborers or the tapaseros encountered various work hazards when they work at the sugarcane plantation or hacienda. One of these work hazards is the possible injury that the workers might experience due to extending their physical strength beyond the average human capacity while carrying the large bundle of cut sugarcane to be loaded to the truck. Aside from this, the disease that they might get out of working in the dirty surroundings when they were made to work after the sugarcane field was burnt. They were also being exposed to the possible bite of the snake anytime. The result of the employees' productivity can be increased from five to ten percent, depending on the improvement of the physical workplace design (Brill, 1992). The elements of a working environment need to be proper so that the employees would not be stressed while getting their job done (McCoy & Evans, 2005).

Further, according to McCurdy and Carroll (2000), the unique features of the agricultural workplace and exposed population combine to increase risk and hinder accurate measurement. These features include a wide range of activities, hazards, and dispersed workplaces in agriculture; a seasonal hired workforce that often has brief tenure, poor English skills, and distrust of officialdom; and a history of exemption regarding occupational health and safety regulations.

Delayed Release of Wage or Salary. Usually, the pay is being given every 15th and 30th day of the month. But, in the agricultural sector, it will be released every week. So, when it is released later than schedule, the workers will be able to find it hard to find ways to be able to buy for their daily sustenance, considering that their income is meager. Delayed in the release of wage or pay to the tapaseros, deprived them of eating the right kind of food on time. This is another problem faced by the tapaseros, where Informant 1 said that:

Dugay kayo mohatag ug sweldo (Informant 1). (It will take some time to

release the wage).

This economic vulnerability was also experienced by Informant 2, when his pay was not given on time. During the interview he straightly said that:

Dugay ang sweldo (Informant 2). (The salary is delayed).

In addition to the delayed release of their pay, such income would not be enough to defray their needs and other household expenses. This undesirable reality was divulged by Informant 6:

Dugay ihatag ang sweldo ug kuwang ang sweldo (Informant 6). (The release of the wage/salary is delayed).

Another problem that the workers encountered is on their wages or salary. This will be delayed or released long after they had already rendered their services. That's why, based on the common observations, they have to purchase the commodities for their daily sustenance on credit either from the middlemen and the small stores near their place. So when the time that they will be able to receive pay, they will pay their advances. So, they will be under the slavery of credit.

Workers were unwilling to accept further cuts in their wages because their earnings were already cut by unemployment and part-time work. In the Keynesian theory, it was assumed that workers prefer to make their decision in terms of money wages. It was believed that that money wages were apt to be sticky or rigid downwards. Workers would actively resist cuts in money wage rates and would later prefer underemployment than reductions in money wage rates (Pagoso et al., 2006).

3.5. Problems in Dealing with the Management and Coworkers Conflict

The fourth question deals with the problems that they experienced in dealing with the management and co-worker. In the business organization, conflict with the management and co-employees are prevalent because of the different behaviors of the employees. Poor communication is one of the leading causes of conflict between employees in the workplace. This situation may cause the employee to feel slighted, which can transform into animosity among the two employees and the manager. Failing to communicate in the workplace may cause employees to make incorrect assumptions and believe in workplace gossip. A difference in personalities among employees is another cause of workplace' conflict. When employees fail to understand or accept the differences in each other's personalities, problems arise in the workplace (Johnson, 2019).

Challenging Group Dynamics. One of the causes of problems in the workplace is the reality on the diversity of human behavior due to the difference in culture, social exposure, family upbringing, experiences in life, and even personal philosophy and principle (Tinapay & Tirol, 2022).

Misunderstanding among the co-workers is highly possible in the workplace especially in the agricultural sector. If this conflict cannot be resolved it would affect their productivity. In this context, the Informant 1 expressed his feelings by saying that:

Dili me magkasinabot sa among kauban kay mga init kayo ug ulo (Informant 1). (We hardly agree with my colleagues because they are hot-tempered).

Human as the workers are, they also have feelings that would be hurt once they received a reprimand or blunt words from their group leader or their employer. Based on the unfortunate experience of Informant 3, he divulged by saying that:

Dili kamao modala ang tigdumala kay permi lang me kasab-an bisan walay hinungdan (Informant 3). (The manager does not know how to handle us because they always reprimand us even without any basis at all).

Differences in attitude and behavior would somehow cause some disagreements among co-workers. Informant 6 expressed the following words:

Ang bati nga batasan sa mga kauban (Informant 6). (The bad behavior of the co-workers).

Further, Informant 9 collaborated the earlier statement based on his experience of misunderstanding among the co-workers. He shared his sentiments by saying:

Usahay dili magkasinabtanay kay tungod sa batasan sa grupo (Informant 9). (Misunderstanding between the co-workers is due to their behavior).

Since the workers in the sugarcane industry had not finished a high level of education, then their level of understanding and flexibility on the difference in human behavior in the working environment is a bit low. Due to this reality, there is a high probability that these people will quarrel because they cannot handle their difference in attitude and manner of relating to one another.

People always have an underlying opinion of what is fair. That belief is not often consistent among individuals, but it is still maintained (Tirol, 2022). As taught in a human resource course, people are not machines. They are human beings to be treated as a whole person. If they feel that they are part of an organization, then they will work hard, but their experience is. Otherwise, they can cause to interrupt the continuity of an organization if they feel they are being taken advantage of (Nebres, 2008).

Strict Management. Another challenge that the workers have endured is the strict management system. Usually, the workers in the sugarcane industry feel that this is a form of oppression since they are very vulnerable and dependent on the income from the owners of the sugarcane plantation or hacienda.

Uneducated workers are susceptible to the undesirability of their working conditions since it would only add to their feeling of oppression due to their po-

verty. However, there is a legal policy that directly protects them from this vulnerability of the strict management system. So despite this situation, Informant 4 uttered that:

Strikto kayo ang tag iya (Informant 4). (The owner was so strict).

Apparently, the workers did not like the strict management system, yet they cannot help it since they are dependent on the income from the hacienda. Hence, with sadness in his eyes, Informant 5 added that:

Strikto ang tigdumala unya mga kauban sa gropo mga tamaran (Informant 5). (The management is strict and my colleagues in the group were lazy).

Based on the significant statements of the participants, they expressed that one of their work challenges is the strict management system where they feel intimidated considering that they knew that they are poor and cannot forego with their work in the sugarcane hacienda, or else they would have no income and nothing to feed to their families. Despite this, unfair labor treatment is what they get from those who managed them. Labor problems represent conflicts on social ideals that normally rise out of employment. Labor problem refers to the working relationship, which is considered below the ideal. Those who took part in employment relationships must work out with mutual satisfactory arrangements. Among the things that have to be determined are the part individual workers who have to pay in return for the payment given by the employers. The employers, in turn, must clarify the terms of agreement. A mutually satisfactory arrangement spelled out from the very beginning would lessen labor problems (Pagoso et al., 2006). Another issue that they encountered is the lazy behavior of the co-workers, which affect the speed and efficiency of the tasks that had been assigned to them, either in planting the sugarcane seedlings or harvesting and loading the bundles of cut sugarcane plant to the truck for milling to BOMEDCO.

Teamwork is essential in the organization. Cooperation is the collaborative effort of a team to achieve a common goal or to complete a task most effectively and efficiently. Groups are an integral part of many organizations. Successful teamwork relies upon synergism existing between all team members creating an environment where they are all willing to contribute and participate in promoting and nurturing a positive, productive team environment (Tirol, 2021). Team members must be flexible enough to adapt to cooperative working environments where goals are achieved through collaboration and social interdependence rather than individualized, competitive problem goals (Luca & Tarricone, 2001).

3.6. Problems in the Performance of Their Job

Occupational Safety and Injury. Due to the intense physical strength that the workers or laborers need to exert in doing their job in the sugarcane field, they have high probability to meet injury and other problems with occupational safety.

One of the occupational injuries that the workers in the agricultural sector would experience is fall. This accident would cause bone fractures and other physical pain. Based on the experience of Informant 1, he shared the following statement:

Kanang inig karga usahay matagak ug mapiang (Informant 1). (During loading of the sugarcane to the cargo truck sometimes we fall and get injured).

Also, the possible injury caused by falls during the loading of the bundles of sugarcane, the workers were exposed to the potential accident due to the slippery and bumpy road. This situation was divulged by Informant 3, who said the following statement:

Magkarga ka ug tubo adto sa dikarga/truck unya hapit ka matagak ug kanang magbyahi na ang truck unya lisod kaayo ang againan ug madisgrasya (Informant 3). (During the loading of the sugarcane to the cargo truck, sometimes we fall and during the times when the truck is in transit and the road was so rough and rocky, they we meet an accident).

The work of the tapaseros would still continue whether the sun is rising or when it is raining. Either of the extreme weather conditions, it might lead to accident. Based on the unfortunate experience of Informant 8, he said:

Ang pagkarga sa tubo labi na ug ting ulan kay dangog kayo ang hagdan (Informant 8). (During the loading of the sugarcane especially during the rainy days, the ladder is very slippery).

The cutting of the matured sugarcane or tubo, they have the tendency to be hit by very sharp spading. Informant 4 uttered that:

Kanang masamad ka sa spading. Ang piligrong kasagaran among maagian mao ang matigbasan among tiil ug madakinas sa banyo inig karga namo sa tubo didto sa dikarga (Informant 4). (When we are wounded by the spading or machete, the danger that we encounter is when our feet will be hit and cut by the spading or machete).

The workers who are exposed directly to the intense high temperature might succumb to heart attack. This occupational danger was experienced by Informant 5 and shared his experience by saying:

Usa sa mga peligro kay kanang masamad ka ug ang kainit sa panahon ug peligro sa ataki sa kasingkasing (Informant 5). (One of the risks is when we are exposed to the intense heat of the sun that might cause heat stroke and heart attack).

Further, the work problem caused by exposure of the workers to the vagaries of the weather was also collaborated by Informant 10 by sharing that:

Usahay makuyapan ko sa kainit ug sa kauhaw (Informant 10). (Sometimes we faint due to the intense heat of the sun and too much thirst).

The informants or the participants' concerns in performing their jobs in the sugarcane plantation or hacienda were the very high propensity of meeting accidents that might cause injury. This situation is a serious problem since they do not have money for hospitalization and even buying the medicines. Their income could hardly meet their daily sustenance requirements. The workers do not have hazard pay or insurance benefits.

A work accident, workplace accident, occupational accident, or accident at work is a discrete occurrence in the course of work leading to physical or mental occupational injury. Another concern of the informants is their health. BOMEDCO in Medellin, Cebu has a medical center to cater on health problems of the tapaseros; nevertheless, no medic is available in the workplace. So, when any worker meets an accident, they have to be brought to the nearest provincial hospital where the medical services are also limited due to the lack of facilities and medical specialists.

A hazard is a potential for harm. In practical terms, a risk often is associated with a condition or activity that, if left uncontrolled, can result in an injury or illness, according to the *Occupational Safety and Health Administration (2002)*. According to the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health, job stress can be defined as the harmful physical and emotional responses that occur when the requirements of the job do not match the capabilities, resources, or needs of the worker. Occupational health and safety is the concern of human well-being, that, this day, industrialization and service giving sectors development are accelerating, resulting in workplace work problem booming. Workplace safety and health hazards nowadays considered as a driving force toward finding solution how to prevent it from the manufacturing industries employee negative consequences (Jilcha & Kitaw, 2016).

3.7. Survival Strategy of the Tapaseros in the 4th District of Cebu during Off-Milling Season

This portion reveals the survival strategy of the informants while working as a tapasero especially during off season or no work in the sugarcane industry.

Means of Livelihood

The first question relates to the informants' means of livelihood during the off-season in the sugarcane plantation in the 4th district of Cebu. The term livelihoods have become increasingly important in development theory and practice, as it is seen to encompass a wide range of concerns, and to allow the inclusion of the broad range of people's activities and assets in considering how they support themselves, rather than focusing more narrowly on economic, income-generating or formal events.

Survival through Agricultural Production. Income of the workers in the sugarcane plantation or hacienda is seasonal, and there are months when they will have no work.

According to Velasco (2014), thousands of sugarcane workers in the Philippines are facing hunger, catastrophic weather changes, and an economy in col-

lapse. They call it *Tiempo Muerto* or dead season, which is the time between planting and harvesting when there is no work in the sugarcane fields.

In the sugarcane sector, the need for work would usually stretch for six months and halted by no action during the period between after planting and the time for harvesting. The workers would not have income, and to be able to survive, they have to find alternative sources of livelihood raising farm animals and planting vegetables. This economic reality was revealed by Informant 2, who said that:

Ug walay trabaho sa kampo mamuhi ug hayop ug mananom ug mga utanon (Informant 2). (If there is no work in the camp I raise farm animals and plant vegetables).

There are also group of people who find farming various types of crops as their way of surviving. During the interview, Informant 4 shared his survival strategy by saying that:

Sa panahon nga walay tapas ang akong trabaho mao ang pag-uma (Informant 4). (During those times when there is no work in cutting the sugarcane plant I work in the farm).

Through the riches of the nature and the natural environment, man only need to find ways to earn income. Based on the statement of Informant 5, he was able to earn alternative source of income by selling wood. This foregoing statement was his revelations:

Pag pamaligya ug kahoy (Informant 5). (Sell a wood).

There is a person who extends to other dimensions of earning in the livelihood sector, like fishing and charcoal making. When there is no available work in the hacienda, Informant 6 earned income in this means and said that:

Kung walay trabaho sa katubhan, kay managat ug manguling (Informant 6). (If there is no work in the sugarcane plantation or hacienda I go fishing and make charcoal).

For very industrious people, they can combine fishing and farming as an alternative livelihood. So in this way, the family will be assured that they have something to eat at the very least three times a day. Informant 10 uttered the following statement:

Manguma, magdaro, ug managat (Informant 10). (Farming and fishing).

The informants shared that during the off-season in the sugarcane plantation, they do everything to live. Most of them do not have any savings for their daily needs and an emergency since their income is limited. So, to be able to survive, they do farming, raising farm animals, and fishing as their alternatives livelihood.

Livelihood is a means of making a living. It encompasses people's capabilities, assets, income, and activities required to secure the necessities of life. One

can describe a livelihood as a combination of the skills and resources people have (including social, human, financial, natural, and material assets) and the activities they undertake to make a living and to attain their goals and aspirations (Chambers & Conway, 1992). Livelihood is sustainable when people cope with and recover from shocks and crises (e.g. seasonal, environmental, and economic) and can maintain or enhance their capability and assets both now and in the future, while not undermining the natural resource base.

Means of Sustenance

The next question relates to the manner in how the informants sustain their daily household needs and expenses during the off-season in the sugarcane plantation in the 4th district of Cebu Province. The cost of living is the amount of money needed to sustain a certain standard of living standard by affording basic expenses such as housing, food, taxes, and healthcare.

Farm Harvest Means Survival. During the off-milling season in the sugarcane plantation, the workers have to find ways on how to earn to defray the daily needs in the household because the no-work period would last for six months while consumption is regularly.

In the rural agricultural area, the opportunity to earn is minimal in addition to the lack of high educational attainment of the majority of the people. Hence, people do not have any choice but to earn still through agriculture to be able to earn income for their everyday needs. During the interview, Informant 2 was honest in saying that:

Mamaligya ug mga hayop ug mga utanon para nay magamit sa inadlaw adlaw nga panginahanglanon (Informant 2). (I sell farm animals and vegetables so that I can have money for the daily expenses).

It has been said that when a person plants, he or she has something to harvest. In preparation for the period where there is no income in the hacienda, their substitute means of living are selling the yield of their farm. So, in relation to the earlier revelation of the participants, Informant 3 honestly shared that:

Ang mga bunga sa akong gitanum ako ibaligya sa Mercado para makapalit ug pagkaon (Informant 3). (The fruits and vegetables that I planted, I will sell it to the public market to be able to buy the daily needs).

Indeed, planting vegetables in the backyard has been the greatest way of earning additional income for the people living in hacienda. Informant 4 further added to the earlier statement of other informants that their survival strategies during tiempo muerto. He said that:

Ang akong trabaho aron makapalit ako sa inadlaw adlaw magbaligya ko ug mga utanon (Informant 4). (My work in order to buy the daily needs every day, I will sell a vegetables to the public market).

To those workers who do not have the inclination or opportunity to do farming and raising farm animals, they opted to directly harvest what they can find in

the forest or the timberland and sell them to earn additional income. This living condition was the means of living for Informant 7, who shared that:

Pagpangahoy unya ibaligya para nay ikapalit ug bugas (Informant 7). (Getting wood and sell it to the public market in order to buy food).

The informants had different answers regarding how to sustain their daily needs during dead season in the sugarcane plantation. The solution that they find ways to have money for their daily needs to buy their needs is to sell the fruits and vegetables that they planted in the farm.

The cost of goods and services considered essential to meet basic needs and participate in society represents a more significant proportion of the budgets of households in poverty than it does for average/high-income households. Low-income families are disadvantaged by having less access to enabling goods such as an internet bank account or a car that would increase their ability to reduce costs. Termed the poverty premium, this effect is examined in relation to groups facing both specific and enhanced additional costs, such as the disabled or people living in remote areas. The concept of consumer vulnerability in respect of an anti-poverty strategy proves useful in describing individuals or groups who cannot participate fully in today's competitive marketplace (Tinson et al., 2014).

3.8. The Life of the Tapaseros Workers during Off-Milling Season

The workers suffer more poverty during dead season in the sugarcane plantation. According to The World Bank Organization, poverty means hunger. Poverty is lack of shelter. Poverty is being sick and not being able to see a doctor. Poverty does not have a job; it is fear for the future, living one day at a time. Poverty is a call to action, for the poor and the wealthy alike, a request to change the world so that many more may have enough to eat, adequate shelter, access to education and health, protection from violence, and a voice in what happens in their communities. No Work Means Hardships. Income depends on the limited opportunity to earn, especially in rural areas or neighborhoods.

Having no income would be hard for the workers who were only earning very little income from their work as tapaseros. This economic situation is an indication of massive poverty experienced by those people who depend on their work in the hacienda. Informant 1 disclosed this reality in his life:

Maglisod mi wala me igasto ug naay mga emergency kung walay tapas sa katubhan (Informant 1). (I don't have money to be used when there is emergency when there is no work in the sugarcane).

The limited income of the people only added more hardships to their life in the rural area. This sad actuality of life was revealed by Informant 3 who further disclosed that:

Lisod kayo ang kinabuhi pagwalay trabaho sa tubuhan kay gamay kaayo

ang income ug walay pundo (Informant 3). (Life is not easy if there is no work in the sugarcane plantation since our salary is low salary and if there is no).

However, despite the hardships, some people remain hopeful and depend on their ingenuity to find ways to be able to survive. Although Informant 4 also said that their life was hard, his statement was different from the others since he considers still light amid his situation by saying:

Panahon sa walay tapas ang akong kinabuhi nay dakong deperensya pero depende ra sa paningkamot sa tao (Informant 4). (In times when there is no work in the sugarcane, there is a big difference with my life but it depends on how a person will work hard).

Other workers treated their situation different from others. So if other workers would earn agriculture, Informant 6 disclosed that they choose not to find other means of obtaining income and said that:

Mag tambay ra jud ko (Informant 6). (I become a bystander).

The deeper pain in the absence of income was felt by Informant 8, who revealed that:

Kagool ug kasakit akong naagian (Informant 8). (I experience sadness).

When the workers do not have work in the sugarcane plantation, their life even becomes harder and painful, especially if they do not have savings in times when they need money for emergencies. In reality, it would be hard for them to save.

The theory of empowerment focuses on internal and external forces that influence the capacities of individuals and groups to bring about changes in their personal and community living conditions. Empowerment is primarily defined as one's ability or control to create and take action to achieve individual and collective aims; and one's capacity for critical thinking and understanding of structural inequalities towards greater access to resources, influence, and power that can yield positive changes within persons and their environment. Empowerment is not viewed as an alternative solution to the redistribution of unequally divided resources but rather as an act of providing the necessary tools to shape the whole person and promote a critical way of thinking and consciousness (Ledwith, 2005).

These are people who have to take on any job for subsistence, notwithstanding the little rewards after failing to land a position corresponding to their educational attainment. This refers to workers holding jobs below what they are qualified for and below the occupational levels they aspire. Numerous agricultural workers do not work twelve months a year because of the seasonal nature of this occupation. Another symptom of underemployment is the widespread need for additional sources of income in rural areas because of the inadequacy of existing family income (Villegas, 2001).

4. Conclusion

The workers in the sugarcane plantation or hacienda in the 4th District of Cebu Province have remained poor and low-paid despite the rigors of working under extreme weather conditions and the backbreaking nature of carrying the heavy bundles of sugarcane that they cut for milling. However, tapaseros receive no form of social protection beyond the pay that they receive. Cognizant to their plight, they suffer in silence without any collective voice or organization to back them up with their demand for better working conditions. Instead they simply accept their destiny due to their low education and the absence of livelihood options in their own community. Due to this, they felt helpless in their impoverished condition since they have been disempowered by the virtual absence of opportunities for any alternative way of living, stemming from both personal limitation and unfavorable economic environment coupled with the lack of institutional support from the barangay and higher governmental institutions. Despite their apparent poverty, their only consolation as human is that at least, they can eat three meals a day and have regular earnings during their six to seven months of work.

Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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