

MENU

# Sugar workers in Negros Oriental deprived of cash bonus, social program

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“It is disappointing that no government agency, like DOLE, educated us on SAP and its cash bonus because obviously, the millers and planters would not likely place our interest ahead of theirs.”

By **MAE MACAPOBRE**  
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MANILA – Germihildo Sanoy, a 45-year-old sugar worker in Manjuyod, Negros Oriental, never tasted any benefit from the Social Amelioration Program (SAP) in the sugar industry.

The **SAP**, institutionalized in 1974 through Presidential Decree No. 621 and enhanced by Republic Act No. 6982 in 1991, mandates benefits for sugar workers, including cash bonus and socio-economic related programs.

Sanoy, who has been working in a sugar plantation since he was 20, said he and his family of six never received any cash bonus through the SAP. When asked why, Sanoy replied, “I did not know about SAP and CBF (cash bonus fund), nobody informed us about that.”

Sanoy is among the thousands of sugar workers in Negros Oriental who has not heard of the 40-year implementation of the SAP.

The Social Amelioration Fund (SAF) is funded through a lien imposed on the volume of sugar produced. Under the law, sugar planters and millers shoulder the SAF. It is collected by the Bureau of Rural Workers of the Department of Labor and Employment (DOLE) and distributed to the sugar farmers.

## Unreleased funds



Sugar farm workers of Central Asucarera de Bais catch their breath after harvesting sugarcanes . (Photo by xtianmichael)

The province of Negros Oriental, the Sugarlandia of Central Visayas, is among the provinces that relies on agriculture, particularly on sugarcane production.

According to a report by the Commission on Audit (COA), a total of P9 million (\$667,000) cash bonus fund (CBF) intended for Negros Oriental sugar workers were unclaimed and undistributed from 2005 until 2012.

Pedro Perater, a sugar farm worker and an officer of the National Federation of Sugar Workers-Negros Oriental (NFSW), said many of their fellow farm workers do not know about SAP and its supposed benefits for them.

Perater said sugar farmers do not know the basis for the computation of the CBF.

Luisito Minguito, a sugar farm worker in Tangkulugan, Bais City said he was rejected as a SAP beneficiary because he is only a seasonal worker, not a regular worker of the sugar plantation. Minguito said, "I do not understand why they (the planters) refused to include seasonal workers like me when we also contributed our labor in producing the sugar."

Today, lien is P10 (\$0.74) per picul (equivalent to 63 kilograms of sugar). The law mandates that 80 percent of the SAF be distributed as cash bonus and the remaining 20 percent for social benefits such as death benefit, maternity benefit, socio-economic projects, among others.

According to the 2012 COA Annual Report of the Bureau of Workers with Special Concern (BWSC), the following milling companies in the province along with planters cooperatives and associations failed to distribute their farm workers' CBFs:

Central Asucarera de Bais P 6.4 million  
(\$474,000)  
Universal Robina Sugar Milling Corporation P  
2.4 million (\$178,000)  
Herminio Teves and Company Incorporated  
Sugar Mill P319,000 (\$24,000)

In an interview, Susan Delfin, senior labor and employment officer for Negros Oriental, said the DOLE is not decisive in the identification of enlisted farm workers who can avail of the CBF and other SAP benefits, it is the planters' discretion. She said DOLE can only monitor the implementation through the liquidation of the planters, which is only a payroll signed by the farm workers.

Perater lamented, "It is disappointing that no government agency, like DOLE, educated us on SAP and its cash bonus because obviously, the millers and planters would not likely place our interest ahead of theirs. Small as it is, this CBF should have helped a farm worker's family who is earning a minimum of P100 (roughly \$2) per day for only five months per year."

#### **Same predicament**

Sugar farmers and workers in other provinces suffer from the same deprivation of social benefits.

According to the same COA report, a total of P408 million (\$3.6 million) remains unremitted by the sugar mills, planters, associations or cooperatives to the Regional Offices from 2005 until 2012.

In the same report, BWSC explained that their regional offices have already sent obligatory letters to the sugar mills, planters, associations or cooperatives in compliance with the COA audit recommendation in 2011.

Aurelio Estrada of the Unyon ng Mangagagawa sa Agrikultura (Uma) said the unclaimed and undistributed P408-million SAF is an indication of delay or non-distribution of the fund to the workers. He added that the planters and millers show no proof of CBF distribution to the farm workers other than a mere payroll list.



Germihildo Sanoy (second to the left) attends the NFSW provincial-wide consultation. (FARDEC file photo)

The anomalies in the implementation of the SAF defeated the program's purpose of alleviating the situation of the sugar farm workers since the huge amount of money is only with the sugar planters.

Even the COA is wondering why the DOLE regional offices are ignoring the law in the imposition of penalties for those who are late in remitting liens. In 2012, the COA reported that the DOLE officials were not amenable to the enforcement of sanctions.

Consequently, an increase in the collection of the SAP would only further increase the unclaimed and undistributed CBF and anomalous and corrupt practices and without anybody getting penalized for these. A bill seeking to amend the RA No. 6982 has been filed in Congress. It also seeks to increase the collection of liens among others from P10 per 63 kilograms to P10 per 50 kilograms of sugar.

Uma and NFSW, together with other farm workers organizations in the country, are calling for a comprehensive investigation on the SAP anomalies. The groups are planning to file cases against those involved in anomalies in the SAP through the Ombudsman, Regional Trial Court or Supreme Court.

The farm workers also called for direct distribution of CBF, including the unclaimed and undistributed, and other social benefits to all sugar workers including sacadas (migratory workers) and seasonal workers.

Estrada said, "Faced with this situation, the farm workers in sugarcane plantations should fight and pursue their rights amid the worsening attack on their livelihood caused by the exploitation and oppression by the landowners and the government." [BULATAT.COM](http://BULATAT.COM)

*\*The article is the author's submission as a fellow of the 18th Lopez Jaena Community Journalism Workshop of the University of the*

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