

POOR AND DESTITUTE WORKING CHILDREN IN BANGLADESH.

Submission by SRG Welfare Society of Bangladesh to the CRC general discussion day on
“Implementing Child Rights in Early Childhood”

Bangladesh is the most poor and populated country in the world with a density of 795 people per square kilometer. It's total area 1,44,498 square kilometer and population about 14 core. About 47 percent of the population are under 16 years of age and 17 percent are below 5 years of age. The population growth rate is 2.16% with the literacy rate only 24.8 percent.

Bangladesh is predominantly a rural country, with 84.8 percent of the population living in rural areas. It is a land of agriculture, but more than half of the rural population are landless. 75% of children below the age of 12 years are malnourished and 85% of the population live below poverty line. According to the Centre for Urban Studies, 60% of the population of Dhaka city live below the poverty line.

The majority of the people are poor and uneducated, because scarcity of land, lack of food and political unrest .In this situation ,people ignore about children care. The economic hardship is caused by having a large population and large member of real families. This has created various kinds of social problems and the incidence of child labour is growing.

In Bangladesh, street children can be defined as those who earn their living on the city streets and stay there for most, or all, of the day. They may or may not have parents or legal guardians. Street children can be broadly defined into two groups:

- 1) Those who spend all the time in the streets, it being their home, where they eat, sleep, make friends, work and play, but not go for study.
- 2) Those who spend the day on the streets but return home at night. Working children can be defined as those between the ages of 7 and 15 years who are engaged in employment and who may or may not live on the street. Children mainly work as domestic helpers, on transport or in factories, shops and restaurants.

Child labour in Bangladesh has increased alarmingly in recent years. Traditionally, many children have always worked in village agriculture, but the numbers employed in urban industrial and commercial sectors has risen sharply. Working children are a neglected group in Bangladeshi society. They are seen as part of the floating population and are not included in the national census. Laws in Bangladesh do not restrict the employment of children in all kinds of industry except where the nature of work is very strenuous.

Child workers in urban Bangladesh

In Bangladesh, urban working children either live on the street or in overcrowded slum and squatter settlements. There are 700,000 children under the age of 15 working in urban areas, which is 17 per cent of the total urban labour force. The work in industry, transport, commerce, domestic service, metal & leather factories, construction and in garment factories. 65 per cent of the total labour force in Bangladesh of 50.1 million, work in agriculture. In rural areas, almost all children work on some extent so the statistics on child labour are imprecise. Most children work for their families—the boys in agriculture and the girls mainly working at home. Those families who are landless, work for rural landowners with their children working along side them in the fields. Most families in rural areas who are better off financially, use children in their homes as domestic helpers and for cattle tending and other agriculture work. Children also work in small shops, tea stalls, handloom and bin' factories and the fishing industry. Most working children do not have the opportunity to attend school.

There is a large scale adult unemployment in Bangladesh, so, one wonders why child labour exists. Some studies over the past few years have put forward the following reasons:

1. **Poverty and family size**

In Bangladesh the average family size is six persons. In families where children work, the father often works as either a rickshaw puller or day labourer and the mother as a domestic help. Poverty leads to quarrels; tension and can ultimately result in cruel treatment of children. The mother, being overburdened with work, can lose interest in her children and neglect them.

56% per cent of people of Bangladesh are landless. They either work on the land of others on a contract basis, or become floating labour moving from place to place. Without a stable income the children become a burden to parents and must find work for their own survival.

2. **Victims of migration**

In general, neglected children migrate to big cities with their families or alone. Often they must beg or drift on the streets in order to earn a living and will consider any work that helps them survive.

3. **Illiteracy & ignorance**

Many parents of working children are illiterate and unskilled with little prospect of being able to improve their situation. There is a lack of faith in the existing education system as it does not necessarily lead to employment. Many poor parents feel that it is better for their children to learn by working rather than sending them to school.

4 **Child labour law and rights**

In practice, child labour laws in Bangladesh do not protect working children. Employers prefer children as they are cheap, productive and obedient. Children working in the industrial sector have no contract of employment and so find it difficult to stand up for themselves and fight for their rights. The demand by factories for child labourers is increasing all the time.

5. **Family breakdown**

Migration of families, broken families, parental abuse and abandonment, all lead to child labour.

6. **Natural calamities**

Floods, land erosion, cyclones etc., have a devastating affect on many area of Bangladesh every year. This further increases the pressures on poor families and leads to many new children entering the labour force.

Working children are used and exploited for the benefit of the better-off sector of society. This is not really deliberate exploitation of children by the wealthy, but rather reflects the attitude of society, of children as a source of cheap labour. Child workers are always faced with bad working conditions, unfixed wages, health hazards, lack of recreation and are exposed to mental, physical and sexual harassment. Child labour is prohibited in Bangladesh under the Employment of Children Act, 1938; The Children (Pledging of Labour) Act, 1933; The Factories Act, 1965; The Plantations Labour Ordinance, 1962 and The Shops and Establishment Act, 1965. All these laws prohibit the employment of children below 14 years of age. In spite of these laws, children can be found working in garment factories, hotels, brick making, biri factories, mechanical workshops, match factories, agricultural work, domestic work, and as garbage collectors and touts on buses and tamos.

In Bangladesh, children work because they and their families are poor and so there is no immediate prospect of eliminating child labour. But that does not mean that nothing can be done. The priority must be to ensure that children are excluded from dangerous and physically demanding work. Children are the future leaders of our nation. By neglecting their basic rights and hampering their process of growth, we are restricting the development of our country.

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