

# State Of Child Rights in Bangladesh 2012



Bangladesh Shishu Adhikar Forum (BSAF)

**terre des hommes**  
netherlands



# State Of Child Rights in Bangladesh 2012

Published by

**Bangladesh Shishu Adhikar Forum (BSAF)**

Supported by



## STATE OF CHILD RIGHTS IN BANGLADESH 2012

Editorial Board : Md. Emranul Huq Chowdhury, Chairperson, BSAF  
Abdus Shahid Mahmood, Director, BSAF

Financial Assistance : Terre des Hommes - Netherlands  
House No - 670/A, Road 11 (new)  
Dhanmondi R/A, Dhaka-1209

© 2012 BSAF

### **Publisher**

Bangladesh Shishu Adhikar Forum (BSAF)  
House # 42/43 (Level 2), Road # 2  
Janata Cooperative Housing Society  
Ring Road, Adabar, Dhaka-1207, Bangladesh

Telephone No. : 88-02-9116453  
Fax No. : 88-02-9110017

E-Mail : bsaf@bdcom.net, info@bsafchild.net  
Website : www.bsafchild.net



## **MESSAGE FROM THE CHAIRPERSON**

I am pleased to know that the yearly publication of Bangladesh Shishu Adhikar Forum (BSAF), State of Child Rights in Bangladesh 2012 has been appeared. As in the previous years, this publication has been containing the scenario of child rights situation in the society which I think profoundly informative and enlightening on child rights issues prepared with active participation of a host of researchers, development activists, planners, social workers, children and other stakeholders. I hope, this report would contribute to enriching knowledge and better understanding about the state of Child Rights in Bangladesh during the recent past.

Since its inception in 1991, Bangladesh Shishu Adhikar Forum has sought to build a better, safer, more peaceful world for the country's children and facilitate and support the government to uphold their responsibilities for ensuring rights and well-being of our young citizens.

The contribution to this publication have, by and large, covered almost all the intriguing facts of child labor, health and nutrition, education, and a number of other vital issues concerning to children . Many problems have been identified and prospects of their possible solutions have also been pointed out. We must put the best interests of children at the heart of all political and business decision-making actions and also at the center of our day-to-day behavior and activities.

This publication would not be possible without the contributions and support of BSAF's Executive Board Members, Editorial Board of the report, senior officials of BSAF secretariat and Member Organizations of this network. We are grateful to each and every individual and organizations who do not appear here but have supported our venture over the year. We are thankful to the consultant and his team for their wonderful effort to bringing out this report in reality.

We are grateful to Terre des Hommes Netherlands for their continuous moral and financial support to BSAF in general and also for publication of this report in particular.

Md. Emranul Huq Chowdhury  
Chairperson, BSAF

## **MESSAGE**

It gives me immense pleasure to acknowledge that BSAF is going to publish “The State of Child Rights - 2012”. This will certainly provide significant information regarding different aspects of child rights situation in the country. The data collected from various primary and secondary sources gives a gloomy picture on the situation. A large number of children are deprived of adequate nutrition and rights of education and engaged with child labour. The number and nature of violation of child rights in various forms has been remarkably increasing.

The study provided information regarding the killing and violence against children, abuse and exploitations. The children are also used for political violence. It is also reported that a large number of children are being killed by road accident and drowning into water. The incidence of abduction, suicide, rape and missing is also increasing.

We hope that findings of the study will give solid ground for the child rights activists and organizations for taking appropriate program intervention. This will help the media and development organizations to identify and organize advocacy on child rights issues.

It is expected that as a national network of Child Rights NGOs in Bangladesh, BSAF will take the leadership for initiating movement to support the children in distress and promote the rights of the child in Bangladesh.

Kind regards

Mahmudul Kabir  
Country Director  
Terre des Hommes - Netherlands



## FORWARDING

Bangladesh Shishu Adhikar Forum (BSAF) is the oldest and largest network of non-governmental organizations engaged in promoting and protecting the rights of children in Bangladesh. BSAF started its journey in 1990 following the ratification of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) by Bangladesh. By this time, BSAF, through its role and contribution has been placed in the paramount position of *Child Rights* entity in its domain. BSAF, as the network of 262 *Child Rights* NGOs in Bangladesh now is indispensable as far as *Child Rights* is concerned.

It is our immense pleasure to publish the report State of Child Rights in Bangladesh 2012. It is an annual publication of BSAF. Because of various reasons beyond our control, it could not come out in due time and we are extremely sorry for that.

We firmly believe that this publication will be a guideline to many activists and researchers of *Child Rights* movement in Bangladesh. It would be an useful and important document to all in *Child Rights* arena.

I express my heartfelt gratitude to the Chairperson of BSAF and all other Office Bearers and Members in the Executive Board of BSAF for their support and cooperation in producing this important document. I am grateful to all the member organizations of this network for their support and cooperation in this regard. I am very much indebted to Terre des Hommes - Netherlands because of their continued support to BSAF and without their support this publication could not come out in light. I am also thankful to Dr. Rafique Uddin Ahmed, the consultant and his team for their untiring effort to accomplish this task. We will never forget those individuals and institutions who have contributed in many ways to make the effort a success. Finally I am thankful to my colleagues in BSAF Secretariat for their support in bringing out this report.

Abdus Shahid Mahmood  
Director  
Bangladesh Shishu ADhikar Forum (BSAF)

## **BSAF AT A GLANCE**

Bangladesh Shishu Adhikar Forum (BSAF) is a national network of Non-Government Organizations (NGOs) actively engaged in child rights work. It was formed and launched in 1990, following the ratification of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) by Bangladesh in the same year. The World Declaration on the Survival, Protection, Development and Participation and the Plan of Action for its implementation as adopted by the World Summit on Children in September 1990 and subsequent Declarations provided the framework for its operational objectives, which seek to ensure services and rights to children as provided in the CRC. BSAF started its journey in 1990 with eighteen member NGOs which has been increased to 260 member NGOs at present.

BSAF advocates for a Child-Friendly world. It works as a networking entity and brings together and assists child rights organizations to pursue common goals. It helps synthesize the viewpoints of member organizations and works to mobilize material and human resources for promoting child rights programs. It provides collective leadership in program matters to member organizations. It works with law and policy makers to bring positive changes in national laws and policies relating to children. It runs a vigorous campaign at macro level to make the civil society and policy makers aware of the provisions of CRC and plays a proactive role in promoting and upholding these rights. It also provides guidelines and assistance to member organizations to carry out advocacies for promoting child rights and influencing the policies of the Government. BSAF's mandate is to complement and supplement the government's effort to promote and protect the rights of the child. It has been engaged in networking and establishing linkage with relevant government organizations, trade unions, media, UN agencies, inter-governmental and other national and international organizations for promoting and protecting the rights of children. Its representative and national status gives it a greater reach to draw attention to issues concerning the rights and well-being of children at national, regional and international levels. BSAF has a resource centre which preserves information and collates database on child rights, publishes state of child rights in Bangladesh and submits alternative reports to the UN committee on CRC about the progress of child rights situation in Bangladesh.

### **VISION AND MISSION STATEMENT:**

To establish a healthy, child-rights enriched society, free of abuse, exploitation and discrimination for the disadvantaged children of Bangladesh. The mission of Bangladesh Shishu Adhikar Forum is to:

- Include organizations working with children in Bangladesh into the Bangladesh Shishu Adhikar Forum network
- Stop child abuse and exploitation
- Stop child labour
- Stop child trafficking
- Education for all without discrimination
- Eliminate gender discrimination
- Provide adequate recreational facilities to children
- Participation of children of the development process
- Improve social security
- Create pollution free environment
- Create and expand superstition-free environment for the children with disability (physically and mentally handicapped)

### **GOAL AND OBJECTIVE:**

**Goal:** The goal of Bangladesh Shishu Adhikar Forum is to promote the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child.

## **Objectives:**

- To play an effective role for the purpose of implementing the CRC
- To create mass awareness on children rights
- To assist in the formation of legal framework for the protection of children rights
- To increase the access to fundamental rights
- To protect children from all forms of deprivation
- To implement children policy, children act and national child labour elimination policy

## **MAJOR ACTIVITIES:**

- Advocacy and lobbying with government on the implementation of CRC
- Monitor the child rights situation in the country and furnish alternative report to UN
- Networking / Campaigning and Awareness raising with relevant stakeholders on CRC
- Rapid situation assessments (RSA), research and study on child rights
- Capacity building of member NGOs
- Information dissemination and publications on child rights
- Media advocacy
- Promote the rights of the child within the contexts of the UN convention
- Influence public opinion on CRC
- Provide a channel of communication and facilitate the sharing of information
- Coordination with member NGOs and other concerned stakeholders
- Seek new ways for establishing the rights of the child
- Provide technical supports and services to the MNGOs.

BSAF has a mandate to work all the districts in Bangladesh through its 264 member NGOs. The secretariat is based in Dhaka and membership is open for all Bangladeshi NGOs having regular program on child rights issues.

## **LEGAL STATUS:**

BSAF is registered under Foreign Donation (Voluntary Activities) Regulation Ordinance 1978 (amended in 1982) with NGO Affairs Bureau, Prime Minister's Office- Government of Bangladesh. Registration No. is 724, dated 4<sup>th</sup> July 1993 and renewed on 14<sup>th</sup> August 2008.

## **CONTACT**

Bangladesh Shishu Adhikar Forum (BSAF)  
House # 42/43 (Level 2), Road # 2  
Janata Cooperative Housing Society  
Ring Road, Adabar, Dhaka-1207  
Bangladesh

**Telephone No.** : 88-02-9116453  
**Fax No.** : 88-02-9110017  
**E-Mail** : [bsaf@bdcom.net](mailto:bsaf@bdcom.net)  
**Website** : [www.bsafchild.net](http://www.bsafchild.net)

# State Of Child Rights in Bangladesh 2012

## Methodology of the Publication

Bangladesh Shishu Adhikar Forum (BSAF) publishes a yearly report titled ‘State of Child Rights in Bangladesh’ which depicts overall child rights situation of the country. The report is prepared through collecting information and gathering data from various sources including publications of national and international organizations, newspapers and electronic media, academic and research institutions, and so on. BSAF has its own information resource center which functions as the information bank. It gathers relevant information on the child rights situations by screening daily newspapers. The centre has also provided relevant information on the present publication. The present report on the state of child rights has been prepared through using both the primary and secondary data derived from the sources below:

- i. Primary Data and
- ii. Secondary Data

### i. Primary Data:

Primary data is an important source of understanding the stakeholder’s views and perceptions about an issue or affair. With a view to understand the overall situation of the child rights in the country following tools were used for extracting primary data:

- a. **Focus Group Discussions:** Under the study, it allowed to collect consciousness and perceptions of different stakeholders through Focus Group Discussions (FGDs). A total of three FGDs were conducted in three regions where different professionals including government officials, representatives from different NGOs, lawyers, academic personals, politicians, local elites and disadvantaged children participated and shared their perspectives. The outcomes of the FGDs are also incorporated within the literatures where required. The FGDs were organized in Dhaka, Jessore and Bogra district. Representatives from social and professional bodies comprising different stakeholders took part in the FGDs and expressed their opinion and statements. The disadvantaged children separately participated in an FGD held in Dhaka to share their experiences, views and opinion.
- b. **Key Informant Interviews (KIIs):** A number of development and rights-based organizations work on child rights issues in Bangladesh. In addition, government

organizations, donor agencies, INGOs, NGOs and CBOs are also contributing to the sector to promoting child rights in the society. The representatives of such different organizations underwent in-depth interviews who provided with valuable information and suggestions to improve the child rights situation in the country. A checklist was developed by incorporating various relevant aspects of child rights situation in the country to conduct the FGD and KII.

### **iii. Secondary Data**

Secondary data were gathered by reviewing relevant literature, i.e. study reports on child rights, newspaper/television reports and publications of different national and international organizations. Websites of different GO-NGOs, INGOs, donor agencies, UN agencies, academic research institutions have also provided with numerous information and data on child rights situation in the country.

## **Child Rights Situation in 2012: A Flashback**

Bangladesh has recently enacted 'The Children Act, 2013' upon abolition of the previous 'Child Act 1974' to befit the UN Convention on the Rights of Children (CRC) to ensure children's welfare and protect their rights. The Act has defined a 'child' as an individual as of up to 18 years of age. Other national and international legal framework and policies have also defined the children in the similar manner. According to '*The State of the World's Children 2013*' report by Unicef, total population of Bangladesh was 150,494,000 in 2011 of which the under-18 population was 55,515,000. As per the existing laws, this huge population belongs to the children who should be covered by the recent Children Act, 2013.

Despite having strict legal framework, active mass media and civil society initiatives to protect the child rights in the country, oppression and violence against the children is a common matter. A number of incidents of violation of child rights was reported in 2012. Like the previous years, BSAF has compiled the incidents of violation of the child rights that were reported in six leading dailies in the country. The dailies underwent the BSAF survey are The Daily Prothom Alo, The Daily Ittefaq, The Daily Juhantor, The Daily Samakal, The Daily Star and the Daily New Age. The news of violation of child rights published during January 2012 to December 2012 came under the BSAF survey.

A total of 30 types of violation of the child rights were reported in the survey. The findings of the newspaper survey revealed that the killing was the highest phenomena of the violation of child rights. During the period, 201 children were killed in different incidents. It shows that the children of Bangladesh are not secured. There were a number of reasons behind killing of the children of which familial dispute over property, abduction for money, enmity with parents, rape, political violence, witness of crimes, etc.

The second highest incident of violation was drowning in water. The survey showed that a total of 135 children were drowned in water throughout the country. It also indicates that the children are not secured even in the rural areas. There exist a number of unsecured ponds which function as the death trap for the children who do not know swimming. Besides, the larger part of the children drowned in the pond are not at the stage of having swimming ability. The parents who are mainly responsible for protecting their children from drowning are remain callous due to unawareness of their children's safety. Moreover, sometimes the parents of the children go for

work together leaving their children to their older siblings or old grandfather and mothers who could not take care of them properly.

Killed by road accidents remain in third position that claimed the lives of 98 children throughout the country as per the survey of the aforesaid newspapers. Road accident is a daily affair in the country which not only killed the children's life but also remained a number of children wounded critically.

The fourth severe violation against the child rights was the rape found in the aforesaid survey. During the period, a total of 86 children were victims of rape as per the newspaper reports published in the aforesaid newspapers though rape is a serious crime for which the rapists might be awarded by the life-time imprisonment as per the Nari O Shishu Nirjatan Damon Ain 2000 (as amended 2003). In case of murder after rape, the act has provision of death sentence or imprisonment for life and fine amounting BDT 1 Lac. Besides, a number of crimes took place around the incidents of rape which left 8 children killed. In addition, 5 children were attempted to rape. However, the statistics of '*Odhikar (Statistics on violence against women)*', a Dhaka-based human rights organization, show that a total of 473 children were victims of rape throughout the year 2012. A total of 39 children were killed after rape. Besides, 479 girls faced stalking in 2012, the statistics of Odhikar show.

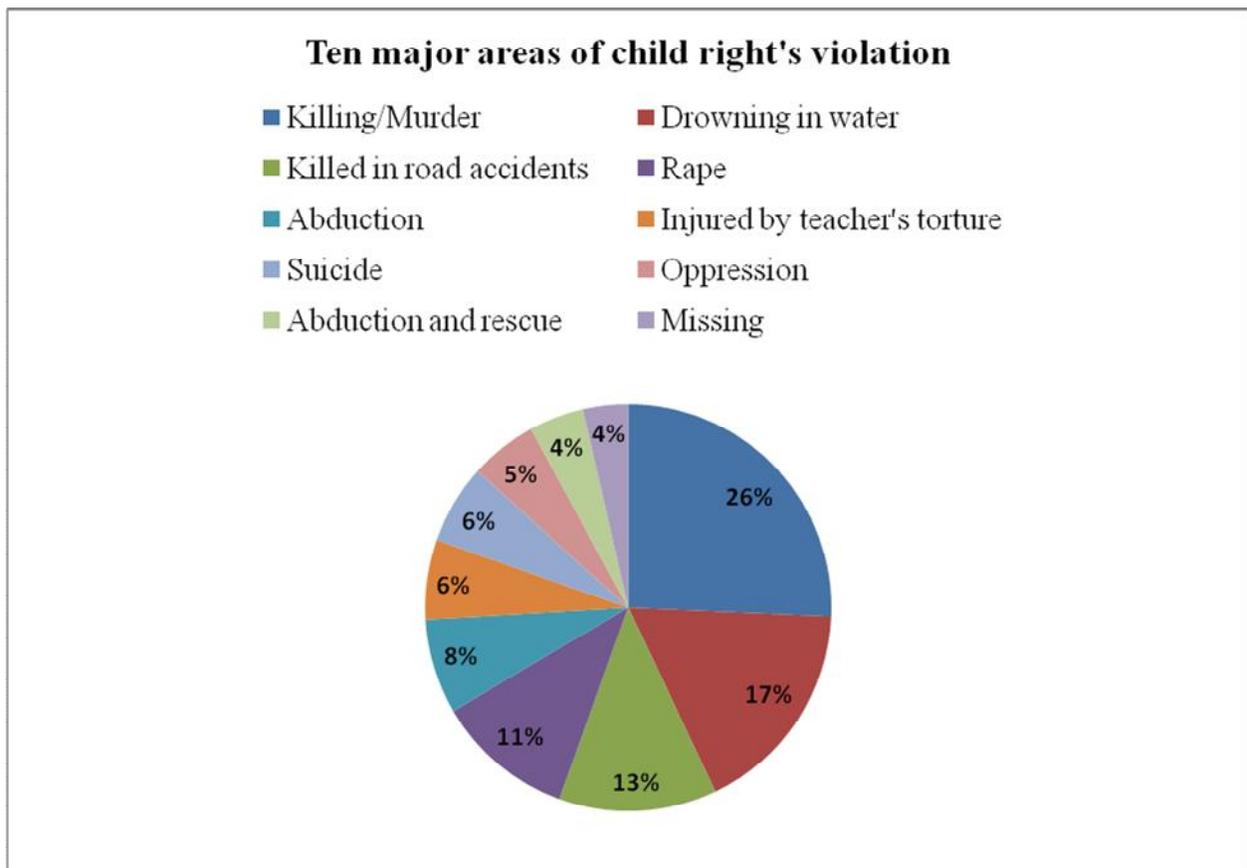
The fifth highest sector was the abduction of the children since 59 children were abducted in 2012 as per the survey. According to the 2013 Annual Trafficking in Persons Report (TIP) report of the US State Department released in Washington DC on June 19, 2013; Bangladesh is a source country for men, women, and children subjected to forced labor and sex trafficking. The report also said Bangladesh does not fully comply with the minimum standards for the elimination of trafficking; however, it is making significant efforts to do so. Children – both boys and girls – are trafficked within Bangladesh for commercial sexual exploitation, bonded labor, and forced labor while some children are sold into bondage by their parents and others are induced into labor or commercial sexual exploitation through fraud and physical coercion. Women and children from Bangladesh are also trafficked to India for commercial sexual exploitation. Recent media reports reveal that many brothel owners and pimps addict Bangladeshi girls to steroids, with devastating side effects, to make them more attractive to clients; the drug is reported to be used by 90 percent of females between 15 and 35 in Bangladeshi brothels (The Daily Star, June 21, 2013).

The survey also shows that a total of 50 students were injured by their teacher's beating while one student died. However, the number of students facing corporal punishment at different educational institutions is too high. A UNICEF survey report showed that 91% of the children

undergoing the survey faced various types of physical punishments at their educational institutions. Corporal punishment was one of the major reasons of children’s dropout of the school, the survey showed. These types of incidents happened amidst prohibition of the corporal punishment at the education institutions.

The High Court declared all forms of physical punishment of children in different educational institutions illegal. Following the judgment, the Ministry of Education issued guidelines in April 2011 to prohibit corporal and psychological punishment in all educational institutions. The National Children Policy 2011 also prohibits all forms of punishment of children at educational institutions (ASK, 2012).

The section 509 of the Penal Code, 1860 and the section 10 of the Nari O Shishu Nirjatan Damon Ain 2000 (as amended 2003) have strongly prohibited using any word, making any sound, or expressing gesture and posture that insults modesty of a woman. In such cases, the law have the provisions of sentencing the person if found guilty with up to 10 years imprisonment. But in reality there are a number of loopholes in the implementation of the law.



Child labour is regulated by both the national and international laws and conventions, and in some cases it is strongly prohibited by the ILO conventions (for example, C138 and C182) and by the Bangladesh Labour Code, 2006. The Labour Code, 2006 has fixed the minimum age of the children as 14 for qualifying entrance in any employment. The labour law has also a provision for the children to enter into the light work/job which will not affect normal schooling. For this, the age limit has been fixed as 12 as minimum qualifying age. Bangladesh has ratified the Worst Forms of Child Labour Convention (C182). The Labour Act 2006 defines minimum ages for light, regular, and hazardous work (ages 12, 14, and 18 respectively), but these types of work are not clearly defined. The Government has weak institutional capacity to enforce the law and monitor the child labour situation. Due to government's insufficient surveillance and monitoring, child labour is prevalent in different mills and factories.

In 2012, Development Consultant and Global Compliance Initiative (DCGCI) conducted a study on *Situation and Needs Analysis of Female Workers in Rice Mills of Bangladesh* for International Labour Organization (ILO). In the study, it was found that a number of children were engaged in different activities of the rice mills along with their parents. There were 15-20 children belonging to the age range of 8-14 years were found in almost every rice mills underwent survey. Most of the child labourers were deprived of primary education.

Early marriage is a violation of child rights. This is an extremely traumatic form of physical and mental abuse against children. Hundreds of children, mostly girls, in the rural areas are exposed to child marriage, although there is a law to prevent it. The Child Marriage Restraint Act 1929, amended through Child Marriage Restraint (Amendment) Ordinance 1984 has fixed legal age both for the boys and girls. According to the law, the permissible age for marriage is 21 for boys and 18 for girls. The law has also defined 'child' as a person who, if a male, is under 21 years of age, and, if a female, is under 18 years of age and 'child marriage' means a marriage to which either of the contracting parties is a child. The 'child marriage, is a punishable offence in the eyes of the law. But, it is common especially in the rural areas of Bangladesh. According to UNICEF, 66 per cent girls in Bangladesh are given in marriage before they are 18 in violation of the relevant law which is the highest rate in the South Asia and the fourth highest in the world. It is also mentionable based on the findings of the UNICEF report that the average age of marriage for girls in Bangladesh ranges between 14 and 16 years, which was one of the lowest in the world (The New Age, October 11, 2012).

**Political Violence against Children:** Bangladesh children are in the threat of a new form of violence which is triggering from the political agitation. This new trend of violence has recently victimized a number of children in 2012. Though there is no concrete data on how many children

were victimized in 2012, the media report can give us an idea of the same. The political activities and agitation i.e. protests, rallies, and strikes result in damage to public property due to spontaneous use of explosives, which are used to create public terror. The school going children had to suffer much due to the aforesaid political agitations. On many incidents, rough and ready bombs were sometimes left behind which the children took as an object of playthings and got victimized seriously when they exploded. Recent political and social unrest is triggering massive violence which is victimizing the children besides ordinary people. The Bangladeshi political parties are failing to provide a safe and secured environment for the children in the fierce face of political terror.

### **Child Prostitution in Bangladesh: Causes and Remedies**

Child prostitution is a severe violation of the child rights and is strongly prohibited by the existing laws of the land. According to ECPAT International's 2006 Global Monitoring report on status of action against commercial sexual exploitation of children in Bangladesh, more than 20,000 children live in the 17 registered red light districts of the country. Many of these children are forced into or are expected to be in the same situation as their mothers. They remain isolated and ignored having no access to services of the mainstream society as mentioned in a report of Aparajeyo Bangla.

According to a report of 2012 of Unnayan Onneshan, an independent research centre, nearly 19 per cent of the girl street children are forced into prostitution. Some of these girls are reported to be HIV positive due to forceful and unsafe sex. According to the activists, almost 45% of these girls with various medical conditions do not receive treatment from government hospitals and health facilities. According to one of the activists of Bangladesh National Women Lawyers Association (BNWLA) there are about 20,000 children who work as commercial sex workers on the streets. The children who are sexually abused face many difficulties as per the opinion of experts. They suffer from depression, anxiety, alcohol and drug abuse, ill health due to sexually transmitted diseases, including HIV/AIDS, unsafe abortions, and traumatized.

Bangladesh has ratified some international instruments and formulated policy guidelines against sexual abuse and exploitation of children including trafficking. These measures certainly indicate the GOB's policy commitment and initiatives towards achieving the goals set for fulfilling the rights of children. However, there is a wide gap between policy commitment and its proper implementation.

BSAF conducted a study during October 2012-March 2013 with a view to strengthening the knowledge and information of BSAF on the situation of child prostitution in Bangladesh. It

aimed at estimating numbers, magnitude of the problem, major causes and consequences, impact on the lives of children and way forwards to overcome the problem. Information were collected both from primary and secondary sources. Primary data were collected mainly through conducting interviews and Focus Group Discussions (FGD). In addition, informal discussions were conducted with relevant stakeholders too. Case studies were also collected from primary source. The data were gathered mainly from Dhaka and two brothels in Doulatdia and Tangail.

The study found that the children were recruited and forced into prostitution by the vested interest groups who used various techniques through their agents like pimps, local mastans, brothel owner, members of the law enforcement agencies etc. for monetary or other types of benefit. According to Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics-BBS, (*Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children (CSEC) Pilot Survey 2008*), there are about 15,702 girls' sex workers in Bangladesh. Out of these, 430 are in brothels, 2,498 in hotels, 4,088 on streets, and 8,686 are residence based sex workers. It is believed that the actual number of child sex workers is much higher than the statistics.

It revealed from the study that the children forced into prostitution were deprived of fundamental needs and rights like proper food, shelter, education, medical care and cloths. They usually had no rest, recreation and leisure. They were also excluded and deprived of most of the public and social services. Sardarni, pimps, dalal, mastans, room owners of brothels were the visible perpetrators of abuse and exploitation. However, there were invisible vested interest groups particularly people in powerful economic, social or political status who were not directly involved but to some extent helped that crime against humanity to continue.

During arrests of the perpetrators, police arrested 30 per cent of the girls forced into prostitution, 13 percent of the eunuchs and 18 per cent boys in last one year. In order to get release from the police custody, 46 per cent of the arrested child prostitutes had to pay bribe, 19 per cent suffered physical assault and 9 per cent had to entertain them with sex.

The study also revealed that a larger number of the child sex workers desired to get back their normal life. But opportunities were very low as they could not go out as long as the so called debt of buying her by the masi/sardarni is not paid back often till the end of their lifetime. Besides, the girls coming out of this profession had little chance of social acceptance.

Prostitution has severe negative economic and social impacts. Children forced into prostitution are condemned and seen as anti-social entities. Economic deprivation, social marginalization and stigmatization often lead these children to learn hatred. They feel like taking revenge that

perpetuates violence in the society. GoB, several national and international NGOs and development partners are providing various services such as temporary shelter, food, basic education vocational training etc. However, these services are inadequate comparing to the need and requirements. Despite initiatives undertaken by government and non-government organizations, there are challenges in addressing the commercial sexual exploitation and prostitution in Bangladesh. Recently, government has undertaken a number of initiatives to ensure birth registration, still a large proportion of children are not registered. Information and data on child prostitution is inadequate. It is hard to rehabilitate or reintegrate victims as families do not want to take them back due to possible social stigma.

It is extremely important to address economic, social, cultural, political factors that push children into and help perpetrators to continue prostitution. Interventions need to be designed in such a manner so that children are not forced into prostitution. Broadly it is recommended to organize national campaign for raising awareness of all concerned, ensure proper law enforcement, establish good governance, designing programmes to rescue, rehabilitate and integrate children. It is also believed that a responsive and sensitive media can help reducing child prostitution. Wider collaboration and cooperation among the government and non government organizations is also required to address the issue.

## **Child Labour Situation**

As per the available statistics, as much as 13 percent of the country's children are forced to work for their livelihood. While there are no statistics to prove the point, experts believe a huge chunk of the percentage live in low-income urban areas. In the existing socio-economic reality of Bangladesh, it is difficult to abolish child labour from the country because of extreme poverty of which still one third of its population is undergoing. There are over 60 million children in Bangladesh, which is nearly 40 per cent of the country's total population (The Daily Star, August 5, 2012). And half of these children continue to live below the poverty line, according to Save the Children. Child labourers are usually deprived of education and are vulnerable to violence and abuse, according to the Unicef. A large number of children (about 7.4 million) are engaged in work due to poverty who are deprived of their survival, development, protection and participation as stated at UNCRC.

With a view to prevent, protect and eliminate all forms of child labour, the Government of Bangladesh has taken various initiatives in compliance with various national and international policies and legal framework. The government initiatives have prioritized elimination of hazardous and worst forms of child labour from different formal and informal sectors. The

government has formulated ‘The Children Act 1974 (Amended in 2012), the National Children Policy 1994 (Amended in 2011), the National Action Plan for Children 2005-2010, as well as the ratification of the UN Convention of the Rights of Child and ILO Convention No. 182 concerning prevention and elimination of the hazardous child labour in different sectors. The Government has also recognized that child labour is a multi-sectoral problem and must be addressed through multi-pronged strategies and approaches. Most of the existing child labour programmes and activities are however education or training oriented and rehabilitative in nature. These approaches deal with the socially visible aspect of the problems. But many of the problems are rooted in the economic structures of poverty and inequality and hence need to be addressed through protective measures.

Considering the child labour as a hindrance to overall national development and a big bar to the achievement of the MDGs, the government formulated National Child Labour Elimination Policy (NCLEP) 2010 under the auspices of the Ministry of Labour and Employment. One of the key objectives of the policy was to provide guidance and direction in initiating concrete interventions to bring about meaningful changes in the lives of the working children by withdrawing them from all forms of child labour including the hazardous work and worst forms of child labour in different formal and informal sectors. A National Plan of Action (NPA) was also developed as a response to the commitment of the government, development partners, NGOs and civil society to ensure successful implementation of the NCLEP 2010. Series of consultations were held with all relevant stakeholders at local and national level. The NPA focused on nine strategic areas of interventions in line with the NCLEP, 2010. It has suggested 65 specific interventions corresponding to 23 key outputs under those strategic areas. Followings include the strategic areas:

- 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
- Research and Training

The NPA identified a number of government and non-government coordinating, implementing and collaborative bodies to be responsible under different strategic objectives with specific roles

for successful implementation of the NPA. In a seminar paper, Sharfuddin Khan, Senior Manager, Child Protection, Save the Children International mentioned that elimination of child labour in Bangladesh will largely depend on the implementation of the NPA. And successful implementation of the NPA will depend on the sincere efforts of all stakeholders, which will provide an enabling environment for reduction of child poverty and promotion of child rights in the country. This will also support the government of Bangladesh in meeting its obligations under the UNCRC and ILO Convention 182.

## **Birth Registration**

Birth registration is considered as the first step for ensuring a child's rights. It is a permanent and official record of his or her existence. A child without birth certificate is invisible to the state and often excluded from the basic services of provided by the government. Birth certificates help children to avail health and education services besides providing with protection against child marriage, child labor, child trafficking and other abuses. According to the Birth and Death Registration Law, 2006, it is mandatory to show birth certificates for receiving 16 services from the state which include: getting passports, driving licenses, TIN numbers, applying for jobs, business identification, admit card for taking public examinations, opening bank account, applying for microcredit, withdrawing government allowance and land purchasing and sell. At the same time, the certificate should be used for getting trade license, purchasing and selling vehicles, involving oneself in an insurance scheme, marriage registration, voter identification in different elections, admission in educational institutions, gas-water-electricity connection, telephone-mobile, internet, cable TV connection, receiving governmental subsidy, filing any case or appeal in court and applying for company shares and for other government services.

Bangladesh had one of the lowest rates of birth registration in the world. Only 10 per cent of children under-five were registered with birth certificates in 2006. This makes it difficult to protect children from trafficking, child labour and child marriage. The government launched a campaign for birth registration of all the citizens and became successful. According to the information delivered by Pascal Villeneuve, the country representative of Unicef, 76 per cent of the total population in Bangladesh had received birth certificates until December 2011 against only 10 per cent in 2006. (The Financial Express, Wednesday July 4, 2012)

Many government officials now claim that the coverage has reached 98 percent in 2012. However, the picture of Dhaka city, the country's capital, is starkly different with only 25.36 per cent included in the birth registration database according to 2011 government statistics (The Daily Star, June 3, 2012). Although the government report shows that 98.91% children had birth

registration upto March 2012, the percentage was only 57% as reported by the Child Parliament. This is because many schools and colleges are yet to initiate the practice of asking the birth registration certificates. A survey on the school-going children shows that only 37% children informed of the requirement of such certificates in their admission process at schools. There is national and international legal and policy framework of birth registration of all the children at the free of costs which is still neglected in the country. Even in many cases, fees or charges are taken for providing the certificate. One of the major reasons of being less interested of the parents for having birth registration is that it is a lengthy process depending on the will of the concerned authority. In the remote zones like hill tracts, char regions and coastal areas, the rate of birth registration is still frustrating. Moreover, the rate of birth registration is very poor in the ethnic communities like badey, dalits and the red-light areas.

With a view to easing and fostering the birth registration system for a huge population of 160 million, Online Birth Registration Information System (OnlineBRIS) was introduced in 2009 with support from Unicef to create a central database of birth registration data and ensure the interoperability of the software with other databases of the government and strengthen the monitoring and reporting system. After successful piloting of the online software, the system was rolled-out in 29 (out of 64) districts with full geographic coverage. The experts opined that the system was effective to serve the purpose which recorded 40 million birth information.

## **Child Marriage**

Child marriage in Bangladesh is strictly prohibited by the existing laws of the land. Legally, the minimum age of marriage is 21 for boys and 18 for girls. But the media reports and the research findings of different international and national development agencies show that Bangladesh has one of the highest rates of child-marriage in the world. Here, 66 per cent of women are married before they reach 18 years of age. The average age of marriage for the girls in Bangladesh is 15 years 3 months as per the data furnished in a talk-show aired on Independent Television at 11:00 pm on 09 November 2013. Bangladesh has also the highest teenage pregnancy rate in Asia due to lack of life-line education and awareness of the parents and the children. Although the eradication of child marriage is slowly occurring, over one third of girls are married before the age of 15 years. The impact of child marriage is terrible since a number of teenage girls have to die due to pregnancy and delivery related complications. Child marriage is one of the reasons for which the girls are dropped out from their education.

## **Drop-out**

Poverty, parental unemployment, lack of education and awareness are the root causes of dropout among rural high school children in Bangladesh. In 2012, 70 per cent of children in the country, according to available statistics, were enrolled as students at the primary level of education. According to the 'State of the World's Children 2012' report by Unicef, in the urban areas primary school attendance ratio improved from 80.9 percent in 2006 to 83.9 percent in 2009. But dropout rates in secondary education still remain alarmingly high. It is mentionable that from Grade VI, the dropout rate starts at 10 per cent and by Grade X, it rises to 65 per cent to 70 per cent. Only 80 % of students enrolled in grade one complete primary school. High drop-out rates and poor quality teaching and learning are serious problems for primary schools. Only 46 per cent of boys and 53 per cent of girls attend secondary school. According to the 'The State of the World's Children 2012' report, costs of schooling including other related expenditure for the poorest families is a major reason for high dropout rates. "Even where schooling is free of charge, families can be burdened with the costs of uniform, books and supplies," the report mentioned.

Many of the slum dwelling parents being illiterate do not even have a clear idea about education and the future of their children. In the slums, pre-primary education programme is run by a number of NGOs. But, these NGO-run schools lack of suitable infrastructure and facilities to offer and attract the children. Even after that, a good number of slum children use to go to those NGO-run pre-primary schools finding out no alternatives since the government primary schools are not available in the nearby areas of many of the slums. Moreover, many kindergarten and primary schools show reluctance to admit the slum children for age-old stigma and negligence to the slum dwellers. While visiting some of the city slums in Dhaka, mothers of the children told, "Schools outside slums do not want to admit our children with a fear of losing students since the children of well-off families do not want to mix and educate with the slum children".

## **Child Mortality**

Bangladesh being one of the successful countries in preventing child mortality in the world, there is still long to go since one million children die every year in the country due to lack of adequate medical facilities, awareness, teenage pregnancy and inherited complexities. According to the World Health Organization (WHO), 54 in every 1000 children (5.4%) are born with inherited complexities. On the other hand, Bangladesh is the first in the teenage pregnancy rate in Asia. (*The Daily Prothom Alo, 11 & 19 July 2013*).

Bangladesh has made tremendous progress in reducing child mortality as per the findings of a report jointly released by the United Nations Children's Fund (Unicef), the World Health Organization (WHO), the World Bank and the United Nations Population Division. The report shared recently shows that Bangladesh's child deaths dropped from over 0.5 million a year (1990) to 0.12 million in 2012 and thus it is being prevented over 1,100 child deaths a day. In the last two decades, it has become possible for the country to reduce child mortality by 72 percent. In 1990, as many as 1,454 children used to die a day even before they could reach their fifth birthday. Now that number has come down to 347. (The Daily Star, September 22, 2013).

In the last 15 years, under 5 mortality rate has declined from 133 deaths per 1000 live births to 65. This decline is mostly due to reduction in the child mortality rate from 50 to 14 and the post-neonatal mortality rate from 35 to 15. The neonatal mortality rate, however, remains high at 37 accounting for 57 percent of all under-5 deaths. Although maternal deaths continue to decline steadily, the maternal mortality rate is still high about 340 per 100,000 live births. Since, the early 1970s, the Total Fertility Rate (TFR) has declined from 6.3 children per women to 2.6 in 2011, and the contraceptive prevalence rate has increased from 8 percent to 56 percent. However, unplanned pregnancies still account for 30 percent of all births. Improvements in the use of family planning and maternal and child health services are particularly slow in some geographic areas of the country.

Every year, about 1,10,000 children die yearly from various water-borne diseases. Drowning and injury is the leading cause of death among children older than one year. Major prevention efforts are needed to keep HIV prevalence rates low (Sarker:2013).

According to the experts and Unicef some pragmatic reasons have contributed to such success in reducing child mortality of which the major ones include:

- expanding immunization for children and vaccination for the mothers
- delivering oral rehydration therapy to treat diarrhoea
- providing Vitamin A supplementation
- expanding network of community health workers
- improving quality of healthcare and use of health facilities
- women being empowered, mothers being aware and informed of various diseases and their treatment
- improving mothers' health, hygiene and sanitation practice
- implementing various Income generating Activities and thus reducing poverty and improving quality of life and livelihood.
- building public awareness
- extensive coverage of vaccination and vitamin A supplementation

- high-level political commitments as well as active participation of non-government development organizations in various child survival interventions
- increased habit of exclusive breastfeeding by lactating mothers due to extensive campaign for the same

As per the report, Bangladesh also succeeded in reducing the infant deaths from 365 (in 1,000 live births) in 1990 to 102 in 2012. But the rate of neonatal deaths (76 in every 1,000 live births) remains high. Infant mortality is rated on probability of dying between birth and one-year age while neonatal deaths are rated on probability of dying in the first month of life. “Absence of skilled (child) delivery persons and lack of sufficient antenatal and postnatal care cause such high number of neonatal deaths,” explained Dr Fatima, also secretary of Bangladesh National Nutrition Council (The Daily Star, March 02, 2012).

## **Street Children**

UNICEF defines street children as, ‘those who are of the street and on the street’. Based on this definition, street children are the children of 5 to 14 years of age who use to earn their livelihood on the city streets and stay there for most, or all of the day. These children may or may not have parents or legal guardians. They can be classified as:

- living on the streets without any family
- living on the streets with their family
- returning to another family and
- returning to their own family

The street children are more visible in both urban and metropolitan areas in Bangladesh rather than in the rural areas and small towns. These street children are usually found at a traffic signal in the city who rushes up to the passengers to sell various items. Some are found selling flowers and sweets, or carrying stacks of books in their thin arms, others wipe the windscreen of cars with dirty rags and beg to be paid.

It is almost difficult to identify the street children in Bangladesh without nation-wide survey. However, according to a recent survey conducted by BIDS, there are 4,45,000 street children in Bangladesh of which 75% live in Dhaka city alone. Based on analysis of the trend of growing street children, it is assumed that by 2014, the number of the street children may exceed 9,30,000 (Sarker: 2013).

Many of the children on the streets are little girls who are vulnerable to abuse and exploitation. According to the activists, one of these girl children is abused in Bangladesh every minute. The abuses they face on the streets include: physical torture by the musclemen and the police, sexual abuse and forceful begging.

A segment of the street children are used to do antisocial activities by the vested interest groups and the criminals. These children deprived of enjoying basic needs for life and livelihoods are reportedly involved in forceful prostitution, stealing, begging, drug addiction and business. Experts and the human rights activists are concerned that a section of these children especially the girls are in the threat of affecting and spreading HIV/AIDS since the girls are forced and compelled to prostitution. Although sexual abuse was strictly prohibited in the existing laws and policies, there exist gaps in implementation.

## **Health and Nutrition**

Despite adopting comprehensive measures and implementing various programmes by both of the government and non-government organizations and improving health care facilities, a considerable neonatal and maternal death take place especially in the rural areas. This rate is high among the geographically scattered communities i.e. the riverine, coastal and hilly zones where there is lack of proper health care facilities. Nutrition is another major issue especially among the urban slum children. Reports of different child rights based organizations show that 47 percent of the country's children are malnourished.

Nearly one in every three children is stunted; 10-year-olds fail to top an adult's belt buckle. Under-nutrition contributes to child mortality. Still, 22 % of infants are born with low birth weight. Up to 46 % of children under-five are underweight who suffer from malnutrition. They are frequently sick: chronic weakness, diarrhoea and worse is standard for many toddlers. (The Daily Star, March 02, 2012). Health facilities lack qualified staff and suffer from shortages of supplies. Since 2007, the percentage of exclusive breastfeeding among children under six months in the country has risen from 43 percent to 64 percent.

## **Addiction to Drug**

According to a survey conducted by '*Campaign for Clean Air*', 43.67 per cent smokers began smoking at their early age when they were children. More than 98 per cent people perceived that the trend of smoking among the children and adolescents was on the rise. Although the existing law prohibited smoking in the public places, it has no implementation. Experts opine that the

children being addicted to smoking gradually divert to drug addiction and drug business. The children who are being engaged in such a social activities belong to 8-17 years of age as per the information furnished by the 'Child Parliament', a child-rights organization. There is no rehabilitation centre for the child addicts. Moreover, there is no separate corner for the children in the private rehabilitation centres for the drug addicts.

## **Slum Children**

According to various statistics on the slum children, there are about 1.5 million children living in the city slums of the country (Sarker: 20013). These children are living below the poverty line. They are neglected, impoverished and invisible in development spectrum denied a proper childhood of joy, education, good health and care. Though, proper food, clothing, healthcare, education and accommodation are the five fundamental needs that are essential for a human being. A child is deprived of these fundamental needs though these must for proper growth of any child. The slum children are deprived of all citizen facilities. Poor rural families migrate to cities in quest of livelihood. They have to live in the city slums in inhuman conditions. Slum families have to sacrifice the education of their children, particularly girls, for meeting the bare minimum costs of food, rent and transport. Teenage girls in slums very often fall victim to sexual harassment, which leads to stop their going to school or work and compel their helpless parents to marry them off at a tender age.

Many children in the city slums use street-side drains for defecation since the small number of latrines is shared by large number of slum dwellers and there is no provision for the children. Thus, the environment is polluted and the children have to suffer from a number of diseases. A study conducted by Development Consultant and Global Compliance Initiative (DCGCI) shows that the slum people have to spend a large chunk of their poor income for the purpose of treatment of their children. The study also found that the children of the slums have to undergo various diseases like dysentery, skin disease, diarrhoea, fever and coughing, typhoid, jaundice etc. caused by unhealthy slum environment. Though there are available clinics and government hospitals in the cities, the slum children have no access to those hospitals. Private clinics are extensively costly while the government hospitals lack of available doctors and medicines. Moreover, government hospitals are overcrowded with the patients. The poor parents of the slum children can't wait for a long time in the queue since they have to work as day labourers or wage earners. Mothers of the slum children are also remain busy since they have to work as domestic workers. Thus, the slum children have to undergo unbearable life and living amidst uncared and unsecured situations. According to 'The State of the World's Children-2012' by Unicef, out of every one thousand children born in the country, around 95 die before they reach the age of five

at slums. On the basis of under-five mortality rate, Bangladesh is ranked 61st on the data available for more than 190 countries.

## **Child Trafficking**

Trafficking is one of the major violations of child rights in Bangladesh. Around 2.5 million people are in forced labour as a result of trafficking. Of them 22 to 50 percent are children as per *'The State of the World's Children 2012'* report by Unicef. According to the government officials and child rights activists, thousands of children are trafficked from Bangladesh to other countries every year which remain unreported. Destinations of most of the trafficked children are different brothels and slums of different provinces of India. According to the *US State Department's 2012 Trafficking in Persons Report*, these children are trafficked internally for commercial sexual exploitation, domestic servitude, forced and bonded labour including forced begging. The report also emphasized that Bangladesh didn't fully comply with the minimum standards for the elimination of trafficking though it is making efforts to do so.

An estimation made by one of the child rights activists show that 200,000 Bangladeshi girls were lured under false pretences into the sex industry in neighboring countries over the last 10 years period while some other activists consider the number even higher. However, little data is available on missing children in Bangladesh. Police, child rights organizations and the media reports are the main source of information on trafficked children. According to Nasima Begum, Director General of the Department of Social Service, "more coordination efforts between the Home Ministry, the Ministry of Social Welfare, the Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics and non-government agencies should take place in order to bolster the quality of data-gathering on missing and abandoned children in Bangladesh." (IRIN News, 06 September 2012)

## **Corporal Punishment**

Violating the government's order and the specific directives from the High Court, a section of the teachers are reportedly engaged in beating the children and attributing mental pressure for which the congenial atmosphere for education in many institutions are being hampered. One of the major reasons behind this situation is lack of motivation and competence of the teachers in comprehending the lesions. Another reason is that the teachers are not well-trained and patient. Although there is a provision in the UN report to form committee to act upon investigating corporal punishment, it has not been possible. Even the Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina also delivered her speeches against corporal punishment and called for a fear-free and friendly environment in the educational institutions. Violating her directives, a section of the teachers are continuing torture on the students irrespective of their age and gender. Even the physically

challenged children do not get redemption of the punishment. A survey shows that 28 per cent children claimed of being punished by their teachers on lame excuse. It was also reported that many students left the schools in fear of beating (Sarker: 2013).

## **Children with Disability**

According to the estimation made by the World Health Organization (WHO) and the World Bank (WB), overall prevalence of disability in Bangladesh is 10% of the total population. According to the same estimation, 6% of the children are disable which is 3.4 million (WB: 2004). However, no comprehensive study has been conducted to determine the prevalence of disabilities in Bangladesh. Due to lack of proper education and awareness, a large sector of population possesses ignorance and wrong beliefs surrounding disability who have negative and derogatory attitude towards the disable children. Even the disable children are neglected by the family members in their own families. The disable children are perceived as the ‘curse’ or the ‘liable to the family as well as to the society’. In order to implement the National Policy on Disability and the Disability Welfare Act, the government formulated a National Action Plan in 2006. It involved forty-six ministries and divisions of the government to undertake specific activities for persons with disabilities. The government has also appointed a focal person in every division of the ministries (forty-six focal persons) who can provide the persons with disabilities the opportunity to get services from the government easily. In addition, Bangladesh signed and ratified the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) in 2007. In May 2008 the government signed the CRPD's Optional Protocol too. The Ministry of Social Welfare, the Department of Social Services and the National Foundation for Development of the Disabled Persons are the three government bodies that cater to the needs of persons with disabilities. Despite these comprehensive interventions, the disabled are yet to attain social recognition, security and dignity in the society in general.

Access to education of children with disabilities is extremely limited in Bangladesh. It is estimated that only about 5 per cent of children with disabilities are enrolled in existing educational institutions. An un-equal educational system, a rigid and unfriendly school curriculum, ignorance and lack of awareness of parents, teachers and the unfriendly school environment are the major obstacles for education of the children with disabilities. Under the existing system, Ministry of Social Welfare looks after the education of persons with disabilities in lieu of the Ministry of Education which is perceived as a barrier to persons with disabilities to be included into mainstream education. At present, government is facilitating inclusive education for children with mild disabilities. Moreover, government is providing stipend to students with disabilities too though it does not cover all students with disabilities. Only 12,000 students with

disabilities are getting the stipend while 1.6 million children with disabilities are waiting at home to be enrolled in educational institutions (Alam:2009).

In order to bring about qualitative change in the perceptions and attitudes of the mass people, an elaborative campaign should be launched.

## **Domestic Child Workers in Bangladesh**

An estimation made by '*Research Initiative for Social Equity(RISE)*' shows that Society Child labour there are around 400,000 child domestic workers belonging to 6-17 age groups in Bangladesh. In a report released by '*RISE*' it was mentioned *that* 80% of the domestic workers were girls. However, the ILO baseline survey in 2006 found about 3.2 million child labourers in Bangladesh of which 421,000 were employed as domestic aides, and 75 percent of them were girls. (Dhaka Tribune, June 12, 2013).

Adolescent girls aged 6-16 are the most vulnerable group of the domestic workers in Bangladesh according to the *RISE* report. The study report showed that 36% of Child domestic workers work on average 9-12 hours a day, and 30% of Child domestic workers work on average for 13-15 hrs. One alarming finding from the study indicated that 16% of Child domestic workers work on average 16 hours a day. According to ILO convention 182, long working hours is a major indicator for the 'worst form of child labour'. There are many practical reasons for becoming domestic workers. Poverty and lack of parental awareness are two main reasons for becoming the domestic workers. This is often the result of a large family size, the fact that they have no land for cultivation, or sickness on the part of the main wage earner. Around 50% of children who come to cities to work as domestic workers are influenced by their parents, and the other half were engaged through a middleman, the *RISE* report shows.

Child domestic workers usually do not work in one house for a long period of time. They change households frequently due to heavy workload, poor wages and insufficient food, inhumane behavior of the employer, insufficient facilities and for higher wages and better benefits. These frequent changes hinder the children's education and psychological growth as per the opinion of the child rights experts. Due to long working hours, child domestic workers are mostly deprived of education.

A report published in the Dhaka Tribune recently shows that the child domestic workers are used to pay a negligible amount of wages. In many cases, their salaries range from Tk 80 to 400 per month. In the report it was also said that the Ministry of Labour and Employment has adopted

National Child Labour Elimination Policy 2010, which provides a framework for eradicating all forms of child labour by 2015. Even though while the Government of Bangladesh has long acknowledged the need to address child labour and has formulated the National Child Labor Elimination policy 2010 (NCLEP) and National Children's Policy (NCP) in 1994 to promote and protect children's rights. The Ministry of Labour and Employment (MoLE) is working to develop a National Plan of Action to implement the NCLEP 2010. There is still a lack of political will to implement and enforce stated policy, to successfully realize the Conventions on Child Rights and protect children working in hazardous work, especially in the informal sector.

A study titled 'situation of domestic child labor in Dhaka city' (report written by Dr. M. Rezaul Islam, Associate Professor, Institute of Social Welfare & Research, University of Dhaka) shows that out of 849 children, 328 workers (39 per cent) have to do a number of hazardous works every day. These include: ironing cloth, washing heavy cloth, boiling water, operating motor for pumping water, lifting heavy goods, going shop by crossing road, etc. The study shows that a large numbers of domestic child workers are abused. Sixty seven per cent children mention that they face minimum one type of abuse. The type of abuses includes physical, mental, sexual, and verbal harassment. The highest numbers of the child workers face verbal abuse (95 per cent). Seventy three per cent children state that they are physically abused and a significant number of children (17 per cent) mentions that they are sexually abusing. Ninety five per cent mention that they are abused by the owners. The rest of them are being abused by the other family members (30 per cent) and relatives (one per cent). The highest 52 per cent state that they are abused regularly.

The study shows that most of the children are not aware of their rights. On the other hand, 99 per cent of the owners have knowledge about child rights. Fifty three per cent owners think that domestic child work should be stopped; the rest of them mention that domestic child labour should not be stopped. The owners have proposed a range of suggestions to stop the domestic child work, which include education for all, especial govt. care, change peoples' attitude and mentality, poverty alleviation and rehabilitation, peoples' awareness, adopt new policy, new law to alleviate child work, help their family, ensure security specially for girl, prevention of early marriage, GO-NGO collaboration, raising awareness among parents, financial assistance to the parents, prevention of dowry, raising awareness among the parents.

## **Child Rights Situation: A Report on FGD**

A two-tire stakeholder meeting (one category with the children and other with the civil society members) was held in Dhaka, Jessore and Bogra by BSAF. In Dhaka FGD held with 32 disadvantaged and working children shared their views in the FGD while a total 62 professionals including teachers, house-wives, NGO activists, businessmen, lawyers, human rights activists, religious leaders, social welfare activists and the Local Government representatives expressed their thoughts and concerns over the issues of the child rights at different stages.

The FGD respondents in Dhaka who were mostly the working children mentioned that they understood the following matters as the child rights:

- access of the children to sports, education and entertainment
- access to rest and education besides working for wages
- access to good behavior, good food and medical treatment

The FGD respondents stated that they did not have any mentionable facilities in work apart from their regular wages/benefits; rather they are ill-treated if they had any delay on the way to work. In many cases the employers deducted wages if they were late. There were no facilities of playing and entertainment rather than bone-breaking labour in the workplaces, they informed. Apart from these, they are punished for making any mistake in their regular work. Their parents also used to rebuke and punish if they failed to go to their work.

The children stated that the Ngo-run schools had some opportunities for them which included: access to education and entertainment, playing games and watching TV, drawing pictures and singing and dancing. They mentioned that they participated in the ‘Child Rights Week’ programme organized by Shishu Academy.

Regarding going to school, they said they felt well in school rather going for work. Schools are the places of attraction of them since there are some opportunities of cultural and social activities in schools, they stated.

According to their views, the environment in schools is improving since physical punishment is reducing though there are some sorts of scolding and mental harassment in the schools, they opined. The children told that they felt discomfort in coaching centre due to extra-loads of lessons. If they had to go to the coaching centres, they had less opportunity of TV programme exposure and playing with the fellows. They felt that the schools having no playgrounds are less useful and distracting for the children.

The children stated that their parents are becoming aware of the bad effects of physical punishment. Previously, the situation was worst when almost all the parents badly beat them over trifle excuses.

The interactions with the children show that their opinion is yet to be valued in their families on the major familial matters. However, the children agreed that their opinion is valued only for adopting decisions in the trifle matters like buying dresses and dolls.

In the schools, the opinion of the children is thoroughly neglected since the teachers fix everything violating the participation of the children. Moreover, the students from the well-to-do families and with the good results have more opportunities of participation in sports and cultural functions in the schools.

The children (except two) stated that they had birth registration since the school management does not allow them for admission without the registration certificate.

The working children told that they felt better in schools rather than in the working places. The working children shared the environment of their workplaces of which the major ones include:

- Working environment is bad
- Older ones scold without any reason
- Pressurize for extra-work
- Beat for trifle reason
- Domestic helps have to work long at night, have to sleep in kitchen and rise early in the morning
- Irregular payment and less payment, deduct money for lame excuses, parents spend if they are provided with the wages
- Do not let to go home with the parents though let to meet parents
- Domestic helps are not allowed to go outside home, have limited access to TV programmes

Regarding their expectations of environment suitable for the children, all of the FGD participants said that they do not want to work for the wages rather they intend to go to schools. They expected more primary and high schools so that they can study free of cost. In the NGO-run schools they cannot continue education at one stage. So will the students return to the streets after NGO schools?

The school environment should be improved, corporal punishment should be abolished. All the children should be treated equally irrespective of their socio-economic positions.

The parents and other stakeholders should be facilitated understanding of the child rights. Employers should be motivated to be kind to the children and sincere to their rights.

Government should be sincere to implement the child rights

The oppressors and the violators of the child rights especially the sexual assailants should be brought to the legal custody so that they are awarded exemplary punishment

### **Findings from the stakeholder's sharing meetings:**

*Venue: Bogra (29 persons) and Jessore (33 persons)*

*Stakeholder identity: Adults (teacher, housewife, NGO worker, businesspeople, lawyer, journalist, human rights defender, religious leader, social worker, local government representative).*

- Proportion of people aware of government steps involving child rights
- Participants of the BSAF program are aware of the UN child rights convention
- About 70% of participants know about the National Child Labor Prevention Policy 2010. About 30% are aware of government's action plan about the policy's implementation.
- Some 40% know about the ongoing process of amending the 1974 child act.
- Almost all of the participants observe the maximum efforts to defend child rights have been put in place in the last few years (For example: laws, guidelines, access to education and healthcare).
- Almost all observe the opportunities for children have risen. At the same time, their problems have increased. Reasons cited include population growth, an increase in climate change-induced displacement, break-up of parents, an increased risk of human trafficking and migration to urban areas.
- The majority are not aware of the local government administration having discussion sessions with the locals on policies related to children. About 10% say they have come to know about these from ministry websites but did not join any program as they did not know how to approach.

**Condition of child labour in our country:**

- child labour is on the rise due to migration to the city
- the employers and the parents do not know about the risky and hazardous work for the children
- monitoring is not conducted due to existence of a huge informal sector employment of the child labour
- child labour situation is not monitored properly for having only one labour inspector per district
- child labour elimination policy 2010 is known to almost all the participants but there is no sufficient information to the participants on its implementation

**The reasons behind Child Labour:**

- ✓ Poverty
- ✓ Children are easy to convince in doing work with a minimum payment
- ✓ Parents force their children to go to work as they are unable to bear with excessive number of children
- ✓ In absence of proper supervision of the government, the businessmen can easily recruit the children in jobs, especially in hazardous jobs
- ✓ The guardians, who are incidentally migrated to the urban areas after being suffered from climate change or natural disaster, send their children to work to satisfy their livelihoods

**Measures to be taken in mitigating Child Labour:**

- To increase government and non-government programs like micro-credit, social safety net etc.
- Guardians should be convinced so that they send their children to the schools instead of seeking jobs as it (sending schools) will carry long-term benefits to them
- To ensure more enrolment to the schools of the children, scholarships, mid-day meals etc. should be amplified
- Considering cheap labour cost, the entrepreneurs are always eager to appoint children to the works. This tendency should be restricted by proper monitoring and building consciousness
- To enact the provision bearing of suspension of trade license of the authority who appoints the children in hazardous jobs

**Rights that the domestic child workers enjoy:**

- ✓ Children engaged in household work are facing the worst situation of child labour

- ✓ They have no work-hour, it continues at least 12 – 18 hours per day
- ✓ Children are offered no leave, no entertainment. They eat wasted meals, dress with old cloths, and sleep in the unhygienic environment at kitchen
- ✓ In most of the cases, children do not get their salary for their jobs. If get, that is handed over to their guardians
- ✓ It is physical harassment that the household workers suffer most and the sexual harassment is very common
- ✓ Only 5% of the children can get moderate meals, entertainment and other benefits including low work-hour
- ✓ Being an informal sector, the household works hardly come under any supervision of any authority

**View about Birth Registration:**

- ✓ Though birth registration from 1 to 12 years of ages is free, it costs 50 TK.
- ✓ Many who were previously unregistered, intend to do birth registration at the time of their marriage or getting job
- ✓ The rate of birth registration recently falls down compared to the scenario of some years ago when it was increasing due to proper publicity
- ✓ Some people collect their birth certificates by increasing their ages to get jobs. Some UP chairmen, members assist it. People even collect fake birth certificates from the market.

**Participant’s opinion on Child Trafficking:**

- Child trafficking has been reduced presently
- In most of the cases, there are no data on child trafficking. It is only known when someone rescued
- The tendency of child trafficking increases in home rather than trafficking to abroad
- Internal child trafficking is increasing as it is performed in the name of engaging children to the household works
- In the trafficking case, the stakeholders mostly mitigate the matter by themselves mutually so that no formal punishment can be applied
- Due to low publicity, the poor people do not get the advantages of the fund of the Govt. and the legal assistance

**Measures to prevent child trafficking:**

- Support the parents of the children (who send them for work instead of school) so that they can improve their life through poverty reduction by engaging in different income

generating activities and being covered by social safety net programme of the government

- Providing the nearby UP, Police station and Municipal office with the information on the child sent for domestic work so that they can surveillance the condition and whereabouts of the child
- Providing information to the nearby UP, Police station and Municipal office about the whereabouts of the workplace where the child will be sent for work should be compulsory

### **Views on education system for the children:**

#### **School Environment:**

- Rate of drop out due to poverty is still high in many places. Moreover, inadequate publicity on what will the poor children do after completing primary education.
- Child labour should be eliminated for increasing school enrollment
- Initiating mid-day meal in the schools to increase enrollment
- Number of good and qualified teachers is decreasing due to corruption and nepotism in the process of teacher's recruitment. Consequently, the children are being deprived of quality education in the schools
- Most of the schools have poor infrastructure that do not attract the children
- There is lack of safe and standard toilet for the children
- The children got free books timely this year

#### **Corporal Punishment**

- Corporal punishment has decreased in schools comparing to the previous years
- Some incidents of punishment still exist in some of the schools
- There is no corporal punishment in the NGO-run schools but there is mental punishment in those schools. Most of the schools have canes but they are hidden.
- Three participants told they knew about the complaint to the school committee against the teachers who cane the children
- Although some of the schools have complained box, there is no practice of the same.

#### **School Expenditure:**

- School expenditure has increased comparing to previous years
- In government schools admission fees are charged though there is such provision
- There is some problems in distribution of stipend, the girl's education upto intermediate should have been free, but high admission charge is taken

- We are heading to corporal punishment free education
- Free education in schools in lieu of stipend will be more fruitful
- Privileged groups are getting more benefits in the government schools

**Opinion about child health:**

- There is some gaps between achieving of MDG goals and the reality of child health
- Parents are in apprehension of giving their children vitamin A capsule due to negative publicity on the issue
- Zero tolerance should be introduced for any forms of corruption regarding child health
- Availing the pediatricians in the government and community hospitals
- Almost all the participants could not tell about the school health clinic system which is supposed to have in every district

**Hopes for Bangladesh Children**

Amidst some pragmatic limitations, Bangladesh has performed well in some of the socio-economic sectors as per the reports of international bodies. In 2001, the youth literacy rate was 63.6 percent which rose to 75.4 percent in 2011. The rate is higher in Khulna, Barisal and parts of Dhaka and Chittagong divisions. The country has made a progress in women’s education, for example, the female youth literacy rate is higher than that of male youths, at 76 percent and 74 percent respectively. One in four children is out of school now while it was one in two a decade ago. The proportion of real child workers has dropped over four percentage points to six percent in 2011. The prevalence of real child workers is higher in the urban areas than in the rural areas. (The Daily Star: July 25, 2013).

Between 1990 and 2010 the infant mortality rate in Bangladesh declined by 62 per cent and the under five rate by 67 per cent. Strong economic growth during those years helped boost efforts to reduce poverty, somewhat improve nutrition, make education more accessible to women and girls, and increase the resources available for health care. Perhaps more important, though, has been the sustained commitment of successive governments to improving child health through, for example, integrated management of childhood illnesses, increased immunization vitamin A, deforming, and water and sanitation coverage. Another key factor has been efforts to reduce gender inequalities, including government stipends to encourage girls’ attendance at school and a large NGO microfinance movement that has focused largely on poor women. However, child survival rates lag behind national averages in some remote and disadvantaged regions of the

country (Progress in Child well-being: building on what works, Save the Children & unicef, Nov 2011), retrieved on 20.08.2013;

‘The 2012 Progress Report on Committing to Child Survival: A Promise Renewed’ examines trends in child mortality estimates since 1990, and shows that major reductions have been made in under-five mortality rates in all regions and diverse countries. This has translated into a sharp drop in the estimated number of under-five deaths worldwide. Data released today by UNICEF and the UN Inter-agency Group for Child Mortality Estimation show that the number of children under the age of five dying globally fell from nearly 12 million in 1990 to an estimated 6.9 million in 2011. For instance, the Under-Five Mortality Rate (U5MR) for Bangladesh in 1990 was 139, while in 2011 it decreased to 46 only.

The newly passed Children Act has made us optimistic about the improvement of child rights situations in the country. The Act has strictly prohibited any forms of violence and harassment against children. According to the Act, any sort of violence and oppression on children will be regarded as punishable offence with five years' jail term or Tk 100,000 fine. The same penalty is also applicable for forcing children into begging and leading them to go astray. Maximum three years' jail or Tk 100,000 lakh fine has been proposed for supplying arms or drugs to children. Under the law, Child Welfare Boards will be formed both at national and local levels and 'child desks will be set up at every police station under the supervision of a sub-inspector. Besides, separate child courts will be constituted in district and metropolitan areas to deal with the cases in connection with children (The New Age: 11.10.2012 & The Daily Prothom Alo, 26.07. 2013)

-0-

## Sources and References:

- i. *World Vision Bangladesh*, <http://wvi.org/bangladesh/publication/maternal-and-child-health-and-nutrition-factsheet>, retrieved on 08 Nov 2013
- ii. *UPPR Report, Situation of Child Rights in Bangladesh; Ain O Salish Kendra (ASK)*, 2012
- iii. *Unicef Report*, New York, 13 September 2012  
[http://www.unicef.org/bangladesh/media\\_7870.htm](http://www.unicef.org/bangladesh/media_7870.htm), retrieved on 20.08.2013
- iv. Islam, Udisa, *Child domestic workers increasing in Bangladesh*, Dhaka Tribune, June 12, 2013  
<http://www.dhakatribune.com/labour/2013/jun/12/child-domestic-workers-increasing-bangladesh>,  
retrieved on 18.11.2013
- v. *The State of the World's Children 2012*, Unicef
- vi. *The New Age*, 11.10.2012, <http://www.newagebd.com/detail.php?date=2012-10-11&nid=26661#UhNIfH-SJkg>, retrieved on 20.08.2013
- vii. *The New Age*, 11.10.2012, <http://www.newagebd.com/detail.php?date=2012-10-11&nid=26661#UhNIfH-SJkg>, retrieved on 20.08.2013
- viii. *The Independent*, Monday, 18 March 2013  
[http://www.theindependentbd.com/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=160591:women-trafficking-on-the-increase&cat](http://www.theindependentbd.com/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=160591:women-trafficking-on-the-increase&cat) ( retrieved on 20.08.2013)
- ix. *The Financial Express*, <http://www.thefinancialexpress-bd.com/index.php?ref=MjBfMDVfMzBfMTNfMV85Ml8xNzEwMjk>, retrieved on 20.08.2013
- x. *The Daily Star*, June 21, 2013
- xi. *The Daily Prothom Alo*, 26 July 2013
- xii. Sarker, Sajeeb, *Role of media in protecting street children's rights* (A seminar paper), 2013
- xiii. Laskar, Rizanuzzaman, *Children in Urban Slum, missing in the realm of development*, The Daily Star, March 02, 2012  
[http://archive.thedailystar.net/suppliments/2012/Promoting%20Child%20Rights/child\\_rights.htm](http://archive.thedailystar.net/suppliments/2012/Promoting%20Child%20Rights/child_rights.htm)  
Retrieved on 08 Nov 2013
- xiv. Laskar, Rizanuzzaman, *Birth registration still to cover all children*, The Daily Star, June 3, 2012  
[http://archive.thedailystar.net/suppliments/2012/Promoting%20Child%20Rights/04/child\\_rights.htm](http://archive.thedailystar.net/suppliments/2012/Promoting%20Child%20Rights/04/child_rights.htm),  
retrieved on 12 Nov 2013
- xv. *Research Initiative for Social Equity Society - RISE Society*,  
<http://risebd.com/2013/01/06/a-glimpse-at-child-domestic-worker-in-bangladesh>,  
retrieved on 18.11.2013

- xvi. Karmakar, Pankaj, *Children in Urban Slum*  
[http://archive.thedailystar.net/suppliments/2012/Promoting%20Child%20Rights/child\\_rights.htm](http://archive.thedailystar.net/suppliments/2012/Promoting%20Child%20Rights/child_rights.htm)  
 Retrieved on 08 Nov 2013
- xvii. *National Plan of Action for Combating Human Trafficking*, 2012-2014, Ministry of Home Affairs, Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh, January 2012
- xviii. Rahman, Fazlur, Md,  
[http://archive.thedailystar.net/suppliments/2012/Promoting%20Child%20Rights/06/child\\_rights.htm](http://archive.thedailystar.net/suppliments/2012/Promoting%20Child%20Rights/06/child_rights.htm), retrieved on 08 Nov 2013
- xix. Alam, Jahurul, Khandaker, *Bangladesh and Persons with Disabilities*, FOCUS March 2009 Volume 55, Asia-Pacific Human Rights Information Center, (HURIGHTS OSAKA)  
<http://www.hurights.or.jp/archives/focus/section2/2009/03/bangladesh-and-persons-with-disabilities.html>, retrieved on 12 Nov 2013
- xx. <http://www.state.gov/j/tip/rls/tiprpt/2010/142759.htm>, retrieved on 20.08.2013
- xxi. <http://www.aparajeyo.org/wip.html>, retrieved on 12.11.2013
- xxii. <http://www.aparajeyo.org/ReachingOutToChild.html>, retrieved on 12.11.3013
- xxiii. [http://odhikar.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/07/Statistics\\_Rape\\_2001-2013.pdf](http://odhikar.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/07/Statistics_Rape_2001-2013.pdf),
- xxiv. [http://bangladesh.wvasiapacific.org/index.php?Itemid=88&id=44&option=com\\_content&task=view](http://bangladesh.wvasiapacific.org/index.php?Itemid=88&id=44&option=com_content&task=view), retrieved on 08 Nov 2013
- xxv. [http://bangladesh.wvasiapacific.org/index.php?Itemid=88&id=44&option=com\\_content&task=view](http://bangladesh.wvasiapacific.org/index.php?Itemid=88&id=44&option=com_content&task=view), retrieved on 08 Nov 2013
- xxvi. *Disability in Bangladesh, A situation analysis*, May 2004, The Danish Bilharziasis Laboratory for the World Bank, People's Republic of Bangladesh
- xxvii. *'Violence against women: Where is justice? A 'Odhikar' Report*, 30 May 2013
- xxviii. *'The State of the World's Children 2013'* report by Unicef
- xxix. Islam, Udisa, *A girl child is abused every minute: child rights activists Bangladesh*, Dhaka Tribune, June 1, 2013, <http://www.dhakatribune.com/bangladesh/2013/jun/01/girl-child-abused-every-minute-claim-child-rights-activists#sthash.iYVNoIIU.dpuf>