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Building a safe and healthy working environment in the rural sectors of the Philippines

Compendium of good practices 2021–24

Acknowledgements

This compendium is part of the ongoing efforts of the ILO's [Safety + Health for All](#) flagship programme to consolidate and disseminate good practices that foster a safe and healthy working environment.

We sincerely acknowledge the invaluable contributions of the project team of the “Improving Workers’ Rights in Rural Sectors of the Philippines” project, particularly **Cerilyn Pastolero** and **Irene de Leone**, whose dedication was instrumental in identifying and documenting the good practices presented in this publication.

We also extend our appreciation to **Justine Tillier**, Programme and Operations Officer at the ILO Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific, and **Mini Thakur**, Monitoring and Evaluation Specialist in the Occupational Safety and Health and Working Environment Branch, for their leadership in drafting the compendium. Our gratitude also goes to **Yuka Ujita**, Senior Regional Occupational Safety and Health Specialist, for her insightful comments on the draft.

Finally, we express our deep appreciation to the Bureau of International Labor Affairs of the United States Department of Labor, and in particular **Keith Goddard**, for his longstanding support in promoting labour rights in the Philippines.

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List of Abbreviations

ALU-TUCP	Associated Labor Union – Trade Union Congress of the Philippines
BFAR	Bureau of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources
BOSH	Basic Occupational Safety and Health
BITC	Banana Industry Tripartite Council
CBA	Collective Bargaining Agreement
CODI	Committee on Decorum and Investigation
CoMP	Chamber of Mines of the Philippines
DA	Department of Agriculture
DAR	Department of Agrarian Reform
DENR-MGB	Department of Environment and Natural Resources – Mines and Geosciences Bureau
DOH	Department of Health
DOLE	Department of Labor and Employment
DTI	Department of Trade and Industry
ECOP	Employers Confederation of the Philippines
FFW	Federation of Free Workers
FS-SENTRO	Fishworkers’ Solidarity – SENTRO
HMC	Hinatuan Mining Corporation
HORSEU-FFW	Hinatuan Organized Regular Seasonal Employees Union – FFW
ILO	International Labour Organization
ITC	Industry Tripartite Council
ITUC	International Trade Union Confederation
IUF	International Union of Food, Agricultural, Hotel, Restaurant, Catering, Tobacco and Allied Workers’ Associations
LEA	Labor and Employment Assistant (chatbot)
LI MIS	Labour Inspection Management Information System
MSSMA	Malaya Small Scale Miners Association
NAC	Nickel Asia Corporation
OSH	Occupational Safety and Health
PAOT	Participatory Action-Oriented Training
PBGEA	Philippine Banana Growers and Exporters Association
PCW	Philippine Commission on Women
SCP	Strategic Compliance Planning
SEBA	Sole and Exclusive Bargaining Agent
SENTRO	Sentro ng mga Nagkakaisa at Progresibong Manggagawa
SOCCSKSARGEN	South Cotabato, Cotabato, Sultan Kudarat, Sarangani and General Santos
SSFFAI	Socskargen Federation of Fishing and Allied Industries, Inc.
TAVs	Tripartite Technical Advisory Visits
TUCP	Trade Union Congress of the Philippines
USDOL	United States Department of Labor

Introduction

The banana, mining, and tuna sectors are important pillars of the economy of the Philippines, generating substantial export revenues and supporting millions of livelihoods. Bananas rank among the country's top agricultural exports, with the Philippines recognized as the leading exporter in Asia and the second largest globally. The mining industry also plays a significant role, driven by the production of gold, nickel, and copper. Meanwhile, the country is one of the world's leading tuna exporters and a major global supplier of fresh, frozen, and canned tuna products.

Despite their economic role, these sectors experience persistent decent work deficits, particularly in occupational safety and health (OSH), which undermine their sustainability. For instance, workers in the banana industry, often non-regular workers, are at high risk of occupational diseases due to exposure to hazardous chemicals, without adequate prevention measures and health monitoring. In the mining sector, especially in informal small-scale operations, workers can also be exposed to harmful substances. Even in large-scale mining, where OSH management systems are in place, the widespread use of subcontracting can undermine compliance and leave agency-supplied workers especially vulnerable. In the tuna sector, many embark on long voyages aboard poorly maintained vessels, lacking essential safety and navigational equipment, which contribute to high safety and health risks.

Women in banana plantations, mining sites and processing facilities face disproportionately high OSH risks due to gender-specific hazards such as workplace harassment.

Fostering a strong culture of prevention is essential to ensuring safe, healthy, and decent working conditions across these sectors in the Philippines requiring an integrated approach strengthening OSH systems, formalizing employment, enhancing social dialogue, and ensuring effective enforcement of labour laws.

To this effect, the ILO implemented the project [Improving Workers' Rights in the Rural Sectors of the Philippines](#) as part of its global Safety + Health for All Flagship Programme between 2021 and 2024. This project funded by the United States Department of Labor (USDOL) worked at national, sectoral and workplace levels reaching a total of **1,142 government representatives, 525 employers' representatives, and 1,416 workers' representatives**, through its various in-person and online activities. Activities engaged the following tripartite constituents:

- **Government:** Department of Labor and Employment (DOLE), Department of Health (DOH), Department of Agriculture (DA), Department of Health (DoH), Bureau of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources (BFAR), Department of Trade and Industry (DTI), Department of Environment and Natural Resources – Mines and Geosciences Bureau (DENR-MGB) and the Philippine Commission on Women (PCW).
- **Employers' organizations:** Employers Confederation of the Philippines (ECOP), Philippine Banana Growers and Exporters Association (PBGEA), Soccsargen Federation of Fishing and Allied Industries, Inc (SSFFAI), and the Chamber of Mines of the Philippines (CoMP) members in the Caraga region.
- **Workers' organizations:** Associated Labor Union – Trade Union Congress of the Philippines (ALU-TUCP), Federation of Free Workers (FFW), and Sentro ng mga Nagkakaisa at Progresibong Manggagawa (SENTRO), Malaya Small Scale Miners Association (MSSMA) and the National Coalition of Small-Scale Miners of the Philippines, Inc. (NCSSMPI).

In terms of geographical and sectoral coverage, the project focused on the banana industry in the **Davao Region**, large-scale critical mineral mining in the **Caraga Region**, small-scale gold mining in the **Bicol Region** and commercial fishing, tuna canning, and fresh-frozen tuna production in the **Soccsargen Region**.

In addition to documenting project [achievements](#), identifying and disseminating good practices is key to foster learning. The project thus identified and documented a series of four good practices on the promotion of a safe and healthy working environment in the rural sectors of the Philippines as follows:

- Institutionalizing strategic compliance planning to protect workers in rural sectors;
- Women's leadership secures the first collective bargaining agreement advancing occupational safety and health for seasonal mining workers;

- Empowering grassroots workers' associations to drive safety and health improvements in the fishing industry;
- Driving safety and health improvements in the banana and small-scale mining sectors through union action.

These practices span policy and institutional reforms, capacity building and workplace-level improvements, all underpinned by a strong emphasis on social dialogue. The selected good practices were chosen for their effectiveness, impact, efficiency and/or innovation. Ultimately, the goal is to inspire replication across different contexts, settings, countries and sectors, amplifying their impact and fostering safer and healthier work environments globally.



Banana plantation worker in Davao © Joseph Dumbrique, ILO

Institutionalizing strategic compliance planning to protect workers in rural sectors

Summary of the practice

To address persistent gaps in compliance with labour laws, the project introduced and **institutionalized the Strategic Compliance Planning (SCP) approach within the Department of Labor and Employment (DOLE)**. This innovative approach enabled the labour inspectorate to shift from reactive, quota-driven inspections to proactive, data-informed and risk-based compliance strategies tailored to sector-specific realities. This was realized through enhanced collaboration between DOLE's national, regional and field offices and helped DOLE better protect workers in vulnerable situations through targeted interventions that combined enforcement, advisory services and capacity building.

By February 2025, nearly **1,500 establishments** in agriculture, fishing and mining were inspected, reaching more than **44,000 workers**. The approach also spurred reforms in labour inspection policies, strengthened local implementation through field offices and revitalized tripartite mechanisms by engaging employers and workers more meaningfully in issues related to compliance. It also indirectly

contributed to the long-awaited ratification by the Philippines of ILO Convention No. 81 on Labour Inspection, a landmark in the country's labour rights journey.

What needed changing

The banana, mining, and tuna fishing sectors are crucial to the Philippines' economy, providing jobs, sustaining local communities, and contributing significantly to export revenues. However, these sectors are also marked by decent work deficits. Many workers, particularly women and those in informal or non-standard forms of employment lack OSH protection and have minimal access to grievance mechanisms. In the banana industry for instance, non-regular agency-hired workers are often exposed to hazardous chemicals with little or no protective measures and without health surveillance. In mining, both small-scale and large-scale operations can pose high OSH risks, particularly for subcontracted workers. In tuna fishing, workers are often informally employed and spend very long periods of time on unsafe vessels without OSH training and limited

safety gear.

Labour inspection has historically focused on formal sectors, guided by national performance targets. Rural sectors remained low priority for the inspectorate due to the logistical challenges, seasonal nature of work, limited awareness of labour rights, and weak institutional incentives to focus on these sectors.

Recognizing these systemic barriers, the project identified the need for a paradigm shift: from enforcement, compliance-by-numbers models to strategic, participatory, and context-sensitive compliance planning. DOLE's openness to reform, combined with the project's capacity-building and policy support, created the foundation for introducing Strategic Compliance Planning as a transformative solution.

What did the project do

The project's approach to introducing strategic compliance planning unfolded in carefully sequenced steps that prioritized institutional alignment, capacity building, and social dialogue.

DOLE Bureau of Working Conditions and Regional Officials during the Executive Course on Strategic Compliance Planning Capacity Building Workshop © ILO/Cerilyn Pastolero



It began by **securing commitment from DOLE's central leadership**, who recognized the limitations of the existing inspection framework and expressed interest in rethinking how compliance is measured and achieved. The project supported the conduct of an Executive Course on SCP in early 2023 with all Regional Directors, facilitating in-depth discussions about the evolving nature of work, the role of the inspectorate, and the necessity of targeting high-risk sectors. This initial engagement was crucial in fostering shared ownership and creating space for institutional change.

Next, the project worked with DOLE to **strengthen the existing Labour Inspection Management Information System (LI MIS)**, incorporating new

prioritization criteria such as regional employment patterns, export related data, reports of injuries and diseases, union density, and collective bargaining coverage. These new criteria made it possible for regions to justify the inclusion of agriculture, fishing, and mining in their inspection plans and to use the strategic compliance approach to address structural vulnerabilities in those sectors. By the end of the project, **11 out of 16 of the country's regions** had included at least one of the Project's sectors in their compliance priorities.

Simultaneously, the project enhanced DOLE's **capacity** by training **207 labour inspectors, 100 women and 107 men**, on OSH inspection, accident investigation, and specialized inspections in agriculture and fishing. These training courses were highly practical, including field visits, legal updates, mock inspections, and sectoral consultations with employers and workers.

Recognizing that sustainability required implementation at the local level, the project then shifted its focus in 2024 to a more bottom-up approach. Instead of starting at the regional level, planning workshops using the strategic compliance methodology were then conducted with field offices first. Field offices' plans were then consolidated and refined at the regional level, ensuring that those closest to the ground, who understood local dynamics, stakeholders, and challenges, played a central role in shaping compliance strategies. All workshops were cost-shared between the ILO and DOLE, which allowed the Project to reach out to many localities. Aligning with this approach, **DOLE also reassigned labour inspectors from regional offices to field offices** to respond to the need for more field level inspectors.

DOLE closely monitored progress by making the implementation of the strategic plans part of its official key performance indicators in 2024.

The project also co-developed tools like the Labor and Employment Assistant (LEA) [chatbot](#) to expand **DOLE's public engagement**, particularly with micro, small and medium-sized enterprises and informal workers.

Strategic compliance planning was not implemented in isolation. It was deeply embedded in **tripartite mechanisms**. Industry Tripartite Councils (ITCs) in targeted regions were consulted in the development, validation, and monitoring of the strategic plans. Following project support, they **expanded**

membership to include actors from informal sectors, such as small-scale miners and small banana growers, ensuring broader representation and accountability. Through the process, DOLE offices also initiated partnerships with other agencies like the Bureau of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources, the Department of Agrarian Reform, the Mines and Geosciences Bureau, and local governments, enabling multi-sector coordination on labour rights, OSH, and social protection.

Impact

The institutionalization of strategic compliance planning transformed the way labour inspection is conceptualized and practiced in the Philippines. From 2023 to February 2025, DOLE inspected **914 agricultural establishments, 327 fishing operations, and 226 mining sites**, collectively reaching over **44,000 workers** in these high-risk sectors. Thousands more were reached through technical advisory visits to 2,204 establishments in target sectors, public information campaigns, and social protection referrals.

"The ILO has significantly enhanced our compliance and workplace safety and health efforts. By adopting the Strategic Compliance Planning approach, we empowered regional managers to set priorities and equipped our inspectors with specialized training in agriculture, fishing, and mining. The project also improved our outreach through digital tools and strengthened collaboration with social partners via the Industry Tripartite Councils, fostering shared responsibility and trust in promoting sustainable compliance."

— **Director Alvin Curada, Bureau of Working Conditions, DOLE**

DOLE **amended its labour inspection rules** (DO. 238) in April 2023 supporting the development of technical advisory visits, thus going beyond enforcement in alignment with the strategic compliance planning approach. Inspections became more targeted, and technical advisory visits to micro-establishments were integrated into the strategy. **Field Offices received more autonomy and staffing**, increasing their ability to respond to sector-specific compliance issues with agility and insight.

Tripartite dialogue was reinvigorated. Industry Tripartite Councils became platforms for co-developing and co-monitoring strategic plans,

with social partners contributing strategies, reporting progress, and proposing policy changes. This collaborative approach shifted the responsibility of compliance from DOLE alone to a shared agenda among government, employers and workers.

The strategic compliance interventions also led to meaningful collaboration between stakeholders. For instance, in Camarines Norte, the interventions catalyzed the inspection of **small-scale mining operations and their integration into social protection programmes** for the first time.

The strategic compliance approach is now part of DOLE's national inspection planning and monitoring system. The lessons and successes of this approach have contributed to the long-awaited ratification of ILO Convention No. 81 on Labour Inspection and created momentum for potential ratification of additional conventions on labour inspection in agriculture, safety in mines, and work in fishing.





Ani, the President of HORSEU-FFW posting information about the collective negotiations covering occupational safety and health at a mine site
© ILO Milestonn Ruaya

Women's leadership secures the first collective bargaining agreement advancing occupational safety and health for seasonal mining workers

Summary of the good practice

In the CARAGA region of the Philippines, a key mining hub rich in nickel resources, workers (including seasonal workers) face a hazardous working environment, insecure employment, and limited labour protections. To address these challenges, the Federation of Free Workers (FFW), with project support, launched awareness and capacity-building initiatives in late 2023, focusing on general labour standards, occupational safety and health and gender equality. These efforts led to the **formation of the Hinatuan Organized Regular Seasonal Employees Union (HORSEU-FFW)** at Hinatuan Mining Corporation (HMC), composed of 150 members and led by Anilou Gorgod, a woman truck driver turned union president. The union became a pioneering example by **negotiating the first-ever collective bargaining agreement covering regular seasonal workers in mining**. The collective bargaining agreement includes OSH measures such as worker representation in OSH committees, expanded access to occupational health services, continuous safety and health training, and the

creation of a committee to prevent and address gender-based violence and harassment. This success story highlights how empowering precarious workers through unionization and social dialogue can promote safer, healthier and more equitable workplaces.

What needed changing

The mining industry in the Philippines contributes significantly to the economy. According to S&P Global, the Philippines continues to rank among the top in Asia and the Pacific region in terms of metal reserves, most notably for nickel, a key component in the clean energy transition used in the batteries of electric vehicles and wind turbines. In 2022, the Philippines produced an estimated 360,000 metric tons of contained nickel, equivalent to 11 per cent of the global production, placing the country second after Indonesia.

Region 13, also known as CARAGA in the northeastern part of Mindanao, is known for its rich mineral resources such as nickel, gold and chromium. In 2023, the Mines and Geosciences Bureau (MGB)

reported 17 nickel mines in the region and 25,597 jobs generated in the mining industry overall.

Nickel mines in the CARAGA region are predominantly nickel laterite surface mines involving open-pit excavation of near-surface, posing occupational safety and health risks due to dust and heavy metals, landslides and flash floods. Musculoskeletal injuries from manual labour and risks of traffic accidents are also common. Work in the mines is mostly seasonal as the heavy rainfall and typhoons that occur during the monsoon season, typically from June to October make open-pit mining difficult. Most workers are unorganized and face challenges in exercising their right to freedom of association. Terms of employment, remuneration, and social protection mechanisms fall short of acceptable standards. Women, increasingly engaged as truck drivers and equipment operators, experience additional risks of violence and harassment.

Government regulation is divided between the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR), which oversees sustainable mining through its Mines and Geosciences Bureau (MGB), and the Department of Labor and Employment (DOLE), which enforces general labour and OSH standards. The Philippines OSH law requires the development and regular updating of company OSH policies to address workplace hazards and risks, as well as the establishment of a bipartite OSH committee composed of both management and workers' representatives to ensure that the development, implementation and monitoring of the OSH policy is inclusive.

What did the project do

Raising awareness of labour rights among regular seasonal mining workers is a challenge, due to their remoteness, as well as the precariousness and seasonality of employment. Indeed, **regular seasonal workers typically work only eight to nine months a year**. Recognizing the seasonal nature of the work, the project thus supported FFW in conducting capacity-building activities at the end of the off-season (in November 2023), before workers resumed their duties. These sessions focused on orienting them on general labour and occupational safety and health standards, as well as gender equality, with the aim of empowering them to take informed action to improve their working conditions.

One of the mine sites that participated in FFW's activities is Hinatuan Mining Corporation (HMC), a

subsidiary of Nickel Asia Corporation (NAC), which operates in Tagana-an, Surigao del Norte, in the Caraga region. Among the participants was Anilou Gorgod ("Ani"), a 44-year-old regular seasonal worker who has been with HMC since 2021. She works as a hauler truck driver, transporting minerals from the mine site to waiting barges. According to Ani, the series of FFW awareness-raising activities, equipped her and her colleagues to advocate for better working conditions and ensure their voices are heard.

Motivated by the training and guided by FFW's mandate, Ani and her colleagues swiftly organized their **own union of regular seasonal workers, bringing together 150 members, 14 women and 136 men**. In February 2024, the newly established Hinatuan Organized Regular Seasonal Employees Union-Federation of Free Workers (HORSEU-FFW) formally ratified its constitution and by-laws and submitted its application for registration to the Department of Labor and Employment.

Ani successfully secured the unanimous support of her fellow workers to serve as President of the newly formed union. In a sector and context where trade unions have traditionally been dominated by men, her leadership represents a welcome shift. Her constructive approach has earned the confidence of management, while her leadership inspires fellow workers to advocate for their rights and work toward a better future.

"My colleagues and I gained the courage to convey to management our requests for higher wages and proper benefits. They included the regular seasonal workers in their activities, which previously only regular employees participated in. Before, when we had complaints, they wouldn't face us, but now they greet us with a smile."

— Ms Anilou Gorgod, President, HORSEU-FFW

Impact

HORSEU-FFW was officially recognized as the Sole and Exclusive Bargaining Agent (SEBA) for the company's regular seasonal workers. This recognition empowered them to negotiate a collective bargaining agreement with management, culminating in **May 2024 with the adoption of the first agreement in the mining industry specifically covering regular seasonal workers**.

Among HORSEU FFW's key achievements are several measures to strengthen occupational safety and

health, including:

- **Union representation in the company's OSH committee and development of an OSH policy** that addresses physical and psychosocial risks, as well as emerging issues affecting workers, such as the impact of climate change on their safety and health.
- **Provision of free occupational health services** for regular seasonal workers, including medical checkups, laboratory tests, and access to medicines.
- **Training for all OSH committee members**, along with ongoing OSH training for workers.
- **Formation of a Committee on Decorum and Investigation (CODI)** to proactively prevent gender-based violence and harassment and investigate any reported cases, in line with the needs and demands of women workers and leaders.

Ani guided the union through all these developments, overcoming challenges such as meeting registration requirements and balancing her regular work with her union responsibilities. Ani's leadership exemplifies how women workers can drive positive change in the mining sector. By serving both as a hauler truck driver and as union president, she challenges traditional gender roles and promotes gender equality in a male-dominated industry. Her example demonstrates how trade unions can play a critical role in advancing equality, as well as safer and healthier workplaces.

"Starting a union is difficult due to numerous regulatory hurdles, employer resistance, and challenges to our unity and resilience as workers. We have overcome all of these obstacles, particularly in concluding the negotiations and signing the collective bargaining agreement. (quote translated from Filipino)"

— - Anilou Gorgod, President, HORSEU, FFW

About the Federation of Free Workers (FFW)

The Federation of Free Workers (FFW), an affiliate of the International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC), is a national trade union centre in the Philippines with around 40,000 members. As an implementing partner of the ILO project, FFW conducted awareness raising and capacity building for regular seasonal workers in large-scale mining in Surigao del Norte, advocating for improved compliance with labour standards, including on OSH and labour standards specific for women workers, eventually leading to the formation and registration of an affiliate union dedicated to the representation of regular seasonal workers in the mining sector.



Fishers prepare to unload their catch at the General Santos City fishport © ILO

Empowering grassroots workers' associations to drive safety and health improvements in the fishing industry

Summary of the practice

Fisher and canning workers in the tuna value chain endure harsh working conditions in isolated locations with limited access to essential services. To address this, the project partnered with SENTRO and its grassroots affiliate, Fishworkers' Solidarity (FS-SENTRO), to promote occupational safety and health in the informal fishing sector by **empowering workers to become agents of change within their communities**.

Through capacity building activities, 35 community members (16 women and 19 men) were certified as Safety Officers and 28 members (18 women and 10 men) were trained in basic first aid in the fishing community of General Santos City. These trainees then **organized regular community coastal clean-ups** and initiated **other local OSH improvements at no or low cost**.

These community-based actions not only improved safety and health of workers but also created a foundation for expanded membership, stronger representation, and improved access to social

protection and services. By the end of the project, FS-SENTRO had established or strengthened **20 fishing community chapters of informal handline fishers** and eight associations of commercial fishers and canning workers, with a total of **1,533 members**.

What needed changing

General Santos City, located in Region 12 (SOCCSKSARGEN), is considered the tuna capital of the Philippines, relying heavily on exports of fresh, frozen and canned tuna to Europe, the United States, Japan and other parts of Asia. Its fishing industry employs over 200,000 individuals and significantly contributes to the economy. However, fishers and other workers across the tuna value chain experience harsh working conditions. Fishers interviewed part of a project study reported hazards on board vessels such as extreme weather, noise, poor ventilation, and wet floor causing slips. Workers also reported that they had not received any occupational safety and health training or other preventive measures before embarking. During long periods at sea, they lack access to essential services, while women who

remain in the community must also shoulder additional household and caregiving responsibilities.

These gaps underscored the need for inclusive, bottom-up interventions that empower workers to strengthen safety and health practices within their own communities and workplaces.

What did the project do

First, the project worked with SENTRO, through its federation FS-SENTRO, and DOLE to customize and deliver the mandatory Basic Occupational Safety and Health (BOSH) training programme for MSMEs by integrating ILO's Participatory Action Oriented Training (PAOT) methodology. This approach included checklists and templates to help fishers, canning workers and their community adapt good practices to their local realities. Resource persons from DOLE and local private OSH practitioners with experience in the fishing industry contributed to the learning process and the local government's OSH compliance unit was also invited to deliver sessions on occupational health. Participants gained certificates that boosted their confidence and motivated them to act within their communities. By the end of the project, FS-SENTRO had established a core group of 35 (16 women, 19 men) members trained as Safety Officers, and 28 (18 women, 10 men) trainers on Basic First Aid.

"Experiences from the trainings continue to be applied by members in communities, factories and vessels. Fisherfolks have learned how to install and operate signal lights on their vessels at sea. Because of their knowledge on safety and health at sea, fishers now claim their life jackets from the Bureau of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources."

— Sabina Orozco, President, Fishworkers' Solidarity, FS-SENTRO



Women workers in tuna canning and family members of fishers are trained during a Basic First Aid Training conducted in collaboration between FS SENTRO and the OSH Compliance Unit of General Santos City. © ILO Herbert Demos

This core group of FS-SENTRO members mobilized their communities to undertake regular coastal clean-ups given that shorelines served as docking and maintenance areas for small-scale vessels. **Clean-ups mitigated safety and health risks posed by congested, trash-filled informal settlements. They also addressed environmental hazards and enhanced fishers' productivity by improving vessel repair areas.**



Members of Fishworkers' Solidarity - SENTRO conducting clean-ups along coastal areas which serve as docking and vessel maintenance areas. © ILO Herbert Demos

Additionally, FS-SENTRO established partnerships with local government units such as the OSH compliance unit. These collaborations facilitated access to **registration in the national health insurance system (PhilHealth)**, and subsequent access to a range of **free medical services** available under the Universal Health Coverage Law, including **annual health check-ups** (needed for employment), **vaccinations**, and **medications**.

These actions were shared with tripartite partners, including the Fishing Industry Tripartite Council (ITC), allowing FS-SENTRO to gain recognition within the industry and further promote community-based OSH actions. Importantly, **FS-SENTRO also pursued formal registration of their associations** to secure their right to organize and access further institutional support.

Impact

Workers began reporting occupational incidents, overcoming fears of retaliation and demonstrating a stronger understanding of occupational safety and health. In turn, **FS-SENTRO submitted OSH incident reports to the Department of Labor and Employment** strengthening accountability mechanisms.

Women played a pivotal role in education and organizing efforts, sharing knowledge gained from trainings with their partners, many of whom were frequently away at sea. Their active engagement amplified their voices in union decision-making and

fostered more inclusive spaces within a traditionally men-dominated sector.

Overall, OSH served as a strategic entry point for organizing workers, enabling **FS-SENTRO to register 28 new associations, reach more than 1,500 members**, and access **services** from DOLE and the Bureau of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources.

“One day, a fire broke out unexpectedly in our fishing community in General Santos City. It was devastating. But thanks to the emergency response knowledge we gained from the Safety Officer training under the project, we knew how to act. The control measures we had learned helped us minimize the damage and protect one another. We are grateful that we were able to recover and rebuild. It taught us the value of preparedness and unity. We learned many lessons, and today our community stands stronger and more resilient.”

— — **Evangeline Malit, FS-SENTRO community member**



Members of Fishworkers' Solidarity – SENTRO as they claim life jackets for their member fishers from the local government. © ILO Herbert Demos

About SENTRO

SENTRO (Sentro ng mga Nagkakaisa at Progresibong Manggagawa), or the Center of United and Progressive Workers, is a national trade union center in the Philippines. It represents around 80,000 workers across the private, public, and informal sectors, including women, youth, and migrant workers. SENTRO is affiliated with the International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC) and the International Union of Food, Agricultural, Hotel, Restaurant, Catering, Tobacco and Allied Workers' Associations (IUF). Its mission is to advance workers' rights, promote decent work, and strengthen democratic trade unionism in the country.

Testimony - Saving a life at sea thanks to my partner's project training

“My partner was trained in First Aid, and she shared with me the knowledge and skills she learned for my own safety and awareness. I never imagined that one day, I would have to use it to save a life. One day at sea, an older crew member collapsed, struggling to breathe and clutching his chest. Everyone panicked, but I remembered the CPR and first aid training my partner had taught me. I quickly cleared his airway, checked for a pulse, and started chest compressions. Time felt slow, but I stayed focused. After a while, his breathing stabilized, and he regained color. The relief I felt was incredible. That moment showed me how important first aid skills are for fishworkers, especially since we work far from hospitals. I am grateful for this training, and I hope more fishworkers learn these life-saving skills. It truly makes a difference.”

– **Jolan Ibanez**, member of the Mandaragat Bula Fisherfolks Association and part of a tuna handline fishing crew.





Women in a packing house in a small grower farm wash the bananas before packing and shipping abroad. © ILO Joser Dumbrique

Union drives safety and health improvements in small-scale mining and banana sectors

Summary of the good practice

Workers in MSMEs are often not affiliated to trade unions, lack adequate labour protection as well as access to government services. To address these gaps, the project partnered with the Associated Labor Union – Trade Union Congress of the Philippines (ALU-TUCP or ALU) to strengthen worker representation and advance OSH in the small-scale mining and banana sectors.

In the banana sector, ALU **leveraged tripartite social dialogue to engage small growers**, leading to tangible improvements in OSH practices, the establishment of functional OSH committees, and the **regularization of workers' employment status**. In small-scale mining, ALU worked closely with miners' associations to provide targeted training, support labour inspections, and **advocate for the formalization of employment arrangements**.

These initiatives not only improved compliance with labour laws and fostered a stronger culture of prevention in occupational safety and health but also demonstrated the effectiveness of union-led action

and social dialogue in driving sustainable change.

What needed changing

Banana workers are often exposed to hazardous chemicals without proper protection, while miners, especially in informal small-scale operations face high risks of accidents and diseases including those due to toxic substances. Women workers are particularly vulnerable to gender-specific risks such as violence and harassment. The project sought to address these gaps by creating mechanisms for gender responsive workers' representation, improving compliance, and fostering inclusive social dialogue.

With project support, ALU led innovative and context-sensitive practices to reach informal and other vulnerable workers in banana plantations and small-scale mines. This required both technical and political strategies, as these workplaces were traditionally excluded from labour inspection and social protection programmes offered by the government.

The process followed through project support

In the banana industry, ALU recognized that its traditional union organizing strategies, effective in large corporate plantations, would not be suitable for small grower farms. Workers in these farms were often employed under precarious arrangements and feared retaliation if unions approached them directly.

To address this challenge, ALU leveraged its representation in the Banana Industry Tripartite Council (BITC), a tripartite body composed of government, workers', and employers' representatives that promotes industrial peace, productivity, and competitiveness in the banana industry. Through this platform, ALU elevated the concerns of small growers as a sector-wide issue. This strategy strengthened its legitimacy and drew the engagement of key stakeholders, including the Department of Labor and Employment (DOLE), employers' groups such as the Philippine Banana Exporters and Growers Association (PBGEA), and local government units. Together, they conducted Tripartite Technical Advisory Visits (TAVs) in selected workplaces, where both workers and employers were oriented on labour standards and occupational safety and health requirements.

At the same time, ALU relied on its strong community presence and worked with local government units and the Department of Agrarian Reform (DAR) to identify small growers. **Establishing a reliable list of these farms was a critical first step, enabling targeted outreach and engagement.**

ALU subsequently organized OSH training for representatives of both employers and workers from small grower farms. In partnership with DOLE, it integrated the Participatory Action-Oriented Training methodology into the government-mandated Safety Officer training. This approach simplified risk assessment and the development of workplace OSH programmes, while helping targeted small banana growers comply with the legal requirement to designate trained safety officers among their personnel.

ALU carried out regular follow-up visits to ensure that bipartite OSH committees were functioning effectively, a practice that has continued beyond the project period. When dialogue and mediation failed to resolve disputes, **ALU also supported workers in filing complaints with DOLE, leading to legal victories, including cases of regularization.**

In small-scale mining, ALU leveraged its experience with large-scale mines and extended technical

support to small miners' associations, particularly the Malaya Small Scale Miners Association (MSSMA). ALU organized OSH and general labour standards training sessions, supported dialogues between miners and DOLE, and helped secure **inclusion of small-scale mining as a priority in DOLE's 2024 Strategic Compliance Plan.** This facilitated the **first-ever DOLE inspections and advisory visits to small-scale mining operations in Camarines Norte.** Beyond training, **ALU's greatest innovation was to use its political leverage through its federation, the Trade Union Congress of the Philippines (TUCP), to advance reforms at the national level.** Working with MSSMA and the National Coalition of Small Scale Miners, ALU co-drafted amendments to the Small Scale Mining Act (House Bill 6408), addressing systemic issues such as the restrictive definition of small-scale mining, short contract validity, lack of access to finance, fragmented OSH standards between DOLE and Department of Environment and Natural Resources-Mines and Geosciences Bureau (DENR-MGB), and weak capacity of local government units. These reforms, once passed, would transform the regulatory framework and allow informal miners to transition into safer, formalized operations.

A cross-cutting value was **ALU's focus on gender equality.** Women workers were engaged in OSH training, leadership roles, and in shaping policy proposals. A number of strategic initiatives were supported by ALU in this regard. This includes establishment of **ALU Southern Mindanao Women's Committee with officers from the banana industry**, as well as the drafting of House Bill 11488 to expand the scope of the Safe Spaces Act to include other forms of gender-based violence and harassment in both formal and informal sectors, providing for firmer penalties, and expanding employer's role to prevent and address such cases.

Impact

The impact of the project was felt at multiple levels, community, sectoral, and national.

In the **banana industry**:

- ALU's work directly benefited **915 workers (659 men and 256 women)** across small grower farms. Workers reported tangible OSH improvements, including clean water supply, better sanitation facilities, availability of first aid kits, shade structures, and clearer OSH signage.

- The establishment of **bipartite OSH committees** and the integration of workers into workplace decision-making marked a significant step forward for labour relations in the sector.
- The **legal victory ordering the regularization of 81 workers after years of subcontracted employment** created a precedent for other cases and demonstrated the effectiveness of unions in using OSH as an entry point to address broader labour rights issues.

These successes were recognized at the national level when DOLE cited the tripartite TAV model as a best practice during the 2024 Labour Inspection Summit, positioning it as a replicable model for other agricultural sectors.

In the **small-scale mining** sector:

- Over **310 miners and 525 households of MSSMA** directly benefited from OSH training, social protection programmes and inspections.
- With small-scale mining prioritized in Camarines Norte's Strategic Compliance Plan, nearly 2,000 miners in the province gained indirect benefits, including access to **DOLE's US\$ 30,000 social protection** package that helped the associations during the off-mining season.
- For the first time, **financiers, traders, and tunnel owners were brought into the Industry Tripartite Council**, broadening accountability within the value chain.
- MSSMA leaders independently updated their OSH programmes, demonstrating sustainability and ownership of new practices.
- At the national level, the filing of legal amendments (HB 6408) laid the groundwork for comprehensive legal reforms that could benefit an estimated 300,000–500,000 workers in small-scale mining across the Philippines.

Overall, the intervention demonstrated that bridging formal and informal workers' organizations is not only possible but effective in addressing both workplace-level and systemic issues. By leveraging social dialogue, legal mechanisms, and tripartite structures, the project created lasting institutional changes while ensuring that the voices of the most vulnerable workers were heard and acted upon.

"Through Project-supported tripartite engagement, ALU was able to put more action to the Union's advocacy for improved OSH conditions for workers in banana plantations, including in small grower banana farms. The same tripartite engagements enabled ALU to push for representation in the Banana Industry Tripartite Council in Region XI. Also, Project-supported consultations and advocacies enabled ALU to reach and work with small scale miners organizations towards the filing of a proposed legislative measure that should make way for labour standards, including OSH in small scale mining communities."

— Ms Shirley Yorong, ALU TUCP Vice President



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