

# **Working children in Patio Bonito, Bogota**

The role of Proyecto Pequeño Trabajador (PPT) in improving the  
situation of working children

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## **Abstract**

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Based on fieldwork, this thesis analyzes in what ways and to what extent the organization *Proyecto Pequeño Trabajador (PPT)* succeeds in improving the situation of working children in Patio Bonito, Bogotá. The research is based on participation in the daily activities of PPT, informal conversations and semi-structured interviews. These interviews were held with participating (former) working children and employees of the organization about their work and their experiences with PPT. Despite the prohibition, child labor remains a persistent phenomenon in Colombia. There are several reasons for the existence of child labor; poverty seems to be the most important. Children from the poor neighborhood Patio Bonito indicate to work in order to earn money with which they contribute to family income or can buy their own things. (Former) working children state that work has both a positive and a negative impact, though it appears to be that the positive effects prevail. Child labor is a point of debate in Colombia. Several parties such as the government and various organizations consider that child labor must be eradicated. PPT in contrast, does not believe that child labor should be prohibited. PPT states that work can be valuable for children, provided that they work in decent conditions. In the debate about child labor, the question whether or not children are able to take well-considered decisions occupies a central position. PPT strives for participation and dialogue with working children, and contributes to the development of awareness among its participants. The organization contributes to working children's self-esteem, gives them a voice, and teaches them to be proud of their work.

Keywords: child labor, working children, Proyecto Pequeño Trabajador

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## **1. Introduction**

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Since the 1950s, child-labor worldwide has declined steadily. Various international conventions focus on child labor, such as the 1989 United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNICEF, 2008), the 1999 International Labor Organization Convention 182 on the Worst Forms of Child Labor (ILO, 1999), and the 2000 United Nations Millennium Declaration (United Nations, 2000). Although these conventions are signed by virtually all countries in the world, in many developing countries child labor remains persistent. According to figures from the International Labour Organization (ILO), in 2008 there were approximately 306 million children aged 5 to 17 years in economic activity (Diallo, 2010, p. 3). That is almost one fifth of all children in that age group. Latin America has the lowest incidence in terms of child labor, outside the developed countries, for over the last forty years. However, it has an unusually high number of working children in comparison with similar developed countries. In Colombia, where this research took place, despite the formal policy against child labor, which is endorsed by the government, labor unions and international organizations like the ILO, child labor remains an important phenomenon. Given this fact that child labor is so persistent, made me wondering how the children themselves look at this phenomenon. Why do they work and how do they themselves consider their work, how do they value it? What is according to them the contribution of certain programs on their future vision?

As Colombia is a poor country, 46.8 % of the population lived below the poverty line in 2010 (IndexMundi, 2010), the discussion about child labor should be conducted nuanced, as child labor often plays an important role in the survival strategies of poor households. Adequate programs that focus on child labor, greatly benefit from current scientific understanding of this phenomenon. Several authors have already written about this, and have made recommendations for policies regarding child labor. Orazem (2009) analyzes child labor from an economic perspective and recommends Conditional Cash Transfer programs. Arat (2002) describes aggravating policies and provides alternatives and Brown (2001) addresses the determinants of child labor and evaluate existing policies. So there is already written about the (economic) impact at the macro level. What I want to contribute is an insight at the micro level; into how children themselves evaluate the approach of child labor. I have therefore formulated the following research question:

*In what ways and to what extent does the Proyecto Pequeño Trabajador (PPT) succeed in improving the situation of children with experiences of child labor?*

The fieldwork for this research was conducted in the months February to May 2011, at the organization *Proyecto Pequeño Trabajador* (Project Little Worker). This organization is an NGO that focuses on working children, youth and adolescents and is located in Patio Bonito, one of the poorer neighborhoods in the south of Bogota. During my research I have participated in the daily activities of *Proyecto Pequeño Trabajador* (PPT), which enabled me to get in touch and build a relationship with working children, and the employees and volunteers of the organization. The research methods used constitute of participant observation, informal conversations and semi-structured interviews. A total of 38 persons have been interviewed, all of which are involved in PPT. This research population consists of children aged 7 to 16 years with work experience, either within PPT, or outside; young adults who have worked as a child and are currently working within PPT; and the adult staff and direction of PPT. Basically, the interviews were conducted individually, only with regard to the younger children it

appeared to work better to interview them in pairs; this way they were less shy and complemented each other. The semi-structured interviews proved to be most informative, the participant observation and informal discussions constituted an important contribution to place the obtained information in the proper perspective.

This thesis is structured as follows: the second chapter analyses the causes and consequences of child labor and policies on this issue. The third chapter then explores the circumstances in which working children and their families live. Together, these two chapters provide the reader with an insight in the background situation of working children in Bogotá. The next chapter analyses how children themselves have experienced their work; the reasons why they worked, the kind of work they did and their working conditions are discussed. Chapter five includes a description of the organization, and chapter six presents the results of the organization for the working children. Subsequently, chapter 7 focuses on the debate on child labor. The different positions, including those of children are explored, and the concept of agency is briefly discussed. The thesis is concluded in the final chapter in which the theory is connected to the research results and the research question will be answered.

## **2. Analyzing child labor**

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According to the International Labor Organization (ILO) not all work done by children should be defined as child labor which should be eradicated. Work done by children which does not negatively influence their health, education and personal development, is generally considered positive. Such non-harmful work contributes to the development of children and the welfare of their families, it helps them to develop skills and abilities and to contribute to the society. The term child labor is often used for work that „deprives children of their childhood, their potential and their dignity, and that is harmful to physical and mental development (ILO, 2010). It is work that is considered inappropriate to children and therefore should be eliminated. The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) ‘recognizes the child’s right to be protected from forms of work that are likely to be hazardous or to interfere with the child’s education, or to be harmful to the child’s health or physical, mental, spiritual, moral or social development’ (UNICEF, 2008). ILO Conventions No. 138 (Minimum Age) and No. 182 (Worst Forms) target as child labor „1) all forms of work carried out by children below a minimum cut-off age (at least 12 years in less developed countries); 2) all forms except „light work. carried out by children below a second higher cut-off age (at least 14 years in less developed countries); and 3) all „worst forms. of child labor carried out by children of any age under 18 years, where worst forms include any activity or occupation which, by its nature or type has, or leads to, adverse effects on the child’s safety, health, or moral development. (Guarcello et al., 2006, p. 20; ILO, 2010; UNICEF, 2008).

### **2.1 Causes of Child Labor**

Three major parties form the foundation which sustains child labor. These parties are parents, employers and the state. Parents and employers are seen as directly responsible and the state is regarded as an accomplice since it does not protect children rights and allow the exploitation of children (Arat, 2002).

Employers prefer children as employees because of their docility and because children work in poor working conditions for low wages. In addition, children are not able to legally form unions and demand for better working conditions. Perhaps most important is the fact that employers do not ensure good working conditions for adults, including a good working environment, incapacity benefit and childcare, which leads to an increasing dependency of families on child labor. Powerful companies that are guilty of using child labor are able to bribe enforcement bodies to turn a blind eye (Arat, 2002; Siddiqi & Patrinos, 1995).

The state in turn, often condones the use of child labor because she welcomes any form of investment. Although in most countries there exist laws that prohibit child labor and obligate education, governments are often unable to guarantee the enforcement of those laws. In developing countries there are seldom enough enforcement agencies, since subsistence has priority above anything else. Furthermore, many children work in the informal sector, such as family businesses, where enforcement is difficult (Arat, 2002; Basu, 1999; Gunnarsson, Orazem, & Sánchez, 2006). The lack of enforcement can also be the result of inconsistencies in legislation. In many countries for example, the minimum age for work is lower than the age at which the amount of compulsory years of school is reached. Children from poor families will then, when they have reached the age at which they are legally allowed to work, contribute to household income and leave school to work. Sometimes it is the other way around. In this case the minimum age for work is higher than the number of compulsory school years. After completing their compulsory school years, children have to wait then a number of years before they are allowed to work. It is unlikely that they will do so. States not only fail in enforcing laws, they

often disavow the existence of the problem of child labor. And sometimes states themselves even use child labor in state-owned companies ( Arat, 2002; Siddiqi & Patrinos, 1995).

Parents form the third corner of the triangular foundation that supports child labor. In the majority of cases, parents are the ones who decide whether or not a child has to work. In developing countries, where children contribute more to the households than children in developed countries, children are considered rather more beneficial than as an economic burden. That is why children in developing countries are often encouraged to work by their parents. However, it is important to realize that child labor is primarily the result of poverty and not of the indifference of parents regarding their children's welfare and future. Parents normally resort to child labor when there are no other options. When parents are unable to provide for the livelihood for their family they depend on the contribution of their children, although children are paid poorly, they are nevertheless essential for the survival of the family. Poverty can therefore be considered as the main cause of child labor. Tuttle (2006, p. 152) argues that poverty and child labor go hand in hand, both at macroeconomic and microeconomic level. As in poor countries the number of working children is higher, and children from poor families are more likely to work than children from wealthy families. Child labor is mainly present in the lower classes and poor sections of the population, heavily represented among immigrants and minority groups (Arat, 2002; Siddiqi & Patrinos, 1995; Tuttle, 2006)).

Besides poverty there are more factors contributing to child labor, and as a consequence inadequate schooling. The failure of the capital market is considered as such a factor contributing to child labor. Studies have shown that parents are willing to borrow for the education of their children when they are able to do so (Arat, 2002, p. 184). When parents have access to credit, the investment in the education of their children will increase. The inability to accede the capital markets, contributes therefore to inefficient child labor and low educational levels (Arat, 2002; Brown, 2001, pp. 765-766).

Regarding the per capita income and child labor there is a negative cross-sectional relationship. If a country's income will increase, the extent of child labor will decrease. Worldwide, the percentage of working children declined from 25% in 1960 to 11% in 2000 (Gunnarsson, Orazem, & Sedlacek, 2009, p. 22). This decrease corresponds to a reduction in the number of countries with very low incomes. However, the relationship between per capita income and child labor participation is convex, so initially child labor will quickly diminish, but as the per capita income rises further, the decline will become more modest. Moreover, some countries appear to be able to eliminate child labor with a per capita income of \$.1800, while other countries with an income of \$.7000 still exhibit an above average level of child labor. So it can be concluded that an increase in per capita income alone is not enough to eliminate child labor. Another important factor for the survival of child labor is the demand for it. Agriculture is the largest sector that uses child labor, 70% of child labor occurs in agriculture, while manufacturing takes a second place with only 8.3% (Gunnarsson, Orazem, & Sedlacek, 2009, p. 23). Therefore, the size of agriculture in a society can be used to predict the extent of child labor. A third factor that influences the existence of child labor is the literacy of the parents. The decision of parents to send their children to work or to school depends in part on their own education. Literate parents assign more value to the education of their children and they can stimulate and help their children with their educational activities. So the more adults become literate, the more they will send their children to school and, thus reducing child labor (Gunnarsson, Orazem, & Sedlacek, 2009).

Poor school facilities can also contribute to child labor. Children may decide to seek employment for

the simple reason that they have no access to schools, because of the distance or because there is no school at all. In the case of very poor quality of education, due to overcrowded classes, not enough or incapable teachers and a lack of materials, education will not lead to improved prospects and parents may decide that school is a waste of time. By keeping their children at home, they save money because even though education is free, they have to pay for uniforms, books, etc. At home parents can teach their children a profession or skill and the children can contribute to the household income (Arat, 2002; Siddiqi & Patrinos, 1995).

Child labor also derives from traditional ideas. Educated women are sometimes considered as unsuitable marriage partner. Therefore, daughters are kept at home, and have to fulfill household tasks so that their mothers are able to perform paid work. Such traditional beliefs impede education of women and contribute to child labor. Other factors that contribute to child labor are class division and urbanization. Manual labor is often carried out by the lower classes, which therefore are less likely to attend school. And due to the enormous increase in the number of migrants from countryside to city the last fifty years, the economic prospects for these migrants have decreased sharply. Migrants end up in urban poverty and their children are soon forced to work (Siddiqi & Patrinos, 1995).

## **2.2 Consequences of Child Labor**

Roggero (2007, p. 271) indicates that while child labor is considered as a global health problem, research on the health effects of child labor is limited. According to Henne (2005, p. 12) slavery-like situations in which children work long hours, often locked up and beaten and without a chance of education, lead to prolonged mental and psychological consequences. Research by O'Donnell (2005, p. 459) shows that, especially in the longer term, child labor has negative effects on health. Up to five years later, persons working in childhood are more likely to report health complaints. This long-term effect may be caused by accidents at the working place which result in long-term or permanent damage. Another possibility is that there is a latency period between child work and occurring health problems. Such is the case with a bad posture, exposure to harmful chemicals or heavy lifting (Roggero et al., 2007; Henne & Moseley, 2005; O'Donnell, Rosati, & van Doorslaer, 2005).

In Latin America child labor adversely affects school attendance as it has a significant and negative effect on educational enrollment. According to Sedlacek (2009, p. 48) the probability of working children to attend school is significantly smaller than that of their peers who do not work. Sedlacek (2009) demonstrates that if the probability of working is reduced by 10%, the probability of school enrollment will increase by 7% (2009, p. 48). But while child labor on the one hand leads to reduced school attendance, on the other hand it may actually enable school enrollment. As child labor contributes to the household income, there may arise financial means which afford education, something that otherwise would have been impossible (Sedlacek et al., 2009; Salazar & Glasinovich, 1998, p. 11).

In Latin America the school enrollment rate is the highest at the age of ten years and then takes off. This is the case for both poor and more affluent households, but is especially common among the poor ones. Poor children in Latin America start school late and quit early. Although the percentage of children aged 8 to 11 years that attend school shows little difference among different income groups, the poorest children have already at age eight years a backlog of one to two years, compared to their wealthier peers. Moreover, there is a big difference between rich and poor income groups in drop-out after the age of eleven years. Thus, the small difference in the enrollment rate at age 8-11 years says little and may even be misleading about the large differences that exist between rich and poor in terms of investment in and acquisition of human capital (Sedlacek

et al., 2009, pp. 35-36). So while working children may actually enroll in school, the number of school years that they complete is lower than that of non-working children. This is important because the number of completed school years affects the earnings as an adult. The less school years a child will complete, the lower his or her income as an adult will be, because of their knowledge gap and resulting competitive disadvantage in the labor market (Salazar & Glasinovich, 1998; Sedlacek et al., 2009).

Apart from the effects child labor has on the enrollment of children, it has an even greater impact on performance in school. Exhausted by their work, children are not able to keep attention and concentrate in school. Furthermore, because of their work, children do not have enough time to make efforts for school as they hardly have time to study and do their homework (Salazar & Glasinovich, 1998, p. 148). Children in Latin America are generally behind in terms of school performance. This applies to both working and non-working children, but the backlog in the latter group is larger. Children from the poorest families have a backlog of 5% to 22% compared to the richest ones, depending on the country (Sedlacek et al., 2009, p. 45).

In short, it is possible that countries with a high degree of child labor have also a high level of school enrollment, but this doesn't say anything about the performances. The impact of household income on school performance is larger than the impact on child labor and school enrollment. And the lack of knowledge will not only affect the future of the child, but also that of his or her family and the whole country. Because without good education, there is no hope for a better future and thus the vicious circle of poverty for the child and coming generations will be maintained. Due to a lack of education a country might stuck in labor-intensive, low wage production, rather than developing a capital-intensive high wages way of production. A country unable to industrialize and modernize, will consequently stuck in poverty (Sedlacek et al., 2009; Tuttle, 2006). As Tuttle (2006, p. 153) argues: "Continuing to employ children will make it almost impossible for Latin America to catch up."

### 2.3 Policies Addressing Child Labor

Regarding the solution to the problem of child labor, among the various authors there is agreement that this solution should be comprehensive in nature. Basu (1999, p. 1115) makes a distinction between "legal interventions" and what he calls "collaborative interventions", consisting of better wages for adults, good education, free meals, and etcetera. The latter should lead to improved economic conditions that voluntarily motivate parents not to send their children to work (Basu, 1999).

Good education is considered of great importance in the fight against child labor and therefore there should be invested in school materials, uniforms, buildings, and wages and trainings for teachers. According to UNICEF (2001) education is the key to combat child labor. UNICEF stresses that both boys and girls have the right to education. Educated girls have more opportunities to escape poverty and because they value education, they will send their own children to school. So by education child labor can be prevented now and in the future. Arat (2002, pp. 200-201) gives the example of India and China where by investing in education, child labor has declined. The same goes for Cuba. Despite relative poverty and a trade embargo by the U.S., this country has nonetheless managed to prevent child labor through good education and social programs. Also from a practical perspective, the obligation of education benefits over the prohibition of child labor since it is easier to monitor the presence of a child at school than to check the absence on his or her work (Weiner, 1991 in: Basu, 1999, p.1090). However, as demonstrated before, child labor does not exclude school enrollment but it actually does have a negative impact on school performances. So, the policy on education in Latin America should not only

aim to get children in school, but also to keep them there and to improve their performance (Arat, 2002; UNICEF, 2001; Basu, 1999). Remedial teaching and flexible schedules is another initiative that has been identified to address child labor. Brown (2001, p. 772) gives examples of Nicaragua and Guatemala where more flexible school hours enable children to continue earning an income, but also to attend school. Other authors, however, argue precisely for longer schooldays. Salazar (1998, p. 14) for example, indicates that school days in Latin America are too short, with only 4-5 hours per day and 120 instead of 180 mandatory school days per year. She states that 'urban, non-coeducational and full-time schools', appear to have the best results (Brown, 2001; Salazar & Glasinovich, 1998).

Since the conditions in certain sectors are regarded as very dangerous, there are special programs designed to address child labor in these fields. In Latin America this involves child labor in, among others, firework- and brick factories, mines, plantations, landfills, etc. These programs try to make parents, employers and society aware of the risks these children face. They also aim to improve working conditions and to offer working children flexible school hours (Brown, 2001, p. 777; Salazar & Glasinovich, 1998, p. 12).

As the effectiveness of laws is contingent on the enforcement, according to Arat (2002, pp. 202-203) effective enforcement requires monitoring by bodies other than governments and employers. These bodies have too little regard for the interests of workers and they succumb to short-term interests. In labor unions, however, competent and dedicated observers can be found. Unionization should therefore be promoted, including among children, to improve labor conditions and ultimately to abolish child labor by insisting on laws and contracts that make child labor less attractive for employers. Except that laws are difficult to enforce, child labor laws in the U.S. and other industrialized countries only proved effective after the standard of living had risen to a level where there was no longer a demand for child labor. A durable solution to child labor would therefore be the eradication of poverty (Arat, 2002).

Brown (2001, pp. 775-777) indicates that several programs exist whereby parents choose school instead of working as an optimal option for their children, without raising the income of the family till that level at which child labor normally is expected to disappear. These are programs that focus on poor families and try to eliminate restrictions that prevent children from attending school, achieving good school performances and health and nutrition. These so-called "Conditional Cash Transfers (CCT)" provide grants to households on condition that these households invest in the welfare of their children, including their human capital. The content of the various programs, like Bolsa Escola and PETI in Brasil and PROGRESA in Mexico (Oratzem, Sedlacek, & Tzannatos, 2009, pp. 13-14) varies, but they have similar goals; they attempt to increase school attendance and to reduce poverty and child labor. (Brown, 2001; Oratzem, Sedlacek, & Tzannatos, 2009). It appears that programs that replace income of the children have the greatest successes. These programs are also relatively cheap to implement because they are not forced to raise the income of the family till that level at which parents voluntarily decide not to encourage their children to work; they only replace the earnings of a child in the family. Brown (2001, p. 776) proposes that, in order to be effective, the amount of the subsidies doesn't have to be so large that they increase household incomes above the poverty line. Oratzem (2009, p. 15) also suggests that relatively small transfers sufficient to reduce child labor and school performance to increase. According to Brown (2001, p. 777) the costs to reduce child labor are modest, and she suggests that „we may not have to wait for the time-honored development process to eliminate child labor. (Brown, 2001; Oratzem, Sedlacek, & Tzannatos, 2009).

### **3. Backgrounds of working children in Bogota**

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Statistics from the Colombia National Child Labor Survey 2001 (IPEC, 2008) show that in the age group 5-14 years, 10.4%, or 0.89 million children are economically active in Colombia. About half of these working children is active in the services sector, 35.6% works in the agricultural sector and the remaining 14.5% in the industrial sector. The number of hours worked increases with age. At the age of fourteen, these children work on average more than thirty hours per week. A large proportion of working children aged 5-14 years works unpaid for their family or receive no wages. In this age group, only 77.5% of working children attend school as opposed to 91.9% of their non-working peers. For children aged 10-14 years the difference is even greater (75.1% vs. 94.5%) (IPEC, 2008).

In Colombia the following conventions have been ratified and came into force: The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (in 1991), the ILO Convention No. 138 on Minimum Age of Employment (in 2001), and the ILO Convention No. 182 on the Worst Forms of Child Labor (in 2005) (U.S. Department of Labor, 2008). The *Estrategia Nacional para la Prevención y Erradicación de las Peores Formas de Trabajo Infantil 2008 – 2015* was adopted by Colombia in 2008 in order to progressively reduce the number of child workers (OIT, 2009). According to data of the Alcaldía Bogota (2010) the number of working children in Bogotá declined from 5.9% in 2003 to 3.4% in 2009 as result of the development plan '*Bogota positiva: Para Vivir Mejor*' (Alcaldía Mayor de Bogota, 2008) which considers the eradication of child labor as one of its major goals, and '*Política Por La Calidad De Vida De Niños, Niñas Y Adolescentes*' (Alcaldía Mayor de Bogotá D.C., 2004-2008), whereby different departments worked together in order to eradicate child labor (Alcaldía Bogota, 2010).

The reality of child labor in contemporary Bogotá reflects the situation of children in cities in which the largest part of the urban population of the country concentrates. As might be expected child workers in Bogotá belong to the poorest strata of the population of the city. They combine their school activities with work on working days that exceed ten hours in most of the cases, and receive remuneration or income far below the legal minimum wage. The majority does not have any kind of affiliation to social security because the work relation is, generally, a clandestine one (Mendoza, 2004). The living conditions of this poor population, of which the working children form part, will be explained in this chapter. First the situation in Bogota will be analyzed after which Patio Bonito will be specifically discussed.

#### **3.1 Bogotá**

The Capital District of Colombia, Bogotá, is the largest and most populated of the country. It is the historical, cultural, political, economic, financial, and commercial center and seat of government in which are represented all ethnicities, regions, provinces and cultural traits of the nation. Bogotá shows lower birth, fertility and mortality rates than the rest of the country and in contrast, increased life expectancy in general. However, these indicators of population growth remain relatively high for a large city where problems are growing faster than the ability to solve them. Only 5% of the population belongs to high socioeconomic levels while 85.6% is located in the three lower categories, where living conditions vary from difficult to precarious. Half of the population of Bogotá lives below the poverty line and 15% lives in misery. This poor population is concentrated in peripheral areas towards the south of the city, in irregular settlements known as 'belts of misery' due to its expansion in areas enclosed in poor neighborhoods, occupying rough terrain of arid hills difficult to access.

Typical families of this population are usually numerous, they live in overcrowded, very precarious rooms and with poor sanitation. Their diet is deficient and child malnutrition appears as a logical consequence of these living conditions. Couples are formed at very young age so teenage pregnancies are common, and the stability of these relations very short. Young mothers remain responding for their children, or the maternal grandparents receive their new members, increasing the size of the original families, and thus the basis of the distribution of food and necessities. All this forms a vicious circle that ends up creating more poverty and difficulties to live in dignity. This population is generally unemployed and therefore has no fixed income. Their creativity develops everyday strategies of urban survival. Adults conduct individual initiatives in order to obtain some daily income. Street vending at traffic lights, in public places, in buses and in places where there are concentrations of people, is one of those street commerce practices in which children are also involved. The collection of rubbish and recyclable garbage is another activity that calls whole families to travel long distances at night or at dawn. Families that are battered and even despised because of the work they do. Begging is a final strategy of the urban hopelessness. Many elderly, children and adolescents, as well as entire displaced families, are seen in the streets asking for help from passersby. Numerous are the deficiencies that propitiate social vulnerability: high economic dependency, lack of housing, malnutrition, lack of education and training, lack of access to health, and location in settlements of high environmental risk. All these factors prevent that people can acquire the status of citizens and hence see diminished their basic rights such as freedom, justice, participation, identity and access to information. It is thus clear that poverty is an issue of both equity and social efficiency, while not only the poor lose, but the whole society by reducing the chances of achieving a social optimum (Mendoza, 2004).

### **3.2 Patio Bonito**

Patio Bonito is a sector that forms part of the locality Kennedy, and is home to many working children, youth and adolescents. It is a marginal urban area of informal origins, located in the southwestern edge of the capital. Its main activities are confessions, food, recycling and personal services. It is also considered the third zone of Bogota in receiving displaced population. It is determined that 43% of the population of Patio Bonito is in the range of 13 to 21, and 35% are people between 20 and 54 years, focusing on these two ranks for 78% of the population. The sector Patio Bonito is built around the 'Plaza de abastos, Corabastos', Colombia's biggest agricultural wholesale distributor. Its people, from rural, two-generation migrants have settled in this territory as an attempt to rebuild their and their families lives. However, the earliest to the latest residents of Patio Bonito share similar stories from the causes to the consequences of their displacement: poverty, armed conflict, family disintegration and uprooting (Mendoza, 2004). Today, the community shares with concern the population growth combined with a delimitation of territory, which has its origins in the implementation of the imagination of a modern city, and at the same time and in contradiction, the decrease in public spending.

Levels of violence in Patio Bonito have different focuses that make the area a hostile field for the lives of adolescents and young people who live there. The presence of illegal armed groups, the increase in 'danger zones' or tolerance zones for prostitution, drug trade, the presence of armed gangs of youths, committing crimes in territorial disputes, and other illicit make that Patio Bonito is currently regarded as one of the most dangerous neighborhoods in the city. The police are often not involved, because people fear revenge from the family of the perpetrator, so they often take the law into their own hands, leading to more violence. This context puts some children, adolescents and youth to the permanent alternative of the street, drugs or crime. Under this scenario the prospects of life are limited and vulnerable both for children, adolescents and adults who live there. Linked to

in this context it is important to mention the presence of public and community-based social organizations or institutions. They seek the protection and promotion of the rights of their inhabitants, but given the size of the different problems are not sufficient to the coverage needed to generate a wider social impact. However, despite all the difficulties most individuals and families struggle to survive and maintain their conditions of dignity, achieving processes of human and social development, which has resulted in changes and improvements in Patio Bonito.

In Patio Bonito 60% of the families are made up of women heads of households and 40% by the father and mother<sup>1</sup>. Conversations with informants indicate that a small 60% of them are living together with both their father and mother. The remaining 40% lives with one parent, sometimes together with a stepfather or stepmother, sometimes with a grandmother. In most cases there is a nuclear family (i.e. father, mother and 1 to 7 brothers or sisters) sometimes they share the house with other family members too, like an uncle or nephews or nieces. Several informants indicate that living in a broken home is often far from easy. Maribel (18) tells:

*"My family nucleus is a bit complicated. My parents separated when I was twelve years old. They separated because there was much domestic violence, so my dad left the house. And from a very early age, it touched especially me and my brother, to work and move on alone."*<sup>2</sup>

Oscar's (23) father died in a work accident, when Oscar was still very young. He explains:

*"For my mom it was very hard. My mom was working all day and she was the one who gave us a daily sustenance. After a while we had to sell the house to pay debts. And me and my sister also entered the field of labor in Corabastos to work in recycling. I was eight, nine years old."*<sup>3</sup>

As mentioned, Patio Bonito is home to many displaced people. Families live in situation of displacement due to armed conflict or because of their economic situation. This makes them reaching the sector Patio Bonito to live in rooms, rented apartments and sometimes settle in areas of invasion, building their homes with materials like wood, plastic or tin. The houses in these illegal areas do not have running water, electricity and gas. Some of the houses are in very poor conditions; they are very small and overcrowded, sometimes several families live in one house, or the houses are severely polluted. Children have rarely if ever a room or place for themselves, where they can study for example. Some families are linked to certain community organizations to receive various benefits such as food through soup kitchens, healthcare, subsidies, or settlement of their situation if having this service registered elsewhere in the country. However, there are families that due to their economic or social situation are unable to get access to complete and nutritious alimentation, nor to care in a health center in times of emergency or illness<sup>4</sup>.

In summary, it can be concluded that children from Patio Bonito, one of the poorer sectors of Bogotá, often don't have an easy childhood. They face a lot of difficulties and as context it is considered that there is a hostile environment to integral human development of families and their children. In the next chapter a closer look at Patio Bonito will be provided, then focusing on the work experiences of children in this neighborhood.

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<sup>1</sup> According to documentation of PPT

<sup>2</sup> Interview, 27-04-2011

<sup>3</sup> Interview, 26-04-2011

<sup>4</sup> Information obtained from documents in possession of PPT

## 4. The story of working children

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Much has been written about causes, consequences and policies regarding child labor. But how do children themselves think about this? Which stories are hidden behind these working children? Why did they work and how did they experience their work? These are questions that are discussed in this chapter. Conversations held with (former) child laborers who participate in PPT, whereby they were asked to tell about their experience, constitute the basis for this chapter.

### 4.1 Why do they work

The reasons for which participants of PPT indicate to work, or have worked, are very diverse and vary from 'to obtain money', 'to help my parents', 'because I like it', 'because of the economic circumstances of my family', 'in order to learn things', to 'caring for the planet' (see also annex II: List of interviews). The most common reason is, however, to earn money. In some cases, children work with their family and get paid now and then, or get paid in maintenance and clothing, in other cases they earn their own money. They use that money to buy their own stuff, clothing for example, or to support their families, e.g. to pay for the maintenance for little brothers and sisters, or for both purposes. The money that children and youths according to themselves earn, ranges from occasionally €0,50 to €5,50 per day.

Children indicate that they are rarely forced by their parents to work, often there is a kind of naturalness. Only in one case an informant indicated that he was forced by his father to work. However, he argued that even if he was not forced by his father, he would probably have started to work. Because of the economic situation in which his family lived, which made it necessary that everyone cooperated, and because the money that he partly earned for himself. In many cases children assist their parents in their work; they want to help their parents.

Many children share the opinion of Maribel (18), who explains:

*"One cannot stand, let's say, to see ones parents suffer. One would like to help them, support them. And then, yes, I was the one who took the initiative, saying: 'If my mom needs someone to help her, to look after her, I can do it, instead of hanging around in the house, sleeping, and she killing herself in her work."<sup>5</sup>*

The reason that children in Patio Bonito work, consists partly of necessity. The parents or carers of children often earn hardly enough to pay the rent, services and food, let alone for things outside of these basic services. The money that children earn helps to make ends meet or to pay for extras. It enables children to buy things for themselves so that they do not have to ask their parents, it makes them a bit more independent. Children sometimes need to work to pay for their further education. For although in Bogotá public education is offered for both primary, secondary as university, there are of course always costs, for example for transportation, materials, etc. These are not large amounts, but the parents are often unable to pay for that. So if these children want further education, they themselves must obtain the necessary means. This is a clear example of child labor enabling school enrollment as described by authors like Salazar & Glasinovich (1998, p. 11).

### 4.2 Kind of work

Regarding the working children, or children with work experience within the school of PPT, teachers have made the following estimates: Within the class with the youngest children, eight of the twenty children work according

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<sup>5</sup> Interview, 27-04-2011

to the teacher; two girls and six boys. The majority of them works in recycling in which they help their parents. They do so to contribute to the family economy. In the subsequent class there are about ten working children or children with work experience; six boys and four girls. According to their teacher they work as 'seller' helping their mom, in supplies, food business and in recycling. Also within the class with the oldest children there are about ten working children according to their teacher; seven boys and three girls. The majority of them works in recycling, either with their families or alone or with friends.

Children often help their mother, father or uncle. The family can therefore be regarded as a major employer. There are also children who work for external employers, but they are often somewhat older, i.e. over 12, 13 years. As previously mentioned, the main sources of income in Patio Bonito exist of clothing, food, recycling and personal services. Often the economic activities of children consist of assisting their parents or relatives in these activities. So for example, they watch over the horse or wagon, or help with sorting out when their parents work as recyclers, or they assist their parents in the sale of products on the street. There are also children who baby-sit their siblings while their parents or mothers are at work.

#### **4.3 Working conditions**

Bogotá is divided in twenty local municipalities and one of these localities is called 'Ciudad Kennedy'. Within the locality Kennedy is located the Plaza de abastos, 'Corabastos'. Corabastos was created on July 20, 1972 in order to give Bogotá an agricultural wholesale distributor for commercialization in the center of the country. With this, one sought to establish a specialized place to perform all operations of collection, storage, purchase, sale and distribution of those products, eliminating small places of intermediation, which created problems of congestion in the city and increased costs for consumers. Corabastos is located in west-central Kennedy, in the west of Bogotá and has easy access to all entries of the four major roads that converge in the capital from all the cardinal points. It occupies a total area of around 412 000 square meters which include accesses, internal roads, parking, loading and unloading zones, administrative areas and general, banking and financial services. It is delimited by a high peripheral wall and has eight controlled gates for movement of vehicles and pedestrians. The core area of the supply center is occupied by 32 large warehouses, arranged in several groups, by types of foods and activities; collection, storage and sale, and separated by large areas of vehicular and pedestrian traffic. On average, daily there circulate about 10,000 vehicles of all kinds, moving over 8,000 tons of food, and around 150,000 people gather around the activities that take place.

The presence of children and adolescents who perform various tasks in the market places is very common in urban areas in almost every country in Latin America. Most of the time they are working with their parents in the various trades associated with the process of commercialization of food in these collection and distribution centers. In the same way, children and adolescents of different ages perform tasks in the area of services in the marketplaces. They work in carries, in the provision of packaging and bags, messaging, surveillance of stalls, shops and merchandise, selling food and beverages, cleaning facilities, cars and vehicles, etc. Generally, parents and adults who are responsible for the various activities of the marketplace, incorporate their children and other children, family or not, in the business of food trade. The fact that children often work for or with their families, has the advantage that they are spared by their parents or relatives from too hard work. Parents won't let their children perform tasks above their power, and keep an eye in terms of working conditions. Yet these conditions are often far from safe as the work in general is dangerous and poses many risks (Mendoza, 2004).

#### **4.3.1 Carrier (cotero)**

A typical activity of Corabastos is loading and unloading. From the beginning of every night until one o'clock in the morning vehicles with food arrive from all over the country. Subsequently these products are brought from the vehicles to the warehouses and collection places of purchasers in the plaza. This is done by so-called 'coteros': people who carry on their shoulders or back all kinds of packages, boxes, baskets and packaging of products. They also load food from the warehouse to the buyers' cars throughout the morning. Several male participants of PPT have worked as 'cotero' when they were young, one of them is Jorge (38). Jorge remembers that he began helping his father when he was only five years old. He is the third in a family of four children and his both parents have always worked. His father was the family breadwinner, but from the moment Jorge's father died, when Jorge was twelve, his mother and Jorge became breadwinners of the family. During his childhood he has done all kind of work, such as: working in supplies, selling food, watching cars, cleaning photocopiers, cultivating sugar cane, polishing shoes, and recycling. About the work in Corabastos he tells:

*"I worked in Corabastos and studied in the afternoons. And with that what I earned, I paid my study. It was very good in terms of money, it facilitate me to pay for clothing, food and college. But sometimes the working conditions were... well, we get up very early. Early in the morning, very early, at two in the morning, to go to work. [But] I did not feel insecure, I felt very good. I worked, but earned well. Nor were the conditions very tough."<sup>6</sup>*

Juan (22) started working in Corabastos at age ten. At first he worked only on weekends, but later it also happened that he worked occasionally during the week. Juan comes from a large family from the neighborhood "El Amparo", and is the third child with seven more brothers and sisters. He has lived alone since he was fifteen, and maintenance himself since then. Juan indicates that he has never considered the work as obligatory or heavy:

*"The work was not compulsory. As we are several brothers, if I wasn't going, my brother would go, or another one was going. So, the one who wanted to go, went. But somehow someone had to go with my dad. The work was not compulsory and it wasn't forced either. Nor was it heavy because my dad would not let us carry heavy things that we could not, but let us carry small boxes or let us take care of the cargo. Things we were able to perform, we could do. So it was not a very complicated process."<sup>7</sup>*

Carlos (20) lives with his mother, sister and cousin in El Amparo. Carlos' parents divorced long ago and his mother has always taken care of him. She made sure that he went to school and not just worked. His father didn't want him to study; he believed that education was a waste of time, it was better to work. Carlos' father and brother worked in Corabastos in order to pay for the rent and maintenance, and his mother worked in recycling to pay for the education of her children; their father didn't want to pay for that. Carlos was obliged by his father to work when he was about seven years old, for according to his father Carlos could better help him in the Corabastos than wasting his time sleeping. They went to work at one o'clock at night and it was Carlos' task to help his father to unload the trucks, and guard the cart with products, because at that time much was stolen. From 5.00 o'clock Carlos worked independently in recycling and guarding cars or horses. The money he earned with

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<sup>6</sup> Interview, 26-05-2011

<sup>7</sup> Interview, 26-05-2011

this was for himself. His father didn't pay him for his work; he received maintenance and clothing for his help. Carlos tells about his work:

*'It was heavy, but you get used to it. The conditions were always a little heavy, because of the cold at this working time, the sleep, the danger with all the trucks over there, of which fell off baskets and the like. And they killed a lot. On this time, out there at three, four in the morning there were already dead people over there 'en la plaza'. Fortunately I never had an accident in Corabastos.'*<sup>8</sup>

#### 4.3.2 Recycling

The collection of rubbish and recyclable materials is another activity in which many children are involved. According to a study of the Unidad Administrativa Especial de Servicios Público (UAEPS, 2011) in Bogotá the three concentrations with the largest number of recyclers are Kennedy, Suba and Ciudad Bolívar. Given the nature of Bogotá as a pole of attraction, the recycling population comes from virtually all departments, however the majority of them (58%) was born and resides in Bogotá. It is observed that 1.2% of the people involved in recycling are children (mainly 10 to 14 years). In particular child labor is observed in resident populations in the localities of San Cristóbal, Usme, Tunjuelito, Bosa, Kennedy, Fontibón Engativá and Ciudad Bolívar. The locality Kennedy has both absolute and relative the largest proportion of recyclers, and in addition it also has the largest proportion of minors working in recycling. The bulk of the material is collected in the streets, using all means of collection, mostly handcarts, animal-drawn vehicles and sack or bags. It is presumed that these material provides very low added value, with a high degree of contamination and difficult selection and classification. Only a small fraction of the material is collected in malls (2%) and residential complexes (7%) where it would be more likely to get better material. In the locality Kennedy many recyclers work in Corabastos. The relative protection of the square, against recycling in the open streets, makes that both men and women perform this work there. The material collected per recycler has an average of 800 kg / month (considering the median), although there is wide variability in the numbers of collection per capita. Of these materials the one with the highest concurrency is paper, followed by collection of metal and plastic. Almost all the material that is collected, is sold to warehouses (UAEPS, 2011).

A large part of the participants of PPT, both male and female, has work experience as recycler. Especially those who are still employed outside PPT work as recycler, mainly the younger participants (see also annex II). This is probably due to the fact that, because of the ban on child labor, this is one of the few activities that children can perform unnoticed, albeit illegally. One of those participants of PPT who has worked as recycler is Carlos (23). He has lived in almost the whole city, at first he and his family lived in Suba, in the north of Bogotá, where his father and brothers of his father had a house. Due to problems within the family they moved to Ciudad Bolívar, where his father bought land and built a little house for the family. Then they moved to Patio Bonito where they first lived together with an uncle; however this gave problems too, so they moved to Metro Vivienda, another neighborhood in Patio Bonito, where Oscar and his family still live. The family consists of Oscar's mother, his sister with her husband and child, and two brothers with their wives and children. They live all together in one house.

When Oscar was ten years old, his father who was a civil engineer, was killed in a work accident. Except that this was emotionally a severe blow for the family, it obviously had a great impact on the economic

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<sup>8</sup> Interview, 29-04-2011

situation of the household. Through the efforts of a lawyer, the family received a financial compensation, this was however not much and only once. From that moment on Oscar's mother, who worked as a plastic recycler and as a housekeeper for families, was the one who took care for him and his brothers and sister, but they all started to be breadwinners of the family. Oscar and his sister began to work in Corabastos as recyclers. They did this with a group of about twenty friends, both boys and girls, in the ages of 9 to 12 years and they worked every day from 23.00 to 8.00 o'clock. Because they were minors, and therefore not allowed to work in Corabastos, they asked truck drivers to help them, to smuggle them into the plaza. The drivers let them hide in their trucks and that way Oscar and his friends came in unseen. Furthermore, when the children were harassed by the *Instituto Colombiano Bienestar Familiar* (ICBF) - a government agency committed to the protection of children and opponent of child labor - the truck drivers gave themselves off as father or uncle of the children, so that the children were left in peace. Oscar and his friends also made sure that they always looked neat; freshly washed and with clean clothes, so the authorities would not identify them as working children. However, sometimes the ICBF didn't believe them and they were removed from the place, or taken by the ICBF for several days. Oscar says that he never had an accident while at work, nor did he became ill or have had an infection. Actually it was the ICBF which was considered as the biggest danger or risk at work. About the working conditions in recycling Oscar tells:

*"We ourselves put our working conditions. While recycling, we ourselves put the schedules and divided what we had to do. We divided the recyclable material among us and we rotated. One day I was carrying cardboard, another day sacks, and another time I had to carry boxes. We liked it because it was 'chevere' or nice to go with them [the group]. Because whenever we met with them, we were laughing all the way, telling what happened to us, what occurred, that was very nice. We were always playing; this also made the work attractive. More than looking for the money, we worked to play and meet each other."*<sup>9</sup>

This work in recycling earned them about €.2,00 to €2,40 per person per day, sometimes it was more, sometimes less. Oscar and his sister also worked in a food stand where coffee, tea and the like were sold. They worked there from 8.00 to 11.00 o'clock, and got paid €.2,40 a day and furthermore they received breakfast and lunch.

Jorge (38) who worked in Corabastos as carrier, in which he considered the working conditions as reasonable, has also worked as a recycler. Surprisingly, he experienced the work as a recycler as much heavier:

*"The harsh conditions were those of recycling. The recycling was quite complicated because we picked it up and when we picked up the trash we cut ourselves, we cut ourselves at the bags; we didn't use gloves, or anything. And it was also tough because of the pollution."*<sup>10</sup>

Maribel is an 18-year-old participant of PPT who grew up and still lives in the neighborhood El Amparo. She has three older brothers, but lives together with her mother and youngest brother because her parents divorced when she was twelve years old. She and her brothers started working at a very young age; Maribel was six years old when she went to help her mother with recycling. The reason was that her mom could use a helping hand and Maribel was the one who offered her this help. So it was more or less her own choice to start working, which certainly does not imply that the work she did was easy. Maribel and her mother got up in the middle of the night

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<sup>9</sup> Interview, 26-04-2011

<sup>10</sup> Interview, 26-05-2011

to go to Corabastos where they searched for recyclable items such as cardboard, plastic and metal. It was Maribel's job to help her mother to search stuff and to guard the collected material. They worked until ten o'clock in the morning and then in the afternoon there was time to sleep. About the working conditions Maribel herself indicates:

*"The conditions were very harsh, because being in this atmosphere of Corabastos is not pleasant for a woman. And I had to get up early, at about 2.00 am, very early. And without breakfast, because we were not having breakfast, because there was no money [...]. And the atmosphere was very dusty, very noise. These were very tough conditions."*<sup>11</sup>

At first, Maribel did not attend school because her family didn't have the financial resources for it. At seven or eight years old she started school within PPT and learned to read and write. The school hours were from 14.00 to 18.00 and her mother took over her job (in part), enabling Maribel to attend classes. Besides working in recycling Maribel has also worked as a waitress and in a fruit stand. At the moment she works within PPT.

Reyna is a girl of thirteen that goes to the school of PPT. Her parents have had little education; her father until the second year of the primary school, her mother until the sixth, and they work as carpentry and as housekeeper. Reyna has five brothers and sisters. She works on Saturday mornings from 5.30 to 13.00 in recycling in order to help her parents and to make some money. On average she earns around €2,00 to €3,20 each morning with which she can buy her own stuff. She started working on her thirteenth, and works with her brothers, sisters and cousins. Reyna doesn't really like her work:

*"It is hard and dangerous. Hard because you have to get material to sell, that it is difficult because there are others who recycle. And there is not much. And it is dangerous because one is far away to look for the material and then something bad can happen."*<sup>12</sup>

#### 4.3.3 Informal trade

Besides (un)loading of goods and recycling, informal trade is another core activity both inside as outside Corabastos. The ambulant vendors walk long distances through all the sites of largest circulation, offering their packages of products of all kinds. In addition to these retailers there are others who focus on selling food and drinks. Throughout the workday, day and night, they offer hot and cold drinks in carts, permanent posts, and in an ambulant way. They circulate around the plaza and other crowded places in the neighborhood and offer aromatic waters, 'tinto' (coffee), soda, candy, pies, sandwiches, etc.. Carried in baskets, thermos and other containers that are not designed for that purpose. In this activity one can observe forms of family work, usually led by mothers or fathers (Mendoza, 2004). Within PPT, mainly girls are the ones who have work experience helping family members in informal trading. Claudia for example, is one of them. Claudia's (28) father died when she was 12 years old. At that moment she was already working; as an eight-year-old she started as an ambulant vendor of ice-creams, fruits and candies, but this was mostly voluntary. However, because of the death of her father and as a result the difficult economic situation in which the family ended up, it became more necessary that Claudia and her two oldest sisters went to work. From that moment on Claudia and her sisters helped their mother every afternoon selling ice creams in the park. In the morning they were going to school as

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<sup>11</sup> Interview, 27-04-2011

<sup>12</sup> Interview, 17-05-2011

usual. About the work as an ambulant vendor, whereby she worked together with her family, Claudia remembers that she has never experienced it as threatening or dangerous:

*"There are some advantages, let's say, when one works with the family. You are often better protected than when working with a stranger. We were always working next to my mom. I was always under the care of the family, which is a privilege because when you're working and you do not know with whom, you may be at higher risk."*<sup>13</sup>

Darlin is a girl of eighteen years who lives with her parents, uncle and her sister of nineteen in the neighborhood El Amparo. Breadwinners of the family are both her parents and Darlin. Her father went to school when he was young, her mother has no education. Darlin is currently working within PPT, but has previously worked as a sweets seller and as baby-sitter. About selling sweets, with which she began at the age of about ten years, Darlin tells:

*"Well, the work of selling candy, the conditions were a bit precarious, because not everyone buys from you, or there are times when the police take away your merchandise. And you must work under the sun, under the rain. My mom had a stand in the center, so I went to study with my sister (in the mornings) and out of school we went to work. From noon to eight, nine, ten o'clock at night, until they closed, we stayed at the center."*<sup>14</sup>

The sisters Betty (13) and Jessica (10) live with their parents and five brothers and sisters in Patio Bonito. Their parents have not completed primary school and they both work in Corabastos. The family rents out a part of the house in which they live in order to obtain some additional income. The sisters are currently working within PPT because they like to learn things such as creating agendas and postcards. They started working on their ninth and eleventh, at that time not yet within PPT; their first work consisted of selling coffee ('tintos'), fruits and activities within Corabastos. The sisters have always worked with their family. At first their aunt asked them if they wanted her help with the sale of coffee, in order to earn some money, and later on they went along with their parents to Corabastos. They still work there on weekends. Betty tells about working in 'tintos':

*"We got up at eleven o'clock, twelve o'clock and I left, and then we arrived at the stand of my aunt in Corabastos. We cleaned and arranged the cart and then started selling coffee ('tintos') out there. It is ugly because of the sleep, for the sleep is difficult, because you get up very early. But besides that it is easy, I think it's easy."*<sup>15</sup>

#### **4.4 School and work**

As shown in the previous section, children with work experiences think differently about their work. They were, however, not only asked about their work, but also about the possibility to combine work and school. After all, in the literature the negative impact of work on education is considered as one of the main consequences of child labor (Salazar & Glasinovich, 1998; Sedlacek, Duryea, Ilahi, & Sasaki, 2009). The stories of (former) working children show that they attend school alongside their work. As is shown by literature (Siddiqi & Patrinos, 1995), for many children school and work are not mutually exclusive. Working children report that their parents often consider education very important, and take that into account, relative to the work. When asked whether it was possible to combine school and work, Juan (22) answered:

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<sup>13</sup> Interview, 24-05-2011

<sup>14</sup> Interview, 04-04-2011

<sup>15</sup> Interview, 02-05-2011

*Yes, yes, yes of course. I kept studying. My dad always said: 'Well, you accompany me to a certain time, from 6.00 in the morning for example to 9.00, 10.00 am, and after ten in the morning you have time to organize, to organize your books'. There were no problems with the process, of quitting school to work, no. He [dad] always worried a little that everyone continued studying. He was always dependent of the process.*<sup>16</sup>

Different is the story of Carlos (20):

*"My dad just paid us a year [for education] and then he didn't want to pay anymore. Then my mom felt the necessity and said: 'you should continue studying'. And she, which what she made in recycling, paid for our study. So she was the one, more than anybody else, who cared for our study. Therefore I went [to work] a few days and other days I didn't; my mom replaced me a few days. My dad did not like it when I kept sleeping, but my mom said, 'No, keep sleeping, and I'll take your turn'*<sup>17</sup>

Carlos experienced no problems with combining work and school because, as he says: "*I like being active all day, I did not feel tired*". Claudia also indicates that work and education can be combined:

*"The work has several aspects, let's say, the factor of necessity is first, before the study itself. Equally, the combination also depends on the job. It depends on the work one does, one can also devote to the study. I worked in the university with a program called ASE (Atención Servicios Estudiantil) and the idea was that in the free hours, in the gaps, I worked at the same university. I worked in the library, worked as assistant to the dean, photocopying, and in correspondence. These are jobs that the university was also aware that there were people, like me, that not everyone has the economic ability to stay in college. [But] it depends on the job. If you work all night, it will surely adversely affect the study. But there is work that allows one to study, work that enables to learn, things that have nothing to do with studies, but rather complementary."*<sup>18</sup>

Others, however, found it more difficult to combine work and school. Oscar (23) who worked at night in recycling tells the following: "*We studied from twelve o'clock, from noon, until six o'clock. We had some time to rest [after finishing the work] and to do our homework. [But] sometimes we came to school to sleep. Sometimes we were asleep and at six: 'Get up, we're leaving!'*"<sup>19</sup> Also for Darlin (18), who started helping her mom selling candies when she was ten years old, it was hard to combine school and work: "*We arrived at ten, eleven o'clock at night to the house and then I had to put myself with my mother until one o'clock, doing homework for school. So it was a situation a little difficult.*"<sup>20</sup> When the informants were asked whether they preferred working or studying, almost all said that they would work as well as study. As an informant (20) put into words: "*Without education, you cannot create a development, both professional and personal. But by working one gains more knowledge, more experience, more than anything else this contributes to ones development.*" When the informants could only choose one of the two options, then the large majority chose education, because, as one of these working children argues: 'If there is no study, there is no decent work'. And: 'For me study, because I want to move forward'. As school and work exist side by side, it seems unlikely that, as some authors (Salazar &

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<sup>16</sup> Interview, 26-05-2011

<sup>17</sup> Interview, 29-04-2011

<sup>18</sup> Interview, 24-05-2011

<sup>19</sup> Interview, 26-04-2011

<sup>20</sup> Interview, 04-04-2011

Glasinovich, Child Work and Education, 1998) claim; longer school days would help to reduce child labor. This is clearly illustrated by an anecdote of Paola Sierra Gòmez, the coordinator of the pedagogical area:

*The government has set up centers where youth can go for lunch, entertainment, activities, etc. in the afternoon (after the school day). The idea is that children will not work, because of their presence at these centers, because of these alternate activities. However, when the staff of PPT visited such a center, one of the employees of the center proudly asked a girl whether she had stopped working (because of her participation in the activities in the center). She replied: 'No, I still work, but now I helping my mother in the evenings'.<sup>21</sup>*

It thus appears that children both work and follow education. These two activities (can) exist side by side. Then the question arises whether the work does not negatively influence the study results of working children. The teachers indicate that some children have to work a lot because of the difficult economic circumstances of their family, and therefore are sometimes absent at school or arrive late. Darlin (18) tells:

*Many times I could not go to school because of, for example the police, as there is always the persecution of the vendors. Many times, they (the police) took away the merchandise of my mom, and they took my mom away. And me and my sister we had to stay alone in the stand, alone and locked up. And then many times I could not go to school for this reason.<sup>22</sup>*

In general, however, according to the teachers, the children are more often absent due to other reasons than because of their work. Catherine Sanchez, one of the teachers explains that reasons for absence are more often illness, or parents being unable to accompany their children to school, because of their working hours, so that children stay home alone.<sup>23</sup> Although occasionally there is 'carelessness of the study' because of the work of the children, the teachers are unanimous that in generally there isn't a difference in the results of working and non-working children. As Alveiro Bernal, another teacher, indicates there is a balance between work and school through the mutual commitment of the school with the parents or families of working children.<sup>24</sup> The teachers furthermore argue that, in some cases, the work can have a positive impact on education. For example, children are less shy so they participate more, or they already learned skills such as counting because of their work.

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<sup>21</sup> Interview, 28-03-2011

<sup>22</sup> Interview, 04-04-2011

<sup>23</sup> Interview, 03-05-2011

<sup>24</sup> Interview, 15-03-2011

## 5. The organization Proyecto Pequeño Trabajador

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The Proyecto Pequeño Trabajador (Project Little Worker) is active in Patio Bonito, in the south of Bogotá. Patio Bonito is one of the twelve zones of the locality Kennedy and has more than 100,000 inhabitants although unofficial figures estimate a value close to 150,000. Patio Bonito is in third place as a reception area of the displaced population in Bogota, experiencing high levels of insecurity in families, child abuse and child labor, and there are many youth gangs which increases common crime. The largest source of employment consists of the wholesale distributor Corabastos, other informal employments are recycling and street vending. Due to these characteristics, the neighborhood has high rates of poverty which can be added to urban development without effective regulation and poor sanitation and education. Proyecto Pequeño Trabajador (PPT) works since 1988 in this area and develops programs for the displaced in the area. PPT is not the only organization that focuses on this population group. Organizations like, among others, '*Fundacion Trabajando por Colombia*', '*La Tribu de Juda*' and '*Un Techo para Colombia*' are also committed to displaced people. There are also organizations that specifically focus on displaced children and youth, such as '*Corporacion Construyendo Amor Con Amor*' and '*Fundacion de Apoyo a Jovenes en Extrema Pobreza (FAJEP)*'. However, PPT distinguishes itself because its main focus are working children and adolescents, who are referred to as NAT's (*Niños, Niñas y Adolescentes Trabajadores*). They form a part of the population of very socially excluded minors, either by being displaced children, either by being workers who are often unable to attend school. Furthermore, NAT's are vulnerable as a result of the policy of eradication of child labor. After all, they work clandestine and are not legally protected. Therefore they fall easy prey to all kinds of violence or abuse, and to criminal organizations involved in prostitution and drug trafficking.

PPT is a community organization of working children, juveniles, adolescents and their families that promotes actions to improve living conditions and the integral development of children, based on criteria of self-organization, evaluation of their role in their own pedagogical processes, protagonism and child participation. For this purpose groups of NAT's are formed which aim to read their reality, think about it and act to transform it; concentrating on improving their living conditions and developing actions to defend their rights. PPT does not want to print a negative stamp on working children; it does not want to stigmatize children because they work; work is their reality, but also gives them identity. PPT agrees with the idea that work and study may go very well together. PPT argues that children can also learn from their work. When work is bad for children, it is often bad for adults and nobody should be doing that kind of work (Proyecto Pequeño Trabajador, 2010; Kerk In Actie, 2010; NATs, 2010).

PPT consists of three areas of social development: a political, pedagogical and productive area. Within the educational area there are five people employed: three teachers, a coordinator and a 'family companion', together they provide education for approximately eighty children. In the political area two coordinators are employed and furthermore there are about eleven volunteers who weekly guide twelve groups with about twenty-five participants. The productive area is led by one coordinator and has seven companions who guide the approximately thirty-five participants. Although in principle it is possible, it appears that children do not participate in all the three areas. Especially the children who attend school in PPT (thus forming part of the pedagogical area) are hardly involved in the other two areas. Among the participants of the productive and political area there seems to exist a greater commitment to the organization. Currently, the three areas, who were

previously housed in two buildings, are merged into one building, because of cutbacks. A possible positive effect of this reduction might be an increased mutual engagement between the different areas, because of intensification of the mutual contact.

### 5.1 Pedagogical area

Paola Sierra Gomez, coordinator of the pedagogical area, tells the following about the origins of this area:

*"The history of 'estudio taller' arises precisely from a group of youths and adolescents in Corabastos, called 'the Queen' because they worked in the warehouse that was called 'the Queen'. They thought they also wanted to study; they wanted to learn, to read and write. But they had not been able to do so, because of their age, they were already too old, because they were workers, because of their physical condition, how they dressed, so they were excluded from the education system. Well this group, they said 'No, we want to study, we want to learn, we want to continue our studies'. And that was how, in 1997, the idea of the school started."*<sup>25</sup>

Therefore, PPT decided in dialogue with the children to develop an area of formal education that responds to the particularities of the NAT's and reintegrate them into the education system. Thus they decided to give life to Study Workshops for NAT's (*Estudio Taller para NAT's*). Processes were developed like library and reading workshops, homework assistance, school support up to and including a pedagogical approach which seeks to have approval of the District Education Secretary. General objective of the pedagogical area is to offer an alternative education that promotes integral human development processes, according to the needs, realities, particularities and expectations of working children and adolescents in Patio Bonito. Paola explains:

*"The goal, what we want is to vindicate the right of education for all. For children, youth and adults, through strategies and experiences close to them. What we seek is that children complete their primary; that they finish their studies and may continue. This is done based on the needs and interests they have, based on critical reading. Reading is an important example within the school. But that reading is not merely the fact of telling a story, but rather how I can use it to my reality, to criticize my context. Above all it's this; the aim is to vindicate the right of education, but comprehensive education."*<sup>26</sup>

The pedagogical area currently consists of three different levels: initiation, deepening and specialization, featuring about 80 children. Children and adolescents are able to move from level to level, depending on the pace and the speed with which each student reach their achievements. Besides the three teachers, there works a coordinator and a family companion within the pedagogic area. The school hours are from 13.00 till 18.00 so that children who work in the morning or work in the evening and sleep in the morning, can still attend school. The pedagogical area works together with several universities in Bogota. Both parties benefit from this cooperation; the project offers students internships and the universities support the project with their knowledge in the field of education and psychology. From time to time the area has contact with the local hospital for insurance issues of the children or for certain health campaigns.

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<sup>25</sup> Interview, 28-03-2011

<sup>26</sup> Interview, 28-03-2011

## **5.2 Political Area**

Stella Talero, coordinator of the political area, indicates that the political area is a result of two programs which derive from the pedagogical area. These accompanying and protagonism programs aimed to give strength to the organizational processes within PPT and to develop networks and ties with other organizations in Bogotá and the country. Stella describes the purpose of the area as follows:

*"The political area aims to achieve that children and young people can recognize themselves as subjects of rights; second that they know the rights they have; and third, that they can encourage among themselves and with others, processes and spaces of legitimate participation and true protagonism that will enable them to effectively require the fulfillment of their rights."*<sup>27</sup>

PPT understands protagonism as a way of being subjects - men and women - who individually and collectively seek to force their rights in a comprehensive manner. This is based on meetings in festivities and familiarity relationships and, moreover, in changing conditions adverse to their individual and social development. Stella states that two concepts, participation and dialogue, play an important role in the political area:

*"We assume that children are individuals who are called to develop integrally. And in this integral development the exercise of participation can allow the enforceability of other rights. Participation is instrumental. It is an instrument that allows me to be able to claim other rights. And in building a fairer, more equitable society the role of children and young people is important, as they have experiences, given by their age and their social background, which allow them to dialogue. And this dialogue of knowledge can effectively achieve progress in the exercise of rights."*<sup>28</sup>

The political area is composed of twelve groups, eight groups of children and four groups for young people with about twenty-five participants which meet on Saturday afternoons. Besides the volunteer companions of the groups, the area has two coordinators. The groups work with the methodology 'review of life'. This is a methodology based on three moments, seeing, judging and acting, allowing the group to learn from their own life experience and transform and improve conditions.

## **5.3 Productive Area**

From small product development initiatives performed by the political area, the productive area arose in 2000. Previously, it consisted of different programs, until it was renamed as 'productive area' in 2008. The coordinator of this area, Jamile Torres, describes the objective of this area as follows:

*"The productive area is initially an area that seeks to create pedagogical, organizational and productive spaces for children, adolescents and youth, to generate a work in decent conditions for them. So guys who are working in other activities such as recycling at night, working in a supermarket, street vending, these guys come to the area in a group with kids of their own age, and they organize themselves to sell a product or a service. PPT provides the physical space, tools, machinery, and an adult which is called a companion in front of the groups."*<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> Interview, 02-05-2011

<sup>28</sup> Interview, 02-05-2011

<sup>29</sup> Interview, 31-03-2011

The productive area consists currently of the following projects: there are ‘El Arca de Papel’, this initiative is decided to the development of ecological paper and products derived thereof; ‘Espiral de Papel’ moves in the line of handicrafts by making cards and other products in the art of filigree; ‘Superficie lunar’ is primarily dedicated to the preparation of agendas, using as main input mandarin peel; and there are two projects which revolve economic activity around dairy and eggs, as a result of a consumer survey conducted in the sector. Furthermore there are ‘Serigrafia’, dedicated to designing and printing on different surfaces, ‘Fraternet’ an internet café for the community, and ‘Café Mandarina’. In total there are a small 40 participants, although there is space for a larger number of participants. The groups of the productive area meet on Monday to Wednesday, in the morning from 8.00 to 11.00 and in the afternoon from 15.00 to 18.00, so that children are able to attend school in the morning or afternoon. For the productive area, the own initiative of the participants is important, as Jamile indicates: “*PPT does not provide jobs, we do not say, nor to the children nor to young people: 'Come and work here, and we pay you'. No, we say: 'Come, organize with others, and improve your living conditions'.*” Jamile further indicates that there are children in Latin America who, if they do not work, do not have opportunities to move forward, to make progress in life. It is often assumed, however, that when children work, they are unable to attend school. Therein lies, according to Jamile, the strength of the area, in enabling children to organize themselves:

*“Children who are organized to work, are also studying. Children can operate in three dimensions: work, education, their studies, and the part of recreation, enjoyment of life. Because the initiatives, besides being a work and educational space, also seek that the kids enjoy.”*<sup>30</sup>

In this chapter, the organization and its various components are discussed. In the next chapter the results of the organization are analyzed, thereby starting from the perspective of former child laborers involved in PPT.

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<sup>30</sup> Interview, 31-03-2011

## 6. The meaning of PPT for working children

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It is Tuesday afternoon, May 24, 2011 and in the huge auditorium of the Universidad Nacional de Colombia, Bogotá (National University of Colombia) stands a young girl, Daniela. For the launching of the project "participation and protagonism" she tells in front of all attendees the history of her life as working child. Despite the aula full of invitees, including representatives of the government, she tells her story fearlessly and confidently. She seems not at all insecure, rather the opposite: she exudes tranquility and self-confidence. She was however not always so confident, as appears from her story, but through her participation in PPT and the warmth and support she experienced there, she has developed into an independent, confident woman.

Not only Daniela, other participants of PPT also consider their participation in PPT as very influential on their lives. In the conversations with these participants they were asked what PPT means to them, what the results of participation are, and what they perceive as strengths of PPT. Various things were discussed, but concepts such as friendship, solidarity, awareness, confidence, personal development and education were frequently mentioned. These concepts will be discussed and explained below, based on the stories of the participants.

### 6.1 Awareness

Although PPT cannot directly influence the work and working conditions of children and young people, except for those working within the productive area of the organization, its strength lies in the process of raising awareness that it unleashes among the working children and youth, regarding their work and working conditions. Especially the older participants indicated that their awareness was increased through participation in PPT. For younger persons, especially those who are part of the pedagogical area, this appears to be less obvious. It is possible that the productive and political areas pay more attention to this process. It is also likely that the younger children in the pedagogic area are less aware of what the term means, or are less able to link it to their own lives. Darlin (18), who at age ten started to help her mother selling sweets, tells the following about the acquired awareness:

*"[PPT is] a place where one meets, where one share, where one walk together, where they won't let each other down. I learned many things. I learned the technique, learned about decent work, about the dignification of work. They [PPT] said to me: 'No Darlin, it is that you have [the right to] decent conditions, you cannot work like this, until late at night, no'. They helped me a lot. They told me that I also have a voice, the voice to say that I have to work in decent conditions. I have to (work), but not obligated. They really helped me."<sup>31</sup>*

One of the main principles of the organization is critical appraisal, which encompasses the following<sup>32</sup>:

*"We believe that work is a right, and from our critical appraisal we argue that work dignifies the man, that it is a form of cognitive learning, source of education and family income, and we are aware of the contribution we bring to society in general. But we do not agree with the conditions of exploitation, marginalization, discrimination, and violence in which we work" (in: Liebel, 2006).*

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<sup>31</sup> Interview, 04-04-2011

<sup>32</sup> Declared during the 6th meeting of NATs in Latin America (2001)

Reyna (13) refers to this as one of the most important things she has learned within the organization. She tells: “*We learned that there is exploitation. We also learned that prostitution and stealing isn't real work. That work has to be worthy. Now I am more informed.*”<sup>33</sup> This critical appraisal also meant a lot to Claudia (28) who thereby felt appreciated:

“*A very nice thing was that when I came here, what I was doing as a worker was admirable and was respectable. For this value of the work I did not feel less than others. PPT said, 'Hey, there are more children like you who want to get ahead, and we appreciate that, but you have to transform these conditions'. PPT has taught me other ways of living. It has taught me that the woman doesn't merely exist to reproduce, but is also able to build, to transform. I build with others, I can learn from others, and my very life may be an example for others*”.<sup>34</sup>

Critical appraisal means for her: “*Assessing the child who is working as a subject who is learning, building, transforming. I look for ways to transform the work with others. I criticize these conditions which do not allow me to grow as a person, and transform them. Strength is that we remain a home for working children, where they feel valued*”.<sup>35</sup> This principle of critical appraisal also forms the basis for the productive area of PPT where children and young people can work in dignified conditions, where they learn from their work, where work entails the possibility for socialization, and where in addition to work there is time for school and playing. Reflection and critical appraisal of work and working conditions which is encouraged by PPT, is mentioned by many participants as the most important things they have learned during their participation in the organization. Furthermore, some informants argue that participation in the programs of PPT, meant for them ‘the opening of their world’. Thanks to PPT they visited places they have never been before. Some of them never went outside Patio Bonito before, so they learned that the world is bigger than the neighborhood where they live. They learned that there are other ways of living and other types of culture and music. They also learned that life isn't just about work, it is also about relationships, about recreation and doing fun things together. According to Carlos (20):

“*[PPT] changes the mentality, the mentality that a person has, to do nothing, to always stay in the same place. That is a strength; that they changes our mind. Well to me they changed a lot, because before I was just working in supplies, making my money. And since I came here, as there are groups in which I'm working, there are spaces to go out, to enjoy with friends, spaces for education, they have space to share your life. Well, all very cool.*”<sup>36</sup>

This notion, that work is something positive but not under all circumstances, and that in addition to work there must be time for other things such as education and leisure, meant a real change in mentality for many participants of the organization.

## 6.2 Self-esteem

Participants indicate that PPT greatly contributed to their self-esteem. This can be explained on the basis of the conceptualization of Searcy. Searcy (2007) argues that self-esteem, defined as: ‘an individual's overall feeling

<sup>33</sup> Interview, 17-05-2011

<sup>34</sup> Interview, 24-05-2011

<sup>35</sup> Interview, 24-05-2011

<sup>36</sup> Interview, 29-04-2011

about himself or herself<sup>37</sup>, is obtained in three different ways: through association with others, by what you do, and by what you hear about yourself from others.

Associative self-esteem means that young people associate with others, and whether or not these associations have the approval of adults, they bring with them a certain status, and through this status self-esteem is obtained. For participants PPT means a lot, for some it's even their second home, others describe it as a family and emphasize the strong friendship and solidarity ties. Maribel (18) argues:

*"This is my second home. I leave my home and they already know I'm here, in PPT. I have practically grown up here. Here are my friends, my companions, people who help you when you are in bad times, that's important. The relationship of brotherhood in the foundation, the love we have, what unites us, which keeps us together; I am very happy to be here and be part of the foundation."*<sup>37</sup>

Being part of the organization, which for them means so much, makes participants of PPT feel strong and proud.

Activity based self-esteem refers to furthering self-esteem by achievement, however not only the performance, the action in itself also contributes to self-esteem. Searcy (2007, p. 125) gives the example of cleaning a room which in itself is a boring and possibly heavy job. However, when young people engage in this adult activity, they may experience that they can contribute, and furthermore, the clearly visible result may lead to pride and appreciation for their work by themselves and by others. So they may value themselves, because they contribute to work that they consider as valuable. However, not all activities lead to greater self-esteem; to achieve this the confirmation from others is needed.

Aural self-esteem is what one hears about him or herself, especially from persons that matter to someone; self-esteem is achieved by positive expressions of persons who are important to someone. A person feels valued, because others tell him that he is valuable, but the opposite may also be the case. For working children, represented by PPT, their work means a lot to them. Not only do they contribute to household income, which gives them a sense of responsibility, participants also indicate that their work gives them a certain degree of independence, that it allows them to discover their skills, to develop themselves. However, because of the prohibition of child labor, the activities of these children are no longer considered as meaningful or useful. The government considers their activities as illegal, and working children, despite their good intentions, are seen by society as criminals. PPT is one of the few in society who stands up for these children and appreciates them. They provide these working children with positive reinforcement. PPT tells them that they have value; they value working children for who they are and what they do. Not only do they value the activities of the child, but also the child itself. For Oscar (23) this means a lot: *"They made me see that I'm also important, in moments of giving opinions, giving suggestions, and also when they say 'brother, congratulations for the process, for what you're doing'. They make you see that you have a lot of support from other people."*<sup>38</sup> And Daniela (15) states: *"I have learned to value more the little ones, to value the family we are, and also to have an opinion. That everyone hasn't just problems, but also has strengths, that you can improve. I came here, a cool space, where all of us are listened to, and that makes you feel better."*<sup>39</sup> By PPT, participants have learned to be proud of their work, and, more importantly that they are valuable and have the right to say no to work that is not good for them, that they have the right to demand for decent working conditions.

<sup>37</sup> Interview, 29-04-2011

<sup>38</sup> Interview, 26-04-2011

<sup>39</sup> Interview, 25-05-2011

Timberlake (1994) demonstrates in her study that ‘school attendance is a critical variable associated with homeless children’s self-esteem’. And just as school appears to be important for homeless children, PPT plays an important role in the lives of working children. Timberlake proposes a conceptual framework which grows out of the theoretical perspective of Janoff-Bulman and Frieze (1983). Janoff-Bulman and Frieze (1983) argue that persons are capable of setting goals, planning, and acting according to three basic assumptions that enable them to have expectations of themselves and the world around them. The first assumption is the belief in personal invulnerability, the second is the perception of the world as meaningful and comprehensible and the third one is the view of self in a positive light (Timberlake & Sabatino, 1994). As for homeless children, the world of children and actually all habitants of Patio Bonito, is often illogical and incomprehensible. There is a lot of poverty and violence and the existence of the inhabitants is very uncertain. Many of them work in the informal sector; they have no permanent job and can just become unemployed with all its consequences. There are robberies and murders, seemingly without reason. People do not know what they can expect, there is no certainty. The reality of today may be entirely different tomorrow. And because of the random danger, one feels often unsafe and vulnerable. People from Patio Bonito often perform ‘low’ jobs and are being bossed and humiliated by their supervisors. Because of this marginal position in society, one may have the feeling to have no influence, to be powerless and weak. In this often illogical and unsafe world, PPT is for the participants an organization, a place where, despite their life circumstances all three basic assumptions are met. As demonstrated by their stories, for the participants PPT is a safe haven where people feel secure and supported. According to Carlos (20):

*“One of the strengths of PPT is that there are bonds of friendship, there are bonds of solidarity. Always when we want to do something, we all come together and realize it. Here at the foundation, the idea is to help each other.*

*And they [PPT] also sent me a hand when I needed it, I feel that this helped me to excel or to succeed.*

*[Participating in PPT] has helped me to value myself as I am, and to value others as they are.”<sup>40</sup>*

The solidarity and support that participants find, gives them confidence in themselves and others and it makes them aware of their ability to jointly influence the world around them. Within the organization they learn for example that they can organize and may and can require decent working conditions. They learn and discover that they can influence their living and working conditions. Juan (23) explains:

*“The process here at the foundation helped me to realize that you yourself can develop in different fields, and gives a lot of confidence to speak too. I was a very quiet child who did not speak much, but one realizes that here the protagonism among children was and is very strong. The children are the ones talking, the ones who participate, promote, the ones doing things. This space is very strong. The value of children is equal to that of the companions. This helps the process of having confidence in yourself, that you as a person, as a child, are worth, that you can make a social transformation.”<sup>41</sup>*

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<sup>40</sup> Interview, 29-04-2011

<sup>41</sup> Interview, 26-05-2011

Carol indicates:

*"[I learned] to understand why things happen, that there are causes and effects, but ultimately that this is not an excuse to do nothing. Even though our neighborhood is not so beautiful, is not so pleasant, or the life we lead, we have force, we have values, we have study, knowledge, and PPT enables us that. I am proud to be a worker, to be from Patio Bonito and to be a woman."*<sup>42</sup>

Participants become aware that they can enhance and change their reality, that they have their own voice, and that they do not have to accept everything, that they have rights and can defend these rights. PPT acts in this as protagonist, it provides preconditions, but assumes that members themselves (learn to) organize. Timberlake (1994) argues that for schools in practice with homeless students, activities are of importance which promote homeless young people to experience the school as a safe place where expectations and rules are clear, and as a place where self-esteem can be regained. This is in fact exactly what PPT means for young working people in Patio Bonito

Returning to the indicators of Searcy (2007); associative, activity-based and aural self-esteem, the latter appears in particular important for members of PPT. For although the activities, i.e. the work of the children may promote their self-esteem, the specific contribution of PPT lies in the valuation of these activities. It is PPT's positive valuation and reinforcement that contributes to the increase of self-esteem of working children. In addition, associative self-esteem is also important. Working children in Patio Bonito feel secure and valued within the organization and are proud to be part of it.

### **6.3 Education**

Literature shows that the work of children affects their education in different ways. First, with regard to their participation in education; through their work, children may be less able to attend classes. Besides the effects on enrollment, the effect on performance might be even more important, since working children can spend less time and attention to their schooling. Finally, working children usually come from poor families with parents who often worked as a child, and therefore potentially attach less importance on education (Sedlacek et al., 2009; Salazar & Glasinovich, 1998; Arat, 2002). Participants of PPT, however, consider education as very important, as a key to a better future. PPT provides in this respect an important contribution. Firstly in the sense that it offers education adapted to working children, because of the teaching periods that enable working children to attend school. Lieten (2008, p. 90) argues that when advocacy for education is brought to poorer neighborhoods, the effect is striking. This seems especially true for the school of PPT, which was founded in response to the initiative of, and in close consultation with working children. Another factor is the mutual commitment of teachers and families. As Lieten (2008, p.89) indicates: "Teachers are usually unaware of the many jobs which children have at home and which in fact means that children cannot live up to the role model of a childhood only devoted to study and play. Since teachers by and large come from middle-class families, the multiple roles which children bring into the classroom are usually not understood and always never given attention to". However, teachers within PPT have often worked as a child themselves. They know the conditions in which children live, know what it is to work, how it is to combine school and work. Teachers will not report children to the government when they know they work, as happens at other schools. They pay attention to the reality and the

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<sup>42</sup> Interview, 29-03-2011

context in which the child grows up. Teachers and the family companion work together with families to find solutions for any problems the (working) child faces in his or her daily life. Another important contribution is that in terms of support. This is not so much material support, but mostly mental support. To this end, young working people come together in groups and together find solutions to any problems that arise with regard to education, for example in exclusion and injustice. By the members of these groups education is regarded as an important tool for improving their living conditions and to contribute to their community and context.

Lieten (2008, p.92) states that: "The central issue in the case of working children is education. As long as the (limited) contributions of children to the household or to economic activities do not interfere with the comprehensive development of their personality, work need not be objectionable". In this respect PPT provides working children the opportunity to realize this combination of work and education. That this approach aimed at increasing enrollment, improving performance, and promoting the intrinsic motivation among working children, is paying off, is evidenced by the fact that an average of about 60 to 70% of the children who participate in the Pedagogic Area of PPT, attend further education. It also appears from the testimonies of the participants, Carlos for example states: "*PPT have always said that children should study, because many do not want to [study], and now there are already a lot of them studying. I think these are strong impacts which help to move the population out of certain problems encountered in the streets.*" Asked about his vision and plans for the future, Oscar indicates that he want to "*enter the university and get a PhD*". And Darlin (18) answers:

*"Work very, very hard to get ahead, to get my parents out, to get them out of working, and to help my sister, and continue my studies. I already finished the baccalaureate. Before (entering PPT) my image of the future was different. Before I thought I would not have the opportunity to continue my baccalaureate. I said, 'No, no, only the primary, I'll do the same as my mum and dad'. Entering the project changed my notion of the future."*<sup>43</sup>

#### **6.4 Points for improvement**

Children themselves mention little or no points for improvement of the organization. When asked, they indicate that in terms of tools and materials, there is space for some improvement. Another point they mention, is that people, both employees as participants, sometimes don't show up, which means that scheduled meetings are canceled. In that case the children return empty-handed, which can be quite frustrating. Employees and former participants also highlight points for improvement. These points are very varied. Something that is mentioned several times, is the lack of documentation and systematization of experiences. Informants indicate that good programs, activities and methods are developed, but these are not documented. When one wants to use these programs again, over time, one have to rely on the memory of employees, or the wheel must be reinvented. This way much valuable knowledge is lost. An informant also noted that there is a lack of political formation and documentation too, making them suffer from shortcomings in discourses. Another weakness of the organization that is mentioned, is the lack of recourses. As indicated by an employee: "*A weakness which I see that we have, is in the management of resources for PPT. We can look for more resources than we do. They say, 'No, we're good, enough, no more', but we can search, but we don't. That's a big weakness*". Within the productive area, where children and young people make products for which they receive revenue, payments are sometimes very delayed. It happens that participants are paid until months later. The result is that participants, despite the good working conditions within PPT, sometimes return to the harsh existence of recycler. That way, at least they get

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<sup>43</sup> Interview, 04-04-2011

paid regularly, and can thus pay their fixed costs. An informant explains: “*Making cards within the productive area was very good, but there were seasons when it took them too long to sell, the delay was three, four months. We weren't paid monthly, and you have your daily expenses*”.

In addition, there is criticism on the way PPT responds to the changing policy towards child labor. This changing policy and the resulting consequences means a difficulty for PPT. Alveiro Bernal, one of the teachers within PPT explains this:

*“Some ten years ago, the vast majority of children [within PPT] were workers, a ninety, a hundred percent were workers. There was no political persecution. Today it is not like that. There are working children within the organization, but not all are workers. At this moment it is unclear [how many working children there are within PPT], because children who are workers, won't say they are workers, because of the persecution. They say 'when I identify myself as a worker, I go to Bienestar, they will imprison my dad, because they say that he is forcing me to work'. The children do not identify themselves as a worker anymore. It's not like before.”*<sup>44</sup>

It is clear that the approach of a decade ago is no longer applicable. Employees argue that PPT needs to adapt its working methods and must look for a way to deal with the new, current situation. The organization needs to find a way to remain significant for working children and adolescents despite the present policy on child labor.

## **6.5 Conclusion**

For participants PPT has had a significant impact on their lives. Participation initiated an awareness process among them with regard to their work, their working conditions, and the place work occupies in their lives. It has made them aware that besides work there should be space for education and leisure. In many cases, participation opened their world and broadened their view. Through their association with PPT, within which they feel safe and supported, and the positive reinforcement from the organization, their self-esteem has increased. Furthermore, PPT made a positive contribution to the educational process of many of the participants. Despite these positive results PPT must however, remain critical with respect to its approach. The organization must respond to changes in society in order to remain capable of providing such a valuable contribution.

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<sup>44</sup> Interview, 15-03-2011

## **7. Debate on child labor**

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In Colombia the ILO conventions No. 138 Minimum Age (2002) and No. 182 Worst Forms (2006) have been ratified and came into force (see also Appendix II) and therefore children under 15 years are not allowed to carry out all forms except "light work" and children under 18 years may not engage in the "worst forms" of child labor. Despite these legal prohibitions, there is still an ongoing debate about the usefulness of such a ban and whether a ban on child labor is per se desirable. Several authors have written about this. Basu (1999, p. 1115) suggests that although child labor is not preferred, the alternative is sometimes much more severe, as is the case with starvation. Especially when child labor occurs on large scale, it is likely that there is no alternative, because parents, how poor they are, usually want to prevent their children to work. Other authors also suggest that in poor countries child labor can make the difference between economic survival and starvation. According to Siddiqi (1995, p. 9) child labor may be necessary for the development of a country as it plays an instrumental role in economic survival which can strengthen the national economic development. Liebel (2002, pp. 265-268) argues that although child labor can put the personal development and even the lives of children at risk, it can also contribute to their development, their self-confidence and prepare them to make a meaningful contribution to society. Basu (1999, p. 1115) shows that a total ban on child labor may lead to better wages and working conditions for adults. This is however not the case in very poor societies. The effectiveness of such a measure must therefore first be properly investigated before such a solution will be implemented. It is further argued that children will only stop working and will attend school if their economic situation changes, and when they get something valuable in return. For these children it must therefore be worthwhile to go to school instead of working. It is also shown that for many children school and work are not mutually exclusive. Many children work in order to attend school and when child labor will be completely banned, this may therefore lead to a decline in school enrollment. The relationship between school and work appears to be complicated and instead of an immediate, total elimination of child labor, a combination of school and work should be considered in the poorest countries, argue Siddiqi (1995) and Basu (1999).

Not only in literature is this debate on child labor ongoing; in Colombia, the Colombian Family Welfare Institute (Instituto Colombiano Bienestar Familiar - ICBF) which is part of the Ministry of Social Protection, combats child labor as required by law. Contrary to PPT who believes that work is a right, and under certain circumstances for children too, the ICBF is convinced that child labor is undesirable under all circumstances and is definitely not necessarily. Although their ideas are completely opposite, it is however good to emphasize that both supporters and opponents of child labor want the best for the children.

### **7.1 Positions in the debate**

According to the ICBF the time that a person spent as a child or youngster is very short and this time should not be spent working, but is intended for development, education and formation. The ICBF argues that even the healthiest kind of work exposes you to something; to a certain type of violence, safety risks, etcetera. Children themselves are not aware of these risks, but in the long run they will suffer the consequences, and according to the ICBF it is the responsibility of the government to protect these children: "*It is the responsibility of adults to give (children) the ideal conditions to develop in the best way*". Children under 15 years would therefore not be allowed to work, and children under 18 years nor in the worst forms of labor. Actually, no one should work in these worst forms of labor, like prostitution, but the ICBF indicates that minors "*are not in the ability to*

*decide*”.<sup>45</sup>

The vision of PPT on child labor is contrary to that of the ICBF. PPT is convinced that children have their own voice and the right to participate and the right to work. As Alejandro Larcen, the director of PPT argues:

*“The work is one of the fundamental forms of personhood and is a fundamental dimension of all people. And children are people and therefore are entitled to participate in the construction of the world. Of course, at different levels. [...] Children are people, but different. When you speak of work as exploitation I could not unite it with children, but neither if you speak of children exclusively as a small adult or an adult in formation, no, there is no. Let's say, work as possibility with its pains and efforts [...] and children as full persons, together these two things, the work of children is a right.”<sup>46</sup>*

PPT does not want to print a negative stamp on working children; it does not want to stigmatize children because they work. Work is their reality, but also gives them identity. It is significant that PPT uses the term ‘infancia trabajadora’ instead of ‘trabajo infantil’. The emphasis is on being a child, not only on the work; a child that works. “PPT values workers as individuals and as social sector, full of dignity and bearers of good news, we criticize the conditions that destroy us as individuals and as a social collective”.<sup>47</sup>

## 7.2 Poverty, maintenance and education

According to the ICBF it cannot be correct that many children indicate that they work for maintenance or education. The government provides in soup kitchens, so according to the ICBF, hunger cannot be a reason for children to work. Furthermore, the ICBF indicates that education is free in Colombia, costs of supplies, notebooks, writing materials, etcetera are not significant, and moreover the ICBF provides in annual packages with these materials. According to the ICBF the main reason why children work, is that they earn their own money with which they can buy their own (luxurious) things. Things that their parents cannot give them: “*More beautiful shoes, a more beautiful watch, a better cell phone*”. Once accustomed to earning their own money, the children would like that too much to stop it. According to the ICBF a very natural phenomenon that applies equally to adults and children. The ICBF indicates that poverty cannot be the reason why children work, because there are poor families where children are not working. The ICBF indicates that according to statistics of 2009 the contribution of children to household income is minimal. The director of the department of ICBF concerned with child labor argues: “*It really isn't a significant support for the family. Families dependent on income of children, there are very few cases, really.*” And further: “*The cases we have of children who have stopped working, the families have not suffered economically because of that*”.<sup>48</sup>

According to PPT, the government pays little or no attention to the reality of the working children. PPT indicates that there are children who actually do work for maintenance and education, and not only for ‘more beautiful shoes’. The soup kitchens where the ICBF speaks of, do indeed exist, and are used a lot. So many that there exist huge waiting lists, and families living in terrible conditions who have to rely on these facilities, cannot be accepted. It also turns out that this soup kitchens are not always completely free of charge. Furthermore, education is indeed free and there are enough schools for all children in Bogota. The distribution of

<sup>45</sup> Interview, 20-05-2011

<sup>46</sup> Interview, 27-05-2011

<sup>47</sup> promotion leaflet of PPT

<sup>48</sup> Interview, 20-05-2011

these schools does however not correspond with the spreading of children in Bogota. It may thus occur that there is a place on a free school for a child of Patio Bonito, but far beyond his or her district. This, of course involves transport costs, and when the parents cannot afford these costs, the student will have to walk. Except that this can be dangerous, because of the violence in the neighborhood, parents do not always have time to accompany their children to school, because they have to work long hours in order to maintain their families. Because of these factors it is likely that a child, in this case, will not attend school, or will be regularly absent. In addition, in Patio Bonito live many displaced people. These families and their children sometimes arrive in Bogota halfway through the school year, and when children start school, they miss the package with materials provided by the ICBF. Employees of PPT also strongly doubt whether the statistics which indicate that child labor declines, and that the contribution of children to household income is not significant, are correct. By, among other things, the policy of the government and the prohibition of child labor, the work that children perform takes place more clandestine and hidden. Therefore, it is definitely not easy to properly display figures on this phenomenon.

### **7.3 Cultural patterns**

The ICBF points out that child labor exists because of, among other things, a cultural factor. “*Child labor generally has a long history in what parents think of child labor. Usually the parents have been working children, and identify it as some activities that formed them, [...] helped them in their formative process, [through which] they learned to manage the resources, then children have a positive valuation of child labor. This is what we call the formation of cultural patterns.*”<sup>49</sup>

PPT agrees that, with regard to child labor there is something like a cultural factor. Child labor is especially common in poor neighborhoods as Patio Bonito, where children work for generations and work is considered as something positive and something necessary in order to survive. However, PPT doesn't consider this as something negative and believes that when one takes away the identity of ‘worker’ (trabajador) of these young people, one actually takes away a part of themselves, of their being. When taking away the right to work of these young people, who grow up in an environment where work is perceived as positive and necessary, by labeling working as negative, one will create a separation between these youngsters and their families and communities, and deny them a part of their identity and self-esteem, argues Alejandro, director of PPT.<sup>50</sup>

### **7.4 Children's opinion**

Working children and former child laborers themselves indicate that work has both a positive and a negative impact, though it appears to be that the positive effects prevail. This in itself is surprising, because the literature on child labor especially emphasizes the negative effects (O'Donnell, 2005; Salazar & Glasinovich, 1998; Tuttle, 2006). Regarded as positive by the children is the fact that their work is a way to contribute to the family, it makes them responsible and gives them the chance to do something together with their parents or mother; a way to spend time together. Others mention that the work has made them stronger and by their work they've learned to deal with things. Through their work they have learned that you must do something, you have to act and move in order to get ahead. For the children it is sometimes necessary to work in order to pay for further education; they are aware that mere work does not lead to progress. Their work is often a means, a need, to pay for study, thus moving forward. Working also gives them financial resources, which enables them to buy their own stuff.

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<sup>49</sup> Interview, 20-05-2011

<sup>50</sup> Interview, 27-05-2011

Christian (11) for example, says that he likes it to earn his own money, so that he doesn't have to ask his mother for it. The same applies to Isa (11). Reyna (13) also indicates that her work gives her a certain degree of independence. Furthermore she argues that it's good to learn to work already, when you're still young, to learn how to deal with others. To gain some work experience, which can be a benefit later on. Jorge, who as a child worked in Corbastos, tells what he experienced as positive about his work: "*As positive that it formed me, it allowed me to become a better person, it allowed me to be more important. I valued as a person in this sense that I was useful. It allowed me to help at home, allowed me to help many others too.*" Maribel (18) also considers work as something positive:

*"I agree with that childhood works. But you have to practice critical appraisal, of which we speak here in the foundation. Work has its positive side because there is a contribution to the family and there is a contribution for yourself, in order to maintain yourself, to study, to buy things, and not to have to ask your parents for it. The work is not only receive an economic remuneration, but one also learns on the job, learns to build, to develop. Work is an activity that helps the formation of one."*<sup>51</sup>

This seems to be consistent with what Liebel (2002) argues, that child labor can contribute to the development of children, their self-confidence and that it prepares them to make a meaningful contribution to society.

Even though the positive aspects predominate, working children are well aware of the negative aspects of work. Perceived as negative is the risk that work sometimes entails, the working conditions which make work hard, and the troubles that the combination of work and education sometimes entails. Exploitation is also frequently mentioned as a negative aspect of work:

*"Here in Colombia there are many unemployed. Adults can no longer work due to their age, because they are too old. Now they are receiving more children, because they have capabilities, they have more strength. Sometimes they take advantage of the innocence. The people have no study, or because they are poor they work out of necessity, and there are others who seek to humiliate these people. They are working more than eight hours, and get paid little. That is the negative of the work"* (Maribel, 18).

Carlos states:

*"The negative effect is that minors do not get paid fair. They pay them what they want to give to children working in supplies. And it could also be that people do not see the need of education. Adults want that children work in supplies, and that they keep working there. They don't want that children continue their studies or anything."*

However, when the working children were asked if they, in the future, would let their own children work, most of them replied that they would do so indeed. But they all noticed that they won't let their children do just any job. They argue that first of all the work must safe. It may not be dangerous and not too heavy for the children. Ivan (7) states: "*I would let them work in what they like, but [on the condition] that they are able to do so*". And Edgar (11) believes that children may work, but they should not be obliged. In addition, they all agree that children should not only work but also have to go to school, that they have to be educated. Jeferson (8) and Viktor (9) for example, argue that they would let their children work, "*but only when there is time for breaks*

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<sup>51</sup> Interview, 27-04-2011

*and relaxation*". Because, they argue, without education you will get nowhere and you have no chance to find a decent job.

Child labor for children under 15 years is prohibited by Colombian law. Most working children themselves indicated, however, that they disagree with this prohibition. Main reason is that, according to the working children, laws and regulations do not take into account their reality. As stated by Maribel:

*"They do not understand that if one does not work, at home there is nothing to eat, one cannot dress, one cannot grow, hoping that everyone will give you, because it is not like that. The state prohibits work, but child workers keep working because there are many poor families who do not have to eat and who work out of necessity because they need something economic, to help the house. The state prohibits but does not provide solutions."*<sup>52</sup>

It's also stressed that there is a sincere fear that work will be carried out clandestinely and that children will disappear into illegality. Carlos (20):

*"I think that [the prohibition] creates more crime. Yes that is true, more crime, more inequality, more poverty. Crime because children who work in supplies, people who aren't doing wrong to anyone, when they are not allowed to work, they'll take the decision of getting into drugs, they begin to steal, to kill."*<sup>53</sup>

And Jorge states:

*"I would argue that the prohibition of work is to hide the reality, moving into a clandestinity. Because children will work at night, they will convey to prostitution, to criminal activities, theft, robbery. So the ban generates this kind of things, generating a kind of malaise, which does more damage to the lives of children and youth. So the work is prohibited, but there are other alternatives, gangs, prostitution, contract killing... If you won't let them work, they will look for these alternatives."*<sup>54</sup>

The sisters Betty (13) and Jessica (10) also think that a ban isn't realistic. They point out, however, that there are children who are obliged to work by their parents. These children work long hours, without earning anything. In that case a ban is desirable, argue the sisters.

Even though (former) child laborers are aware of the disadvantages that work may entail, they are not in favor of a ban. They call for a solution in which children are given the opportunity to work in dignified conditions, if possible supported by the government, and whereby they also are able to attend school. Maribel for example states that *"If children want to work, the state promotes work spaces for children in decent conditions. Spaces where children can receive a money, something economic, and likewise are working, developing in their work."* And Jorge pleads for *"Decent work for children and youth. Another solution is to link work and study, a link that allows the growth of the individual. The work itself does not form the person; it has to be connected to the study. I think this is a solution, the combination of both."*

## 7.5 Agency

The debate on child labor seems to revolve around the central question whether children are able to take well-considered decisions. Both Rosen (2007) and Feeny & Boyden (2004 in: Lieten, 2008, 137) indicate that

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<sup>52</sup> Interview, 27-04-2011

<sup>53</sup> Interview, 29-05-2011

<sup>54</sup> Interview, 26-05-2011

children are often portrayed as passive victims; exploited and powerless and depending on adults. Children wouldn't have relevant agency and would benefit from "rescue actions" by adults. This conception contrasts with anthropological findings that children and adolescents are active participants in society who have a good understanding of which factors affect their lives and what is happening in society. In his research on child soldiers, Rosen (2007) argues that 'laws regarding child soldiers were not developed with the involvement of children, nor do they consider any framework for understanding the agency of children other than extreme protectionist constructions of childhood'. The same appears to be the case with regard to laws concerning child labor. Working children themselves are not asked for their opinion; decisions are made for them. The ICBF has a very protectionist attitude in this and believes that children are unable to make their own choices; they should be protected by adults because children wouldn't be able to oversee the consequences and risks of their activities. And by referring to cultural patterns, the ICBF in fact indicates that parents are also passive victims without agency. Parents might believe that work is good for their children, that it contributes to their development, but according to the ICBF parents are incapable of deciding upon this because they aren't able to make a proper assessment due to their history and background.

Organizations of working children, like PPT are convinced that children not only have their own rights, but are also capable enough to deal with these rights, on their own responsibility. They do not consider themselves as dependent on the goodwill of adults, but as independent individuals who are able to plan and judge their own lives, and who can give something back to society. The call for participation by organized, working children, shows that they do not place themselves on the edge, but instead consider themselves as an equal part of society. Liebel (2002) points out that these working children, however, experience a double marginalization: "first, as workers whose work power may be claimed by society, but whose efforts are devalued; secondly, as children who, solely because they have not yet reached a certain age, are questioned in their judgmental ability and denied (political) participation" (Liebel, 2002, p. 268). This certainly seems to be the case in Bogota, where because of the ban on child labor and as its result the stigmatization, child labor is considered as negative. Liebel argues that just looking at the negative effects of child labor, considering it as purely devastating, and to advocate complete abolition, violates the human dignity of working children and their organizations.

As the ICBF advocates child protection, PPT strives precisely for participation of children and adolescents. PPT "recognizes the importance and relevance of genuine participation of children, highlighting the contributions that this can have on the full exercise of their rights."<sup>55</sup> According to UNICEF authentic participation will give young people more confidence in themselves, it makes them more aware of their community with its problems, it will make them more dedicated to cooperation with others, and make them optimistic about the future and their contribution in it (UNICEF 2003 in: Lieten, 2008, 139). Lieten (2008) notes however that "the exercise of agency and responsible citizenship" is not something that an adolescent suddenly acquires; it is a capacity that a child develops as he or she engages with the environment. Children should therefore be encouraged to do so with a sense of respect and responsibility. Lieten suggests that children could be more involved in matters that concern them and that they should be listened to. Listening to the insights, fears, wishes, ideas, frustrations, etc. of children is according to Lieten an important first step toward meaningful participation (Lieten, 2008).

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<sup>55</sup> In: programa evento de lanzamiento, Bogotá, mayo 24 de 2011

In summary it can be stated that children, potentially, have agency, that is however something that should evolve.

### **7.6 Conclusion**

Despite the negative effects of child labor, a complete ban seems (initially) not desirable. As long as the living circumstances of the children and their families do not change, children will probably continue to work and may end up into illegality. In the debate on child labor the main party, the working children themselves, seems to have no voice. A perhaps more important issue than whether or not children are allowed to work, is whether children themselves are able to decide about this. Several authors suggest that children really understand the world around them, but that their valuable contribution often remains unused. Asked about their opinion (former) working children show that they have insight into the phenomenon. They are aware of the negative effects of the work, the risks they run, but also realize that a ban on child labor does not do justice to their reality. Moreover, they emphasize that the work has many positive aspects. In short, children seem well capable to oversee what they do and the consequences thereof, and show a well-considered view with regard to their work.

## 8. Conclusion

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This thesis analyzes the experiences of working children; the reasons why they work, their working conditions, educational opportunities, and their experiences with the organization *Proyecto Pequeño Trabajador (PPT)*, in the south of Bogotá. The emphasis is on the perspective of working children themselves, through this thesis I tried to give working children in Patio Bonito a voice. In this conclusion I will answer the central question as formulated in the introduction: In what ways and to what extent does the *Proyecto Pequeño Trabajador* succeed in improving the situation of children with experiences of child labor?

Working children in Bogotá belong to the poorest strata of the population of the city. Typical families of this population are usually numerous and live in overcrowded, precarious rooms, and broken families are a common phenomenon. Adults have informal jobs like street vending and recycling in which children are also involved. This population is concentrated in peripheral areas like Patio Bonito. Patio Bonito is a marginal urban area in the southwestern edge of Bogotá, built around the ‘Plaza de abastos, Corabastos’, Colombia’s biggest agricultural wholesale distributor. Within Patio Bonito there is a lot of violence, making it one of the most dangerous neighborhoods of Bogotá. As context it is considered that there is a hostile environment to integral human development of families and their children.

Children give several reasons for the fact that they work, the most common reason is to earn money. Respondents indicate that they work partly out of necessity. Their parents or carers often earn hardly enough to pay basic services. The money that children earn, helps to make ends meet or to pay for extras. It enables children to buy things for themselves so that they do not have to ask their parents. (Former) working children indicate that they seldom if ever are forced to work. The majority of the respondents has work experience in recycling. Especially those who are still employed outside PPT work as recycler. This is probably due to the fact that, because of the ban on child labor, this is one of the few activities that children can perform unnoticed, albeit illegally. Recycling often takes place in the evening or at night. Because of their work children may be very tired during the day. The work can also be dangerous because of the working times and the violence in the neighborhood. Besides recycling, other common sources of income of working children are (un)loading of goods and informal trade.

For some children it is quite difficult to combine work and school, others experience no problems with this combination. In general, however, both working children and teachers of PPT argue that work and school can exist side by side. They consider a combination of both as ideal. This corresponds to findings of Siddiqi (1995) and Basu (1999) who argue that school and work are not mutually exclusive. Therefore, it seems not a good policy to extend school days in order to combat child labor, as argued by for example Salazar (1998), because children indicate that they will continue working, either in the evening or early in the morning.

PPT works since 1988 in Patio Bonito. It is a community organization of working children, juveniles, adolescents and their families. It promotes actions to improve living conditions and the integral development of children, based on criteria of self-organization, evaluation of their role in their own pedagogical processes, and child participation. The organization consists of three areas; a pedagogical area, featuring about 80 children; a productive area with about 40 participants; and a political area with some 25 participants. PPT does not want to print a negative stamp on working children; it does not want to stigmatize children because they work; work is their reality, but also gives them identity. PPT agrees with the idea that work and study may go very well

together and argues that children can also learn from their work.

Child laborers themselves do not experience their work as necessarily negative. According to them, the work certainly has its negative aspects, but positive aspects seem to predominate. Just as Liebel (2002), working children and adolescents argue that their work enables them to contribute to household income, it gives them a sense of responsibility and independence, and contributes to their development. Working children and adolescents also indicate that their work is inextricably linked with their reality. A total ban on child labor isn't realistic according to them as they will continue working, albeit clandestine, and will be more likely to fall prey to abuse. The prohibition of child labor therefore leads to a worsening rather than an improving of their living conditions, argue the children and adolescents. This is in line with authors like Arat (2002) who note that child labor laws in other countries were not paying off until the living standards had improved to that extent that there was no longer a demand for child labor.

However, in the debate about child labor and the prohibition thereon, children themselves don't have a voice. By parties like the Instituto Colombiano Bienestar Familiar (ICBF) child laborers and their parents are considered as defenseless victims who should be protected and who are unable to decide for themselves. PPT is convinced that children have a voice and strives for participation and dialogue with working children. The debate on child labor seems to revolve around the central question whether children are able to take well-considered decisions. Asked about their opinion, (former) working children show that they have insight into the phenomenon. They are aware of the negative effects of the work, the risks they run, but also realize that a ban on child labor does not do justice to their reality. Several authors like Rosen (2007), and Feeny & Boyden (2004) and Liebel (2002) argue that children are often portrayed as passive victims, while in reality they are active participants who have a good understanding of the factors which affect their lives. They argue that children, potentially, have agency. However, this is not something that arises spontaneously; it is a capacity that a child develops. In this sense, PPT provides a significant contribution. PPT contributes to the creation of awareness among children. Informants indicate that prior to their participation in PPT, their work was often their only and major occupation and they took the working conditions for granted. Participation initiated an awareness process among them with regard to their work, their working conditions, and the place work occupies in their lives. By participating in PPT they have learned to look critically at their work. They have learned about decent working conditions, and they learned that besides work there must be time for education and leisure. In many cases, participation opened their world and broadened their view.

Besides awareness, participation in PPT also leads to an increase of self-esteem among participants. Searcy (2007) argues that self-esteem can be obtained in three different ways; by associative self-esteem, active-based self-esteem and aural self-esteem. My research shows that the specific contribution of PPT lies in the latter one. PPT's positive valuation and reinforcement of the work of the children provides a significant contribution to their self-esteem. This is important as children grow up in an environment where on the one hand it is expected that they participate in economic activities, but where they on the other hand are stigmatized precisely because of their work, as Liebel (2002) argues. Associative self-esteem also plays an important role. Working children in Patio Bonito feel secure and valued within the organization and are proud to be part of it.

Furthermore, PPT has made a positive contribution to the educational process of many of the participants. Participants previously thought that further education wasn't possible for them. Now, by the support and attention of PPT, they regard education as essential in order to achieve progress, and a large number of

participants actually attend further education, including university programs.

Respondents also mention some points for improvement, namely the lack of documentation and systematization of experiences, the lack of recourses, the delay in payments within the productive area, and the way PPT responds to the changing policy towards child labor.

PPT's role in improving the situation of working children in Patio Bonito, consists of developing awareness among its participants; contributing to their self-esteem and giving them a voice. Nevertheless, the organization should remain critical with respect to its approach, in order to remain capable of providing such a valuable contribution.

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## Annex I: List of interviewees

Date	Name and Function	Kind of work	Reason
<b>Pedagogic Area</b>			
9 march	Deisy Duran - Teacher of specialization		
15 march	Alveiro Bernal - Teacher of deepening		
24 march	Luis Alberto Camargo - Family companion		
28 march	Paola Sierra - Coordinator of the pedagogic area		
3 may	Catherine Sánchez - Teacher of initiation		
5 may	Omar; working child - age: 13, working since 9	Recycling	'Ayudar a papas'
6 may	Matias; working child - age: 10	Recycling	'Gusto y ayudar a mama'
6 may	Manuel; working child - age: 9	Recycling	'Conseguir plata'
17 may	Maira; working child - age: 13, working since a few months	Recycling	'Conseguir plata y ayudar a papas'
17 may	Lina; working child - age: 16	'Desgranar' (treshing)	'Conseguir plata y ayudar a papas'
18 may	Jonathan ; working child - age: 10, working since 10	Recycling	'Conseguir plata y cuidar el planeta'
18 may	Ivan; working child - age: 7, working since 6	Helping dad in Corabastos	'Conseguir plata y cuidar el planeta'
19 may	Isa; working child - age: 11, working since 11	Babysitting	
19 may	Edgar; working child - age: 11, working since 8	Corabastos	
23 may	Christian; working child - age: 11, working since 8	Recycling	'Ganar propio dinero, independiente'
23 may	Marina; working child - age: 13, working since 13	Helping her mother in selling	'Ganar propio dinero, ayudar a mama'
24 may	Claudia; former working child – age 26, working since 12	Ambulant vendor	
26 may	Juan; former working child – age: 22, working since 10	Corabastos	
<b>Productive Area</b>			
31 march	Yamile Torres Rincon - coordinator of the productive area		
4 april	Darlin; former working child - age: 18, working since 10	Vendor	
26 april	Oscar; former working child - age: 23, working since 8	Corabastos, recycling, vendor	'Conseguir plata y por gusto'
27 april	Maribel; former working child - age: 18, working since 6	Recycling, waitress, vendor	'Por propia iniciativa; ayudar a mama'
29 april	Carlos; former working child - age: 20, working since 7	Corabastos	'Obligado por padre'

2 may	Jessica; working child - age: 10, working since 9	Corabastos - vendor	'Conseguir plata y aprender cosas'
2 may	Betty; working child - age: 13, working since 11	Corabastos - vendor	'Conseguir plata y aprender cosas'
16 may	Camilo; working child - age: 16, working since 12, 13	All kinds of work	
16 may	Brian; working child - age: 12, participating since 8	Working within the productive area of PPT	
16 may	Andres; working child - age: 15, participating since 14	Working within the productive area of PPT	
<b>Political Area</b>			
2 may	Stella Talero - Coordinator of political area		
30 march	Rosember Ariza Valbuena - Coordinator of political area		
25 may	Daniela; working child - age: 15, working since 14	Recycling	'Gusto y circunstancias economicas'
25 may	Jeferson; child with work experience - age: 8, worked for a year at age of 6	Recycling	'Contaminacion'
25 may	Viktor; child with work experience - age: 9, worked for a year at age of 6	Recycling	'Contaminación'
29 march	Carol; participant of political area - age: 28		
26 may	Jorge; former working child – age: 38, working since 5	Corabastos, selling, guarding cars, cleaning photocopiers, polishing shoes, recycler	
<b>Other</b>			
20 may	Instituto Colombiano Bienestar Familiar (ICBF)		
26 may	Paola Sierra - Coordinator of pedagogic area; reflecting the interview with ICBF		
27 may	Alejandro Larcen - Director of PPT		

## Annex II: Statistics

### Ratified conventions relating to child labor

Convention	Ratification	Entry into force
The Minimum Age Convention (No. 138) (minimum age specified: 14 years)	02-02-2001	02-02-2002
The Worst Forms of Child Labour Convention (No. 182)	28-01-2005	28-01-2006
Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC)	28-01-1991	27-02-1991

Source: (International Programme on the Elimination of Child Labour, 2008)

### Children aged 5-14, type of activity

Activity	%	No.
Work only	2.3	201,390
Study only	82.3	7,062,081
Work and study	8.1	693,406
Total work	10.4	894.796
Total study	90.4	7,755,487
Neither	7.3	624,066

Source: (International Programme on the Elimination of Child Labour, 2008)

Regiones (2005)	%
Pacífica	14,3
Oriental	9,5
Central	10,2
Atlántica	5,2
Bogotá D.C.	4,6

Source: (Comité Interinstitucional Nacional, 2008)

Razones para trabajar	Porcentaje
Deben ayudar a la familia en la actividad económica	26,1
Quieren tener su propio dinero	25,0
Deben ayudar con los gastos de la casa	34,6
Se cree que el trabajo lo forma y lo hace honrado	6,0
Debe costearse su propio studio	3,6

Source: (Comité Interinstitucional Nacional, 2008)

<b>Sectores en los que los niños/as trabajan</b>	<b>%</b>
Agricultura	36,4
Comercio	30,4
Industria	11,6
Servicios	10,1

Source: (Organización Internacional del Trabajo, 2009)

<b>Horas laborales (promedio)</b>	<b>%</b>
Menos de 24 horas	56,9
De 25 a 48 horas	27,9
Más de 48 horas	15,2

Source: (Organización Internacional del Trabajo, 2009)

<b>Razones de inasistencia escolar</b>	<b>Porcentaje</b>
Sus padres no tienen dinero	25,9
No les gusta	23,8
Sus padres consideran que no están en edad	11,6
No encuentran cupo	6,0
Tienen que trabajar	8,5
Deben encargarse de los oficios del hogar*	3,3
Cambiaron de residencia	4,8
Otra	16,1

\* Los oficios del hogar se consideran trabajo cuando superan 15 horas semanales.

Source: (Comité Interinstitucional Nacional, 2008)

### Annex III: Principles of Proyecto Pequeño Trabajador

#### Principles

**Fe:** follow Jesus of Nazareth, poor among the poor, worker among workers, obedient to the will of his father and builder of the new man and the kingdom of God.

**Fraternity:** permanent construction of relations of friendship, familiarity, solidarity and love with themselves, with equal and different. “We are brothers!”

**Critical appraisal:** value to workers as individuals and as social sector, full of dignity and bearers of good news, criticizing the conditions that destroy them as individuals and social group.

#### **Annex IV: Patio Bonito**



Photo taken by Gerdienke Westerveld



Photo taken by Gerdienke Westerveld

#### Annex IV: Corabastos



Photo taken by Gerdienke Westerveld



Photo taken by Gerdienke Westerveld



Photo taken by Gerdienke Westerveld