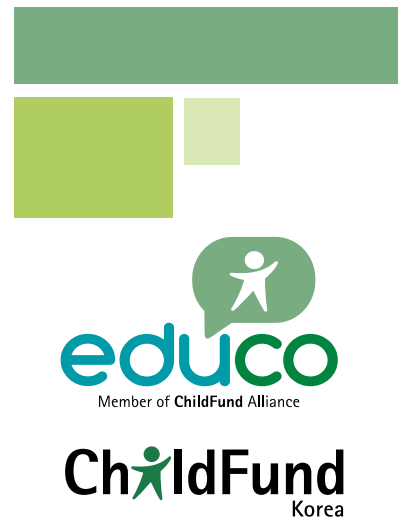
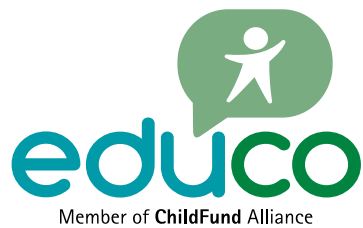




Child Labour in Bangladesh

Looking back and the way forward





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Preface

Child labour is legally prohibited in Bangladesh yet there are approximately 3.45 million working children in Bangladesh; of which, 1.28 million are engaged in hazardous work as per BBS Survey, 2013. Although Bangladesh government as well as national and international NGOs has taken various initiatives to prevent and eliminate child labour, child labour is a serious concern for Bangladesh. The Government of Bangladesh and NGOs have tried out a good number of strategies and interventions to tackle child labour, especially hazardous forms of child labour in the country. However, it seems that many of these strategies and interventions could not produce expected results. As a result, child labour in general and hazardous child labour in particular has not been reduced in an expected manner.

At the backdrop of the above reality, with the support from ChildFund Korea, Educo Bangladesh has initiated a research to assess the effectiveness of the strategies/interventions applied by the Government and other stakeholders to tackle child labour. The research also aimed at identifying some of the hazardous child labour sectors that are often unattended. The research revealed the major interventions made by the Government and NGOs, what worked and what did not work and why, what are the major challenges to tackle child labour and what need to be done to prevent and eliminate child labour in the context of Bangladesh. It also revealed some sectors in which a large number of children are engaged and exposed to severe abuse and exploitations. I hope, the report will contribute to develop appropriate interventions by the government and other relevant stakeholders to address child labour.

At this point, I would like to express our gratitude towards ChildFund Korea for their technical and financial support to ODHIKAR project. Thanks to DCN research team for their effort to conduct this study. Last but not the least, we are thankful to Afzal Kabir Khan, Manager- ODHIKAR & Child Labor for coordinating the study and to our Head Office colleagues for providing support in finalization of the report.

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Abbreviations and acronyms

DCLWC	Divisional Child Labour Welfare Council
DCRMC	District Child Rights Monitoring Committee
DIFE	Directorate of Inspection of Factories and Establishment
DCN	Development Communication Network
DNFE	Directorate of Non-Formal Education
Educo	Education and Development Foundation
EFA	Education for All
FGD	Focus Group Discussion
GoB	Government of Bangladesh
IDI	In-depth Individual Interview
ILO	International Labour Organization
KII	Key Informant Interview
MoLE	Ministry of labour and Employment
NCLEP	National Child Labour Elimination Policy
NCLWC	National Child Labour Welfare Council
NFE	Non-Formal Education
NGO	Non-government Organization
NPA	National Plan of Action
ODHIKAR	
PRSP	Poverty Reduction Strategy paper
SDT	Skill Development Training
UCLMC	Upazila Child Labor Monitoring Committee
UN	United Nations
UNCRC	United Nations Convention on the Right of the Children
WFP	World Food Program

Introduction and background



Introduction

Bangladesh has ratified the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) in 1989 and ILO Convention No. 182 concerning Worst Forms of Child Labour in 2001. Through the ratification of these two important international child right instruments, Bangladesh as a country demonstrated its commitment at international and national level towards realizing the rights of all children in the country.

Article 32 of the UNCRC calls upon the States Parties to recognize the right of the child to be protected from economic exploitation and from performing any work that is 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.

Article 7 of the ILO Convention No. 182 calls upon each Member State to take effective and time-bound measures to prevent and eliminate the worst forms of child labour as matter of urgency.

After three decades of ratification of the UNCRC and two decades of ratification of the ILO Convention No. 182, child labour still remains quite visible in Bangladesh. According to the last national child labour survey conducted by the Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics in 2013, there were approximately 3.45 million working children in the country, of which 2.10 million were considered as child labourers and among them 1.28 million were found in hazardous work.

Background of the Study



Over the years the Government of Bangladesh (GoB) as well as national and international NGOs and UN agencies have taken various steps in terms of policy formulation and implementation of projects and programs to prevent and eliminate child labour, especially hazardous forms of child labour. The GoB has ratified ILO Convention No. 182 and enacted laws and regulations related to child labour.

The GoB has also established institutional mechanisms for the enforcement of laws and regulations on child labour. In addition, the GoB and national and international child rights NGOs and UN agencies applied a good number of strategies to prevent and eliminate child labour. However, it seems that many of these strategies did not work or partly worked to address the child labour problem in the country. Therefore, it is important to review the major interventions made by the GoB and NGOs to determine what worked and what did not work and why.

Under the above-mentioned backdrop, Educo as a leading international NGO having special focus on child labour intended to undertake a study titled “Child Labour in Bangladesh: Looking Back and Way Forward”. The findings of this study would enable Educo to design its upcoming child labour related interventions in an effective and efficient manner. In addition, it would also enable other national and international NGOs dealing with child labour as well as the GoB to formulate appropriate projects and programs to address child labor problem in Bangladesh.

Objectives and methodology



Specific objectives of the study

The specific objectives of the study were:

- To identify the major interventions so far made by the GoB and NGOs to tackle child labour in Bangladesh;
- To identify what strategies/activities worked and what did not work in addressing child labour problems;
- To identify major challenges to tackle child labour in the context of Bangladesh;
- To identify the most hazardous child labour sectors in selected geographic locations,
- To determine a set of recommendations for appropriate interventions required.

Study location

The study was conducted in **Dhaka City, Sathkhira and Cox's Bazar districts**. In Dhaka City, respondents were selected from 15 Thanas covering both Dhaka South and Dhaka North City Corporations. In Cox's Bazar, respondents were selected from Cox'bazar Sadar Thana and in Satkhira, respondents were selected from Shyamnagar Thana.

Methodology

Secondary documents review

The study team rigorously reviewed a good number of available secondary documents to get a better understanding about the overall child labour situation in Bangladesh, previous and current interventions and strategies to deal with child labour problems, existing laws and policies and its enforcement status etc.

Primary data collection

Primary data was collected using both quantitative and qualitative approaches. Quantitative data was obtained from the working children engaged in transport sector, domestic work, informal manufacturing industries, shrimp fry collection, brick kiln and dry fish sector through face-to-face survey using a semi- structured questionnaire.

Qualitative data was collected from a range of relevant stakeholders through Focus Group Discussion (FGD), Key Informant Interviews (KII), In-depth Interviews (IDI) and Case Studies.



Findings



Major interventions so far made by the GoB and NGOs to tackle child labour in Bangladesh

The GoB has made major commitments regarding child labour during the last two and half decades in the areas of law and policy making, initiating survey/researches/studies, ratification of ILO Convention and implementing programs and projects. In addition to the efforts of the GoB, other key civil society actors have implemented good number of interventions to address child labour problem. Summary of the major interventions made by the various duty bearers and stakeholders are furnished below.

Ratification of ILO Convention No. 182:

On 12 March 2001, the GoB ratified the ILO Convention No. 182 concerning the prohibition and immediate action for the elimination of the worst forms of child labour, which comprises all forms of slavery /practices similar to slavery, such as the sale and trafficking of children, debt bondage and forced or compulsory labour, the use, procuring or offering of a child for prostitution, for the production of pornography or for pornographic performances, work which, by its nature or the circumstances in which it is carried out, is likely to harm the health, safety or morals of children.



Formulation of laws and policies:

After ratification of the ILO C 182, the GoB enacted/ amended child labour related laws and policies over the last two decades in order to make the national legislation consistent with the international child rights instruments, including ILO C 182. The major laws/policies enacted/amended by the GoB are as follows:

The Labour Act: The Labour Act was enacted in 2006 to ensure protection and welfare of the labour force, including child labourer in the country. This act was amended in 2013 and 2018 in order to make it much more appropriate with the present time scenario. Chapter 3 of the Labour Act deals with the child labour related issues. The Labour Act 2006 prohibits employment for “**children**” below the age of 14 years and hazardous work for “**adolescent**” below the age of 18 years. This law allows children between 14–18 years for light work with health certificate from the appropriate authority. The Labour Act also prohibits hazardous work for adolescents and asked the Government to produce list of hazardous work for adolescents time to time.

The Children Act 2013: The Children Act 2013 was enacted repealing the Children Act 1974. Some of the special features of the new Children Act includes diversion of children in conflict with the law, ensuring alternative care, setting up minimum standard of care, establishing child friendly desk at police stations, formation of Children’s Board at National, District and Upazilla level, identifying duties and responsibilities of the Probation Officers, expediting case management process etc. Section 4 of the Children Act defined child as anyone up to the age of 18 years.

National Plan of Actions for Children (NPA): Following the ratification of the UNCRC in 1990, the GoB adopted the National Children Policy and formulated the first National Plan of Action (NPA) for Children (1991-1996). However, the child labour problem was only identified in the second NPA for Children (1997-2002) for the first time under the heading of “Children in need of special protection”. Although child labour has been recognized in this NPA, it was still not addressed as a specific issue.

The Third National Plan of Action for Children (2004-09) clearly spelt out the government commitment, policies and actions towards acknowledging the position of children in society, ensuring their welfare and rights, and creating an enabling environment for blossoming to their full potential. The document adequately addressed the issue of worst forms of child labour and highlighted the planned interventions for the next five-year period.



The NPA for child labor was formulated to implement the NCLEP 2010. As the NPA was not implemented up to the expected level, therefore, target set in the NCLEP was not achieved”

The National Child Labour Elimination Policy (NCLEP): The NCLEP was adopted in April 2010 to prevent and eliminate child labour, especially hazardous forms of child labour. The NCLEP aimed at withdrawing working children from different forms of occupations, including the hazardous work and the worst forms of child labour, involving parents of working children in income generating activities with a view of getting children out of the vicious cycle of poverty, offering stipends and grants in order to bring the working children back to school, extending

special attention for the children affected by various natural disasters, providing special emphasis for ethnic minority and children with disabilities to bring them back to congenial environment, enacting pragmatic laws and strengthening institutional capacity for the enforcement of the laws and planning and implementing short, medium and long term strategies and programs to eliminate various forms of child labour by 2015.

National Plan of Action (NPA) on Child Labour: The NPA on child labour was formulated to implement the NCLEP 2010. The NPA has focused on nine strategic areas of interventions highlighted in the National Policy on the Elimination of Child Labour, 2010. It has suggested 65 specific interventions corresponding to 23 key outputs under these strategic areas. Nine strategic areas of the NPA included: Policy Implementation and Institutional Development; Education; Health and Nutrition; Social Awareness Raising and Motivation; Legislation and Enforcement; Employment and Labour Market; Prevention of Child Labour and Safety of Children Engaged in Labour; Social and Family Reintegration; and Research and Training.

The list of hazardous work for children: The list of hazardous work for children was determined in March 2013. A total of 38 sectors were included in the list. However, many potential hazardous sectors, including child labour in domestic work were not incorporated in this list.

*National Plan of Action on Child Labor
*The National Child Labour Elimination Policy

“The DWPWP* kept a provision to employ 12 years aged children for domestic work, which contradicts with the Labour Act 2006 and NCLEP*2010. According to the Labour Act and NCLEP, no child should be employed in any occupation before the age of 14 years”



The Domestic Workers Protection and Welfare Policy (DWPWP): The DWPWP was adopted in 2015 to protect the rights and welfare of a large number of child and adult domestic workers in the country. According to the policy, no child under the age of 14 years shall be employed for domestic work. However, in especial cases, children 12 years of age can be employed provided the work is not harmful for the child or it will not prevent him/her from getting education.

Establishing institutional mechanism: The government has established institutional mechanisms for the enforcement of law, policies and regulations on child labour. Child Labour Welfare Council was established at central, division, district and upazilla level. The National Child Labour Welfare Council (NCLWC) is responsible for preparing analytical review of the situation of child labour in the country, advising the Government on necessary actions to be taken for successfully implementing the National Policy on the Elimination of Child Labour and its National Plan of Action, conducting hearings and investigations and suggest remedies on adverse situations related to child labour and ensuring effective coordination between different agencies, both government and civil society organisations, and ensure that their activities are aligned with the objectives of elimination of child labour.

The Divisional Council is responsible for coordinating, facilitating and monitoring the implementation of NPA at divisional level and suggesting the District Child Rights Monitoring Committee (DCRMC) for necessary action to implement the monitoring system in the district.

District Child Rights Monitoring Committee is responsible for coordinating, facilitating and monitoring the implementation of NPA at district level, establishing Upazila Child Labour Monitoring Committee (UCLMC), reporting to DCLWC on the information of child labour data collection and tracking systems for use in developing new policies,

*The Domestic Workers Protection and Welfare Policy (DWPWP)

*The National Child Labour Elimination Policy



programmes, strategies and budget allocation on child labour, and conducting periodic surveys to understand the impacts of NPA activities on child labour in the district; prepare updated assessment reports and submit to DCLWC.

Upazila Child Labour Monitoring Committee is responsible to monitor upazila level activities, ensure the rights of children and take necessary actions against violations of child rights at the upazila level.

The GoB also established an Inter-ministerial Coordination Committee for ensuring effective coordination among the responsible ministries to implement child labour related laws and policies at all level.

Mainstreaming child labour in national development plans:

The Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (PRSP) entitled “Unlocking the Potential: National Strategy for Accelerated Poverty Reduction” which was approved by the GoB in October 2005 gave emphasis on the importance of abolishing the worst forms of child labour. In the policy matrix of PRSP, a strategic goal was set to take immediate and effective measures to eliminate the worst forms of child labour as defined in the ILO Convention No. 182. Furthermore, the PRSP set a target to increase the knowledgebase on child labour and child rights issues.

After the PRSP era was over the GoB started preparing Five-Years Plan and almost all Five-Years Plan has given emphasis on the importance of abolishing hazardous child labour.

Enhancing the knowledgebase on child labour:

The GoB, national and international NGOs and UN agencies undertook a good number of researches/surveys/studies to understand the magnitude and various dimensions of child labour in the context of Bangladesh. During the period from 1995 to 2013, many nation-wide sample surveys, baseline surveys and research studies were conducted primarily, with an aim to i) uncover the magnitude of the problem, ii) understand qualitative features of the child labour situation, and iii) to identify the nature and sectors of hazardous child labour in Bangladesh. Therefore, the situation regarding child labour, in particular its hazardous forms, in Bangladesh has been understood more clearly.

Efforts in combating child labour through education

Enrolment of the children in school at an early age has proven to be an effective tool to prevent child labour. Aware of the immense challenge of education and the crucial role it plays in the development of the country and the combat against child labour, many efforts have been undertaken by the GoB to address the deficits in the country's education system. Some of those efforts can be listed as follows:

- The GOB committed itself to make efforts towards Universal Primary Education. In 1990, Bangladesh passed a compulsory Primary Education Act;
- Following the World Conference on "Education For All" in 1990, the GOB prepared its first EFA National Plan of Action (1991-2000). The NPA was prepared towards realizing the enhanced access to primary education and reduced adult illiteracy.
- In line with these GoB policies, the Primary and Mass Education Division was set up in 1992 to ensure compulsory primary education for all children aged 6 years and above.
- In 1993, the government, in collaboration with the World Food Programme (WFP), started "Food for Education" programme in many areas of the country that attracted poor children and their families to primary education.
- The GoB launched a special education programme in October 1997 for the urban working children of Bangladesh. Under this programme, arrangements were made to conduct two years basic literacy courses for 346,500 urban working children through 11,550 centres in six Divisional Headquarters including Dhaka.
- Both National Plans of Action (I and II) provided the strategic framework for education in Bangladesh. The implementation of this framework was devolved to the Compulsory Primary Education Programme, Food for Education Programme, Stipend Programme and the Primary Education Development Programmes (PEDP I and II).
- In 2005, the GoB adopted a policy called "Non Formal Education (NFE) Policy Framework" to bring all NFE stakeholders under a single umbrella to ensure uniformity in providing NFE services. In line with this framework, the GoB created a new institution named "Bureau of Non Formal Education (BNFE)" in 2005.
- Finally, the GoB formulated the National Education Policy in 2010 with a goal to bring all socially and economically disadvantaged children, including street children under the education service.



Direct assistance to combat child labour:

Direct action by the Government: In 2000, with the funding from USAID, the Ministry of Labour and Employment (MoLE) launched a pilot project titled “Eradication of Hazardous Child Labour in Bangladesh”. This 4-year project was aimed at preventing and eliminating hazardous child labour in a number of sectors in Dhaka and Chittagong. The second phase started in July 2005, was entirely funded by the GoB and covered children engaged in various hazardous sectors in urban settings. It also aimed at providing a package of interventions ranging from NFE to family economic empowerment to the target children and their families in Barisal, Chittagong, Dhaka, Khulna, Rajshahi and Sylhet metropolitan cities as well as in Keraniganj, Tongi, Narayanganj and Bogra industrial areas. The third and fourth phase of the project was also funded by the GoB aimed at withdrawing 1,00,000 working children from hazardous work covering six divisional cities through providing NFE, SDT and financial support to the families of working children.

The BGMEA Project: A joint response from employers and the Government:

In 1995, the GoB endorsed a joint BGMEA, ILO and UNICEF Child Labour Project to remove child labourers below the age of 14 from export-oriented garment factories, and provided the support of its Labour Inspectors for the monitoring process. In order to sustain its achievements and to provide for a smooth transfer of monitoring responsibilities, a second MOU was signed in 2000 between the ILO, UNICEF and the BGMEA. Under the second phase of this joint project a large number of children previously removed from the garment factories received vocational skills training, and their guardians became eligible for micro credit support for income generating activities. The BGMEA joint project also developed a comprehensive workplace monitoring system.



Direct actions by NGOs, trade unions and employers’ organizations

Withdrawing children from hazardous work was found extremely difficult and, thus a comprehensive strategy was used to create the ‘favourable environment’ through variety of interventions. With the technical and financial support from the development partners, a good number of national and international NGOs, UN agencies, trade unions and employers’ organizations carried out number of activities to combat child labour in Bangladesh. These are as follows:

Advocacy and mass awareness raising: Numerous efforts were made by the NGOs, Workers’ and Employers’ organizations to create awareness among the policy makers and various segments of the society at large on the causes and consequences of child labour as well as role of the different stakeholders to combat child labour. On the other hand, advocacy with the policy makers and duty bearers at local and national level were also carried out through sharing study findings, organizing workshops and seminars etc. to formulate appropriate laws and policies and its proper implementation.



“Despite conducting a good number of researches and studies by Bangladesh government and NGOs, there is a lack of updated data on child labour, especially geographic location and sector-specific data is not available”

Social/community mobilization for attitudinal change:

A wide spectrum of social/community mobilization activities were carried out by various entities to raise the awareness on child labour issues as well as to create a favourable environment for effective implementation of various interventions.

Development of training material and conducting training:

A good number of training materials were developed and series of trainings were imparted on child labour for government officials, representatives of the local government institutions, journalists, NGO workers, working children and their parents and employers, community leaders, teachers, religious leaders etc. in order to develop their understanding regarding the causes and consequences of child labour and their role to prevent and eliminate child labour.

Strengthening the institutional capacity of the MoLE:

Series of activities were carried out by the NGOs to develop the institutional capacity of the MoLE to catalyse, co-ordinate, and monitor programmes to combat child labour.

Conducting assessments/researches: NGOs and other implementing agencies conducted various qualitative and quantitative researches/assessments of the child labour situation in the country and disseminated findings through organizing seminars at local and national level.

Providing Non-Formal Education (NFE):

One of the common strategies for combating child labour followed by the NGOs and GoB was to provide NFE to the working children followed by mainstreaming into formal education. Flexible in nature NFE could attract many working children and their parents as an alternative to formal schooling. Employers were also willing to release children for couple of hours to attend NFE class.

The main concept of NFE was to create an alternative education option for working children who either dropped out from school or never attended school and they are not able to adjust with the formal school system. It

was assumed that after graduating from NFE, relatively younger working children will be fully withdrawn from work and mainstreamed into formal education, which could prevent them from entering into work and who are relatively older will be able to gain basic literacy and numeracy skill, which would help them to develop their life skill capacity as well as gaining basic requirements to get enrolled into technical education.

Providing skill development training: Skill development training was also considered as one of the best solutions to withdraw children from hazardous work and place them into a decent job either through job placement or self-employment. Therefore, a good number of NGO and GoB projects took the initiative to provide skill development training on different trades.

Providing micro-credit support: A large number of poor and vulnerable families send their children to work to supplement family income. Therefore, many NGOs believed that providing micro-credit support to the family members of working children for generating alternative income opportunity could reduce the dependency of their children's income. Therefore, this was followed as one of the strategies to combat child labour with a view that once parents have alternative source of income, they will withdraw their children from work and send them to school.

Conditional cash transfer: Apart from the micro-credit support, a few NGOs introduced conditional cash transfer as a strategy to withdraw children from work. Under this cash transfer activity, a family having children in work was provided with a fixed amount of money per month with a condition that they will withdraw their children from work and send them to school.

Establishment of Community based Child Protection System: Establishing Community based Child Protection System was another almost common strategy for NGOs working for reducing child labour both in urban and rural setting. The idea behind formation of this system was to making the community responsible and accountable for the wellbeing of their children.

Workplace Improvement Program: This was another strategy that a few NGOs tried out, mostly in urban setting to protect children from hazardous working condition. As withdrawing children from hazardous work is often difficult and challenging, therefore this strategy was applied allowing children to work under non-hazardous working condition. This was applicable for children who are in legal work age (14 years and



above). Under this strategy, employers were encouraged to withdraw hazards from the workplace instead of withdrawing children through approving workplace situation.

Formation of child led organization: Promoting children's participation became a common strategy for child rights NGOs in Bangladesh since 1996 as an effect of Special UN General Assembly on children. Since then most of the national and international child rights NGOs have been advocating for children's participation at all levels. They have been also advocating with the Government policy makers to hear the voices of the children at the time of developing any national plan that directly affects the lives of children. As part of this initiative a good number of NGOs facilitated formation of child led organizations in which children themselves decide their role They were also provided/ given the opportunity to raise their views and opinions with the policy maker at all levels.

Strategies/activities worked and did not work in addressing child labour problems in Bangladesh

Through the ratification of ILO C 182, the GoB expressed its commitment at the international and national level in 2001 to prevent and eliminate child labour with special focus on hazardous child labour. However, according to the stakeholders of the civil society organizations, after almost two decades there was no significant efforts, except formulating few laws and policies by the government. As per the appeal made in the Convention, the GoB was expected to take effective and time-bound measures to prevent the engagement of children in the worst forms of child labour. According to the study findings, the current situation of child labour in the country reveals that the GoB failed to fulfill its commitment that was made 20 years back. More than four hundred thousands girl children are trapped into domestic labour and exposed to all forms of violence, abuse and exploitation. But the GoB is yet to consider this sector as hazardous work for children. This is one of the examples to analyse the level of commitment to identify children at special risk and taking account of the special situation of girl children.

As a follow up to the ratification of the ILO C 182, the GoB has enacted/formulated couple of laws and policies. However, according to the primary study findings, despite having adequate provisions in the



“Lack of enforcement of the existing laws and policies contributing to a great extent for the existence of child labour, especially hazardous forms of child labour in Bangladesh”



laws and policies, none of these laws and policies are implemented in full swing as of now. The NPA was formulated in 2012 to implement the NCLEP with a target to eliminate child labour by 2015. On one hand, this target was not achieved at all and on the other hand, it took almost five years to update/revise the NPA. As of October 2020, the draft revised version of the NPA was made available by MoLE. The list of hazardous work for children was determined in 2013 and was not reviewed and updated after seven years. Therefore, it can be said that formulating appropriate laws and policies as a strategy to combat child labour in Bangladesh could not produce expected results, except creating a legal base to prevent and eliminate child labour.

It was encouraging to observe that the GoB established an institutional mechanism for the enforcement of law, policies and regulations on child labour. However, this institutional mechanism did not function as per the Terms of Reference. If there was an effective National Child Labour Welfare Council (NCLWC) in place then NCLEP and NPA could have been implemented. It is evident that this Council could not produce any significant result, except organizing meetings.

Similar situation prevails at Division, District and Upazila level. It was found from the KIIs and IDIs with the members of the District Child Rights Monitoring Committee and Upazila Child Labour Welfare Committee that many of them do not even know that they have got a role at District and Upazila level to monitor child labour situation and taking necessary actions against the non-complying employers for employing under aged children for work, specially hazardous work. Therefore, this institutional mechanism for ensuring enforcement of laws and policies failed to contribute to combat child labour.

Mainstreaming child labour issue in the national development plans was found as a promising strategy to combat child labour. Because, child labour is a multi-sectoral problem and it cannot be dealt with single approach. Rather a comprehensive approach is required to address the root causes of child labour. However, it was found that except giving emphasis on preventing and eliminating child labour in the national development plans (Five-Year Plan) and setting up few objectives and goals, no significant efforts were made to convert the commitments into reality.

A large number of people in Bangladesh became aware of the negative consequences of child labour over the years. However, this awareness has yet to be translated into actions at personal and societal level.

Creating or enhancing knowledgebase on child labour through conducting survey, research, baseline was an effective strategy to understand the magnitude and dynamics of the problem. It enabled the government and other stakeholders to design and implement appropriate projects and programs. However, these are not systematic and there are gaps in the knowledgebase. For example, there is a strong lack of sector and geographic location wise gender disaggregated data on child labour. More importantly, there is no updated data on child labour.

It is widely accepted that ensuring education for all children is the single most solution to combat child labour in any country. The GoB also recognized this strategy and thus made efforts to combat child labour through education. However, according to the study respondents, it was not been possible to bring all children into school despite the country has a Compulsory Primary Education Act in place and the GoB enacted the Education Policy in 2010 in which emphasis was given to ensure education for all children, including children from vulnerable families and hard to reach area.

Advocacy and awareness raising initiative taken by the GoB, NGOs, Workers' and Employers' organizations was effective to a large extent. Because of the series of awareness raising campaigns, majority of the country's population became aware about child labour issues and many of them have been able to recognize child labour as a problem in the country. However, according to the primary findings, there is still far to go to change their attitude and practice in their personal life. Large number of people, including policy makers still believe that child labour is not bad for the children of poor families.

There were some limitations in implementing awareness raising activities. First of all, most of the awareness raising activities were carried out in urban and city areas. NGOs and Government failed to reach the sources of child labour. Secondly, most of the activities were in similar nature (Poster, sticker, TV Talk show etc.) and became monotonous and thus failed to attract the target audience. Thirdly, the lack of customized awareness raising activities for different audience considering their level of education, specific requirements and geographic locations. Another important limitation of the awareness raising campaign was disseminating different messages by different institutions, which has created confusions among the audiences.

Mobilizing community to create a favourable environment for effective implementation of various interventions was also effective to a great extent. Community members became sensitized regarding the consequences of child labour and their role to combat it. In many areas, community members made significant contribution, including material and financial support to prevent and eliminate child labour. However, majority of them did not change their attitude and start practicing in their personal life. One of the limitations of community mobilization was short duration of projects implemented by the NGOs. Most of the projects were phased out before getting the results of mobilizing the community. This has also created misunderstanding between NGOs and community leaders. Therefore, results derived from community mobilization could not be sustained for long period.

Developing capacity of the MoLE was one of the strategy/activity for many national and international NGOs and UN agencies. However, according to the findings, this strategy/activity could not bring expected result mainly for two reasons. First of all, in most cases, support was provided on adhoc basis without making the analysis of the actual requirements of MoLE. Secondly, frequent transfer of the government officials, including MoLE made serious obstacles to sustain the benefit of capacity development of the concerned officials. Many NGOs spent time and money for developing individual as well institutional capacity of MoLE, but after a certain period the person was transferred to a completely different ministry or department and all effort went in vain.

Conducting various qualitative and quantitative researches/assessments of the child labour situation in the country and disseminating findings through organizing seminars at local and national level was one of the strategies/activities of many NGOs as part of knowledge base development as well as evidence based advocacy. However, a few studies undertaken in early stages by various agencies were narrowly focused; lacked consistency as far as the sectors were concerned and thus, did not reflect the entire country situation. The main reason for the inadequacy and, in many sectors, complete absence of statistics and qualitative information on child labour, was the lack of an appropriate survey methodology, as well as clear concepts, definitions and classifications of the factors and variables relating to child labour. With the introduction of appropriate child labour survey methodologies by ILO-IPEC and other technical institutions, the studies carried out in the latter part gave a complete picture on the child labour situation in the country. The findings of these assessments/researches enabled NGOs and other entities to initiate joint advocacy with the government.

According to the findings derived from NGOs, NFE Teachers, working children, parents and employers, NFE partially worked to withdraw children from work. It worked mainly for younger 8-10 years of age) children who entered into labour market for few months or work as apprentices and did not acquire skills. These children have the flexible working hours and they work for few hour in a day. Besides, employers are more willing to release them for couple of hours as they do not have significant contribution in the work place and they get little amount of wage or even work without wage. It is also easy to get them mainstreamed into formal education as they are still young and are adjusting with the school environment. Parents also showed interest to send their younger children to school.





On the other hand, NFE did not work for children above the age of 10 years, working for 2-3 years, gained skill on a particular trade and getting a reasonable amount of wage. Children themselves, their parents and employers often create obstacles to send these age group children to NFE Centers. It is also difficult to get them mainstreamed because of their age and dropping out from school earlier.

Providing Skill Development Training (SDT) to withdraw children from hazardous work through placing them into a decent job after graduating also worked partially as a strategy to combat hazardous child labour. According to the SDT service providers, SDT Instructors and SDT graduates, SDT provided by the formal institutions were useful for many working children to entered into decent job. The formal institutions provide required level general education and skill development training on marketable trade for a reasonable duration. Besides, they also provide life skills before entering into job market. These institutions also have strong connection with the employers in the formal sectors. On the other hand, SDT provided through informal arrangement are mostly on traditional trades with short duration, which is not suitable for children to get a decent job.

Economic support to the parents/families of working children through micro-credit disbursement and conditional cash transfer did not make any significant impact towards combating child labour in Bangladesh for many reasons. First of all, the amount of micro-credit was not sufficient to start up a petty business in urban areas. On the other hand, setting up an alternative income generation activity in rural areas was not often feasible. Secondly, most of the parents/guardians did not have any prior experience in running business and therefore, they went for very traditional business and without could not succeed . The training they were provided was not enough for running a business without having prior experience. Thirdly, many of the micro-credit recipients women handed over their loan to their husbands for doing business and in most cases, they did not get back their money either for occurring loses in the business or spending money for unnecessary purposes. According to the field level NGO workers, in some cases, micro-credit promoted child labour, as

many parents involved their children in home based business. Only a few percentage of recipients who had prior business knowledge and experience became successful. Weekly installment with high interest rate was also a barrier for not being able to successfully run the business.

With regard to the conditional cash transfer, majority of the beneficiaries did not comply with the condition that they will withdraw their children from work and send them to school. It happened because of the lack of strong monitoring and some level of corruptions committed by the field based NGO workers.

Participation of children in policy-making dialogues and debates still seems tokenistic to a great extent. Working children hardly have the opportunity to raise their voices against unlawful behavior at home and workplaces.

Although establishment of Community based Child Protection System sounded great but in reality this system did not work, especially in the urban areas simply because the concept of 'Community' does not exist in urban cities. People are more busy with their own agendas and hardly have time to spend for the problems of other people. Besides, most of the community people are divided into different political beliefs and rarely meet for common interest. The system partially worked in rural areas where there are less social and political conflict and kind of community feelings still exist. More importantly, this system could not produce expected results because, the overall attitude towards the rights of the children is still not favorable and majority of the community people do not have knowledge on the rights of children. On top of all, in many occasions, the NGO projects were phased out before getting the momentum.

Theoretically Workplace Improvement Program was a nice concept through which hazards could be removed from the workplace as opposed to removing children from hazardous work. However, this concept was found mostly inappropriate for the informal work places in urban setting. Because, the nature of informal workplaces does not permit to do much in terms of improving the working environment through ensuring adequate light, air flow, hygienic toilet facility etc.

Providing space to children through formation of child led organizations worked to a large extent in terms of developing capacity of the children, getting them equipped with information and knowledge on child rights issues, raising their views and opinions in front of the policy makers and duty bearers, sharing knowledge and information with other children, leadership skills etc. However, there were some limitations in carrying out this activity. Most of the policy makers and duty bearers did not believe in children's participation and therefore, their presence in the policy dialogues were merely tokenistic. Besides, the child led organizations could not always represent the most vulnerable children. In many occasions, these children were dictated by the adult members of the NGOs and they often could not speak up their mind to share their own views and opinions.

Major challenges to tackle child labour in the context of Bangladesh

There are number of challenges involved to tackle child labour in Bangladesh. Based on the findings from primary and secondary data, some of the major challenges are presented below:

- **Lack of updated and appropriate child labour data:** There is a strong lack in getting updated and appropriate data on child labour. This is one of the key challenges towards designing child labour programs/project in an effective manner.
- **Addressing the economic vulnerability of the poor families:** Given the fact that approximately 30 percent of the total population live below the poverty line. This population needs economic support to fulfill the rights of their children. The existing social safety net programs have failed to reach out this large number of population. Therefore, it will be really difficult to stop children from these vulnerable families to enter into labour market without providing financial support.
- **Ensuring child labour monitoring in the informal sector:** More than ninety percent working children are found in the informal sectors, including agriculture. However, the present child labour monitoring system is mainly concentrated in the formal sector.
- **Enforcement of existing laws and policies:** Ensuring adequate level of enforcement of child labour related laws and policies is a big challenge to tackle child labour in Bangladesh. Many initiatives were carried out to raise awareness among various stakeholders, including employers. But it seems that no one bothers about the laws that prohibits employing under aged children for hazardous work.
- **Ensuring functionality of the DCLWC, DCRMC and UCLMC:** Without ensuring effectiveness of the Child labour Welfare Council at Division, District and Upazilla level, it will not be possible at all to combat child labour.
- **Allocating adequate budget to implement the NPA:** The NPA was not implemented since it was formulated in 2012. The MoLE has taken an initiative to revise the NPA and new target has been set to eliminate hazardous child labour by 2021 and all forms of child labour by 2025 in alignment with SDG targets, which is really a big challenge for the GoB. The eight Five-Year Plan is almost ready to unveil. If child labour was not adequately reflected in the eight Five-year Plan with specific goals and objectives as well as allocating sufficient budget then GoB will be failed again to fulfill its commitment.
- **Social and cultural attitude towards child labour:** The social and cultural values in Bangladeshi society as a whole still allows child labour. This is one of the challenges to combat child labour.
- **Low capacity of the responsible institutions:** Low capacity of the responsible institutions at national and local level in terms of knowledge, information, human and financial resources is a major challenge to tackle child labour in the context of Bangladesh.
- **Addressing the root causes of child labour:** No significant efforts were made to address the root causes of child labour that would include poverty eradication, ensuring adequate number of general and technical and vocational educational institutions, quality education, population growth control, reducing rural-urban migration, ensuring minimum wage for adult workers, enforcement of laws etc. Without addressing the root causes combating child labour will not be possible in a significant manner.
- **List of hazardous work:** The list of hazardous work for children does not still include a good number of hazardous sectors (e.g. child domestic work, dry fish). It would be difficult to address child labour in those sectors before determining as hazardous work/sector.

Most hazardous child labour sectors in selected geographical locations



The study team aimed at identifying some of the hazardous child labour sectors in the study locations with a view that Educo may opt these sectors for their upcoming child labour related interventions. Besides, it may be also useful for other organizations to prioritize their interventions covering these sectors. Key findings derived from these hazardous child labour sectors are presented below. A total of eight sectors (Child domestic work, transport, dry fish, bricklyn, shrimp fry collection, aluminum factory, lathe engineering and plastic recycling) were covered.

Age of the working children

Among the respondents 8.91% belong to below 8 years age group, 5.79% of them were 8-9 years age group, 18.18% were 10-11 years, 30.21% were 12-13 years, 30.09% were 14-15 years and 15.73% belong to 16-17 years age group. It may be noted that highest number of low aged working children (10-11 years) were found in Shrimp Fry collection, Dry Fish, Transport and Child Domestic sectors.

Years of work

According to the study findings, approximately 68.35% children have been working for 1-2 years, 22.78% children have been working for 3-4 years, 3.29% children working for 5-6 years and 5.06% children have been working for more than six years.

Why do they work?

Approximately 72.33% working children claimed that they have to work because their families are poor and need their income support to meet the economic need of the family. Around 19.28% children said that their



families cannot afford schooling cost and therefore they entered into work. Around 3.77% children said that they did not find education relevant for them and therefore entered into work. Approximately 4.61% working children responded that they were forced by their parents to enter into work at an early age.

Number of working days in a week

Approximately 51.05% children work 5-6 days in a week. Approximately 29.89% children work 7 days in week, 17.99% children work 3-4 days in a week and only 1.06% children work 1-2 days in a week.

Majority of the child domestic workers and children engaged in Shrimp Fry collection work 7 days a week. Most of the children engaged in transport work, lathe machine, dry fish, Brick kiln and Aluminium work 5-6 days in a week. However, very young children aged between 8-10 years work 3-4 days a week across the sectors. And children who just started working as apprentices work 1-2 days in a week.

Working hours per day

According to the findings, approximately 38.04% children work 13 hours and above per day. 8.63% children work 12-13 hours per day, 10.20% children work 10-11 hours per day, 5.10% children work 8-9 hours per day, 8.63% children work 6-7 hours per day, 23.92% children work 4-5 hours per day and 5.49% children work 2-3 hours per day.

Status of payment

According to the study findings, 97.34% children getting payment for their work and 2.66% children do not get any payment simply because they have recently joined as apprentices.

Monthly income

Approximately 27.04% children earn Taka 3000 and above per month. 18.92% earn between 2500-3000 Taka, 14.02% earn between 2000-2500 Taka, 10.35% earn between 1500-2000 Taka, 7.74% earn between 1000-1500, 11.50% earn between 500-1000 and 9.67% children earn below 500 Taka per month. Children working in Brick Kiln, Dry Fish, Transport getting highest income while children working in the aluminium, lathe, plastic recycling getting the second highest income. Children working in shrimp fry collection and domestic sector getting lowest income per month.

Types of risks associated

Approximately 32.85% children suffer from physical injury in their work. Around 14.94% children suffer from mental problem, 29.75% children suffer from scolding, 7.53% children suffer from physical torture, 0.23% children suffer from sexual abuse and 3.67% children suffer from economic exploitation.

Children working in lathe machine, aluminium, plastic recycling and transport are the most sufferer of physical injury. Children working in domestic work, transport, and dry fish sector are mostly exposed to physical torture and scolding. Children engaged in domestic work and shrimp fry collection are often exposed to sexual abuse. This has confirmed again that children working in these sectors are often exposed to physical, mental and sexual abuse and exploitations, which create obstacles for their mental, physical and moral development and thus remain as hazardous work for children.

Status of school attendance

According to the primary findings, approximately 64.32% children attending school and 35.68% children do not attend school. It is important to note that most of the children attending school belong to shrimp fry collection, transport and domestic sector. It happens because, there are good number of government primary schools in Shyamnagar area. Besides, there is no fixed time for collecting shrimp fry. As a result, they can go for work before and after school. Although many of them said that they do not go to school every day. On the other hand, Educo has been running three schools under its ODHIKAR Project in Mohammadpur area targeting the child domestic workers and child transport workers. As a result, these children have got the opportunity to attend school for few hours in a day.

Types of educational institutions

Approximately 36.82% children go to Government school, 31.79% children go to NGO school, 17.96% children go to private school and 13.43% children go to Madrasa (Religious school). Majority are girls among the Madras going children.



Barriers for attending school

Approximately 28.22% children said that their parents cannot afford their educational cost and therefore they cannot go to school. About 22.65% children said they cannot go to school because they are busy with work and nature of work does not allow them to take leave for few hours. Around 21.23% children were found uninterested in education because they don't find it relevant for them.

Around 13.84% children said their parents are not willing to send them to school, as they depend on their children's income. Approximately 11.50% children said that they cannot go to school due to lack of government school nearby. Around 1.35% children said that their employers are not willing to send them to school and this mostly applies for child domestic workers.



Status of technical education

According to the study findings, 98.66% children do not have the opportunity to attend technical and vocational education. Only 1.34% children said that they are attending some sorts of technical education provided by NGOs.

Barriers for getting enrolled in technical education

Approximately 27.54% children stated that they do not have the opportunity to access technical education due to lack of technical school nearby. Around 11.10% children said that they do not have required educational qualifications to get admitted into technical school. It may be noted that children requires at least Grade – 5 level general education to get admitted in most of the technical school. In case of government run technical education center, the minimum required education level is Grade – 8. Around 12.78% children do not have required age to get admitted into technical education. Again, technical schools do not admit children below the age of 12/13 years. About 9.33% children said despite they have required age and educational qualifications

they cannot get admitted as their families are not able to afford the cost. About 12.99% children said that their parents are not willing to get them admitted into technical school mostly because it is costly and they also do not understand the importance of technical education. In some case, parents discourage their children towards technical education as they will have to go far away from their locality to reach the technical school. Approximately 11.49% children said they are busy with their work and they cannot afford the luxury to take a break for couple of years to get technical education. Around 9.47% children were found uninterested in technical education, as they believed that they can acquire skills from their current work.

Status of receiving support from GoB/NGOs

About 95.45% children stated that they did not receive any support either from Government or from any NGOs. Only 4.55% children said that they received some sorts of support from NGOs which include some reading materials and food.



Conclusion and recommendations

Conclusion

Despite strong commitments made by the GoB to combat child labour through undertaking researches and surveys, addressing root causes, enforcement of laws and policies, implementing programs and projects, strengthening capacity of the responsible institutions, ensuring child labour monitoring across the formal and informal sectors etc. within the given time-frame, child labour still remains as a major challenge for Bangladesh.

The GoB and the NGOs have applied a good number of strategies and implemented numerous activities over the last two decades to prevent and eliminate child labour with special focus on hazardous child labour. Many of these strategies and activities brought positive results, however, some of the strategies either partially worked or did not work at all. Therefore, it is crucial to design appropriate interventions based on the experience gained from the previous experiences.

There is a lack of updated child labour data, which often creates hurdles to design and implement effective child labour interventions. Therefore, it is crucial to undertake new national level survey to get updated and reliable data.

Combating child labour in a sustainable manner would not be possible without addressing the root causes of child labour. The major root causes were identified and included in the National Child Labour Elimination Policy 2010 and National Plan of Action. Therefore, implementing the NPA in a whole would certainly address the root causes of child labour.

Monitoring child labour across the hazardous sectors is crucial to identify non-compliant employers and producing them before the law for legal punishment. This will set examples for others to comply with the laws. Due to lack of capacity of the responsible institutions, monitoring child labour at the sub-national levels yet to be operationalized. It is crucial to provide adequate support to these institutions in order to ensure child labour monitoring effectively and efficiently.

Recommendations

Based on the analysis of the study findings, following recommendations are being made for consideration:

For policy level

- 1 Initiative needs to be taken to undertake new national child labour survey in order to get updated data on child labour. The survey methodology should be designed in such a way so that location and sector wise gender segregated data are made available.
- 2 Strong effort is required by the for making sure that adequate amount of budget is allocated in the eight Five-Year Plan followed by national fiscal budget 2020-2021 for smooth implementation of the revised NPA on child labour.
- 3 Strong effort is required by the concerned ministries/departments to enforce child labour related laws at all levels.
- 4 Efforts are required to make necessary arrangements to ensure child labour monitoring in the major informal hazardous sectors.
- 5 Strong effort will be required to ensure child labour monitoring at Divisional, District and Upazila level by the designated committees. The committees should be equipped with adequate human and logistic support.
- 6 List of hazardous work for children needs to be revised incorporating child domestic work and other commonly known hazardous sectors.





For implementation level

- 1 Sectoral approach may be taken to tackle hazardous child labour as opposed to geographical approach. This would help to design and implement more focused child labour programs/projects.
- 2 Child Labour programs/projects should aim at addressing root causes of child labour. To ensure sustainable change, the duration of such project should not be less than five years.
- 3 Sector wise survey may be undertaken before implementing programs/projects to determine the actual number of working children in that particular sector and their level of vulnerabilities.
- 4 Technical and financial support may be provided to strengthen the capacity of the Child Labour Welfare Council and Child Rights Monitoring Committee at Divisional, District and Upazila level.
- 5 Strategies/activities need to be developed to combat child labour based on the situation analysis of the targeted working children and their families as well as their actual needs.
- 6 Awareness raising campaign needs to be designed and implemented using appropriate mediums and methods for specific audience.
- 7 Strong joint advocacy with the national government needs to be initiated to ensure implementation of the NPA and revising the list of hazardous work.

