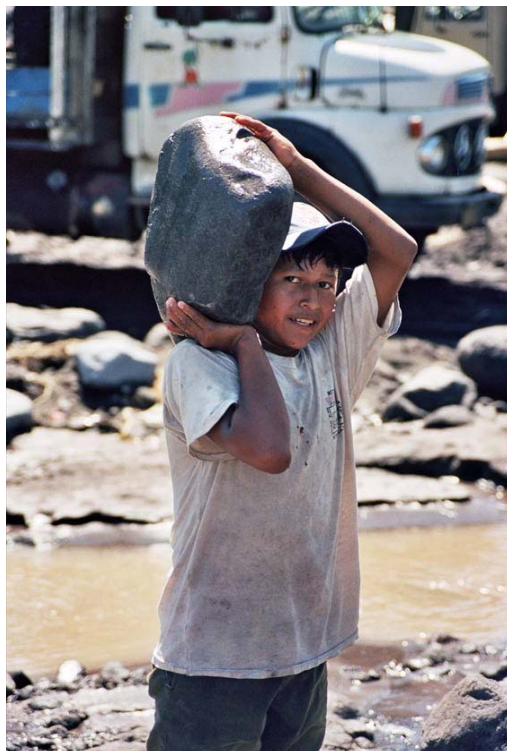


In their own words...

Guatemala: Juan Carlos goes back to school



At the foot of the Samala volcano near Brillantes, Retalhuleu, poor families earn their livelihood chipping volcanic rocks. Juan Carlos, now 17, has been doing this since he was 8 years old. The work is hard. Heavy rocks are gathered from the river, carried to shore and crushed using heavy and dangerous tools. The gravel is then sold to construction companies for a very low price. Children who do this work regularly suffer bruises and insect bites, and some experience vision loss due to dust from the rocks.

Juan Carlos lives with his mother and five younger brothers. “I am the oldest, that’s why I have to be responsible for the family”, he says. In 2003, he began participating in a project of the International Programme on the Elimination of Child Labour (IPEC), and its NGO partner, CEIPPA, which aimed to eradicate child labour in the region. With

the project’s assistance, he was able to reduce his working hours and go back to school. The death of his father in 2005 made Juan Carlos head of the family, and if it hadn’t been for the project’s intervention, he would have been destined to work from sunrise to sunset on the shores of the river.

Instead, Juan Carlos and his brothers have been able to stay in school, and the project is helping their mother to start a business selling food in the Retalhuleu market. “My mother always said she wanted to open her own business”, Juan Carlos says, “but my father wouldn’t let her”. The project will continue to support Juan Carlos in his future studies at the Technical Institute for Training in Guatemala (INTECAP). His teachers already say he is a promising student.