

## CHILD LABOUR IN BANGLADESH

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Child labour is generally defined as work engaged by those below 18 years of age. The definition, however, has different categories depending on the country with variations according to age, working hours and type of work.

Child labor is common in Bangladesh. There is approximately 10.1% children between the ages of 5 and 14 in the work force and another 6.8% between age 7 and 14 who engage in some form of work while attending school<sup>1</sup>. Child labour is caused by several factors including poverty, rapid population growth, unemployment of adults and lack of or low minimum wages. One or more of the above factor contribute to the large numbers of children currently working under exploitative or hazardous conditions.

### Key Statistics for Bangladesh<sup>2</sup>

Working children, aged 5-17	7.4 million		
Working children, aged 5-14	4.7 million		
Child labourers (according to definition, below), aged 5-17	3.2 million		
Children engaged in hazardous labour, aged 5-17	1.3 million		
Child domestic workers	421,000		
Percentage of children (aged 5-14) engaged in child labour (2006)	National	Slum	Tribal
	12.8	19.1	17.6

### Key Actors

The Ministry of Labour and Employment is the government lead for addressing child labour in Bangladesh. Under the the Department of Labour, a unit on child labour has been established and serves as the executing agency for overseeing the implementation of the policies and action plans aimed at eliminating child labour. Other key ministries involved on the issue include the Ministry of Women and Children Affairs, the Ministry of Social Welfare and Ministry of Home Affairs.

### Challenges

<sup>1</sup>Report: Findings on the Worst Forms of Child Labor by Country, 2011

<sup>2</sup>Ministry of Labour and Employment website, 2010

Bangladesh has already made a moderate advancement in efforts to eliminate the worst forms of child labor. Bangladesh passed the Human Trafficking Deterrence and Suppression Act 2012 which makes human trafficking (including labor trafficking) a capital offense, developed and fully funded a Child Labor Monitoring Information System to manage child labor related data and began implementation of a \$9 million child labor project. However, enforcement of legal provisions regarding child labor are limited and the capacity to enforce child labor laws remains weak. Bangladesh also maintains a low compulsory education age.

### **Legal Protection**

Bangladesh enacted the Labour Act in 2006, which includes a chapter on child labour. This new law prohibits employment of children less than 14 years of age, as well as prohibiting hazardous forms of child labour for persons under age 18. However, children who are aged 12 and above may be engaged in “light work” that does not pose a risk to their mental and physical development and does not interfere with their education. The law does not provide a strong enforcement mechanism for the child labour provisions. Additionally, the vast majority of children (93 per cent) work in the informal sector which makes enforcement of the relevant legislation challenging.

The Ministry of Labour and Employment has recently adopted a National Child Labour Elimination Policy 2010, which provides a framework to eradicate all forms of child labour by 2015.

According to this policy, the criteria for defining hazardous work for children includes:

- working more than five hours a day;
- work that creates undue pressure on physical and psychological wellbeing and development;
- work without pay;
- work where the child becomes the victim of torture or exploitation or has no opportunity for leisure.

UNICEF has been advocating for the creation of a Children’s Code, in order to harmonised domestic legislation with the Convention on the Rights of the Child including Article 32 on child labour and also been working with the Ministry of Social Welfare and other ministries and NGOs to undertake mapping and assessment of Bangladesh’s child labour.

In 2011, Bangladesh made a moderate advancement in efforts to eliminate the worst forms of child labor. Bangladesh has ratified both the Minimum Age Convention (C138) of the International Labour Organization (ILO), and the ILO Worst Forms of Child Labour Convention (C182). In addition, the country also ratified the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child.

### **The National Plan of Action**

The National Plan of Action (NPA) has been undertaken as a response to the commitment of the Government of Bangladesh, development partners, and non-governmental organizations to create a roadmap for ensuring the successful implementation of the National Child Labor Elimination Policy. The preparation of NPA for the National Child Labour Elimination Policy 2010 (NCLEP 2010) was mainly supported by the Inter-Agencies Working Group (IAWG) formed by the Government of Bangladesh/ Ministry of Labour and Employment and concerned

international agencies including ILO, UNICEF and Save the Children (Sweden-Denmark). BRAC University prepared the NPA in close consultation with this working group and agencies.

To date, the Government of Bangladesh has taken various initiatives to prevent, protect and eliminate all forms of child labour, particularly all forms of hazardous and worst forms of child labour. 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 programs and activities are however education or training-oriented and rehabilitative in nature. These approaches deal with the socially visible aspect of the problems. However, many of the problems are rooted in the economic structures of poverty and inequality and, hence, need to be addressed through protective measures.

This proposed NPA has therefore carefully developed measures and intervention strategies to address some of these structural issues and highlight the informal sector. In addition the NPA has deliberately focused on child labour at two levels: i) working children aged less than 14 years and ii) working children aged less than 18 years working in hazardous and worst forms of labour; The proposed NPA has focused on nine strategic areas of interventions highlighted in the National Child Labour Elimination Policy 2010. It has suggested 67 specific interventions corresponding to 23 outputs under these strategic areas.

### **Monitoring and Evaluation**

The NPA strongly emphasizes the need for regular monitoring and periodic assessments to determine the performance of activities set against each of the outputs in the Plan. A mid-term and subsequently a final evaluation by independent experts will be required to provide a rigorous assessment of success of the National Child Labour Elimination Policy. An institution based M&E framework is needed for tracking the efficacy of different interventions in eliminating or reducing child labour.

The Ministry of Labour and Employment has been contacted to get the latest update on implementation of the NPA for the National Child Labour Elimination Policy 2010. It is reported that the following measures have been taken so far in this regard:

1. Some workshops and seminars have been conducted on various issues relating to implementing the National Plan of Action (NPA) for the National Child Labour Elimination Policy 2010.
2. A project has been planned with the assistance from USAID to initiate the implementation of 9 strategies under the Action Plan.