

Child labour and sexual exploitation in Bangladesh: Analysis of government failure to protect children's rights within the constitutional framework

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Abstract: In the context of the constitution and in its execution, the state is now required to satisfy the rights of its citizens, particularly the rights of children. Nonetheless, many nations around the world continue to fail to fully enforce these rights, which would lead to social discontent. Bangladesh is one of these nations, with a high prevalence of abuses of children's rights. With an emphasis on child labor, sexual exploitation, and the government's policy reaction, this study uses a qualitative research approach and a thorough literature analysis to investigate child rights abuses in Bangladesh. Peer-reviewed scholarly journals, official government publications, and reports from international organizations were among the many secondary sources from which the data were collected. Despite the existing legal and constitutional framework for protecting children's rights, child labour and sexual exploitation still happens regularly. It is found that the root causes of these phenomenon are poverty and religio-cultural values in Bangladesh's society. Thus, addressing these problems could help to further make existing laws to protect children's rights even more systemic.

Keywords: Children's rights, constitutional framework, human rights.

INTRODUCTION

The fulfilment of citizens' rights, especially children's rights, has become a crucial matter that must be fulfilled by the state, both in the constitutional framework and in its implementation. However, there are still many countries in the world that are accused of not implementing these rights holistically, which in turn would cause societal unrest. One of such countries is Bangladesh, which has a high rate of child rights violations. This can be seen in the high rate of sexual and physical abuse as well as the endless cases of child labour and child trafficking. The implementation of the government's plans and policies is still considered incapable of fulfilling children's rights. Therefore, this paper aims to analyse in depth how the Bangladeshi government has failed to fulfil children's rights. Distinctively, this analysis will include the identification of factors that contribute to the failure to fulfil children's rights, various forms of child rights violations, of which sexual exploitation is one of the main ones, how the national and international legal frameworks in fulfilling children's rights holistically, to appropriate policy recommendations for the government of Bangladesh to strengthen the implementation of child rights protection in the country.



Human rights are a fundamental part that must be fulfilled by all countries in the world. Through this overarching concept, children's rights is one of its constituent part. This is based on the reasoning that every child is naturally a human being who needs guidance during the growth process to become an adult (Mohajan, 2014). Such a child's nature gives urgency to the importance of fulfilling the rights of every child, whether for parents, the community, or the country where the child lives. The classification of children's property rights is limited by age, which is under 18 years old. Mohajan (2014) states that children's rights cover various aspects of life, such as the right to life, the right to education, the right to health and balanced nutrition, the right to protection, the right to participation, the right to recreation, and the right to hygiene and sanitation. Based on the political framework, children's rights are integrated through national and international policies and legislation.

In retrospect, the government should have a great obligation to formulate policies that ensure the fulfilment of children's rights in accordance with various aspects. Other groups, such as political parties, non-governmental organisations and international institutions should also have responsibilities in advocating and monitoring the implementation of children's rights. As an international institution, the United Nations (UN) has adopted the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) in 1989, which is the main international instrument governing the implementation of children's rights. Every country that has ratified the CRC has an obligation to respect, protect and fulfil these rights. Mohajan (2014) explains that in the context of democracy, children's rights can be defined as an important reason to participate in public life and decision-making that affects their lives. The concept of inclusive democracy ensures that every child's voice is heard and taken into account. Democratic education as well as children's involvement in democratic processes in schools and communities or institutions are important steps to realise children's awareness and skills in participating actively and meaningfully in society.

Unfortunately, in Bangladesh the realisation for a country to fulfil children's rights, has not been fully accomplished, on the contrary it still have major problems. Issues such as child labour, underage marriage, and various types of violence against children are crucial points that have shaped the stigma of labour in fulfilling children's rights. These abuses are largely an implication of the rampant poverty in Bangladesh. High levels of poverty are often the main reason for children to work in order to help the family financially, which eventually gives birth to child labourers. Poverty also leads to another problem, which is the lack of access to education. In Bangladesh, there is an existing law that provides for compulsory education, although in reality there are many children who are unable to get an education due to financial constraints or the need to work. A further domino effect can be felt with the availability of a platform, many children in Bangladesh are vulnerable to various forms of violence as well as exploitation, whether it be at home, school, or the place of earning a living. Ironically, this is something that is quite common in Bangladeshi society despite the country's commitment to various international conventions related to children's rights. Rashid et al. (2023) stated that Bangladesh joined as a country



that has ratified the CRC in 1990 which creates an obligation for the country to respect and protect all children's rights listed in the convention. In addition, the high rate of child labour in Bangladesh is also not balanced with its commitment through the ratification of the International Labor Organization (ILO) Convention on the Worst Forms of Child Labour, No. 182. This convention ensures the protection of children from all forms of exploitation and abuse in the form of employment and gives urgency to ensure children get proper education and rehabilitation.

RESEARCH METHODS

This study adopts a qualitative research approach through an extensive literature review to examine the violations of child rights in Bangladesh, with a specific focus on sexual exploitation, child labour, and the government's policy response. The data were gathered from a variety of secondary sources including peer-reviewed academic journals, official government publications, and reports from international organizations such as United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), ILO, and the United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR). The selection criteria prioritized materials published between 2000 and 2024 to ensure the analysis captures recent developments and current challenges in the protection of child rights in Bangladesh.

The collected data were analysed using thematic content analysis to identify key patterns and underlying factors contributing to child rights violations, such as poverty, limited access to education, and weak enforcement of laws. Additionally, the study evaluated the effectiveness of Bangladesh's national legal framework—including policies like the National Child Policy 2011 and the Children Act 2013—in aligning with the principles of CRC. By synthesizing these findings, the research highlights existing policy gaps and provides recommendations for strengthening child protection measures. Ethical considerations were maintained by exclusively using publicly available secondary data and properly citing all sources to uphold academic integrity.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Convention on the Rights of the Child as the policy framework in Bangladesh

The CRC is a written response to the concerns of the late 20th century, one of the concerns is centred on the wellbeing of a child, considered to be one of the most important elements for nation-building, who was experiencing a number of problems with a high degree of urgency and required immediate attention so that the future plights could be mitigated by certain measures. Of course, the issue of children is not a new subject in the 20th century; rather, it started at the beginning of the century. Early international organisations such as the League of Nations and later UN, have included child welfare agendas reflected in specific criteria for the fulfilment of human rights and international humanitarian law. However, the existing agenda has not been able to fully guarantee the rights that should be received by children so that a more detailed and holistic written agreement or agreement is needed that covers



all social aspects related to children, including children's rights and obligations. Cases of criminal offences and other criminal offences are in the spotlight due to the prevalence of victims mostly coming from children. In response, a long discussion took place in 1979, which coincided with the International Year of the Child, and it took ten years to identify and draft the forerunner of the convention. 1989 was the time when the convention was ready to be ratified and adapted by countries in the world, especially countries that are members of the UN membership, to immediately adjust the conditions of each child to immediately obtain their universal rights. By the end of 2015, 196 countries had agreed to adopt the convention to be incorporated into their respective national policies as a form of responsibility for the survival of the next generation of their nation (OHCHR, 1996).

With the ratification of this convention by countries in the world, it is expected that it will be able to reduce the problems faced in improving the welfare and ensuring the fulfilment of universal rights of children. Included within are the principles to ensure the manifestation of the convention's adaptation runs smoothly, notably the principle of non-discrimination, the principle of the best interests of the child, the basic rights to life and continuing life, the principle of freedom of expression. The principle of non-discrimination is based on the reflection that in every country, every individual belongs to a certain race or social and natural features, so this principle ensures that every child should be able to access every right without feeling excluded or marginalised. Gender is one of the factors that still often gets different treatment, where usually men get a higher role or status than women so that the impression of patriarchy is clearly visible. The principle of the best interests of the child sees the welfare of the child as the goal of the adaptation of this convention. Therefore, this principle requires that every decision taken must be orientated towards whether the interests of the child are prioritised. The right to life and survival is linked to economic growth and development. Clothing, food, and shelter are unavoidable needs of children if we want to create the next generation of nations and countries that will not lack quality in the future. Therefore, economic development carried out by the government in a country must be able to equalise access to the above. The complexity of the world makes other aspects such as mental, emotional, and cognitive health issues make parents and governments have to think hard to be able to account for the guarantees listed in the convention. The principle of freedom of expression plays a role in fostering children's self-confidence as early as possible while honing children's cognitive abilities to be able to solve simple problems faced by a country (UNICEF, 2022). Children's arguments must be taken into account in all matters concerning the dignity of the child, such as in judicial and administrative proceedings.

Bangladesh was one of the first pioneering countries to ratify the convention in Asia in 1990. In the case of Bangladesh, the first implementation of the CRC can be seen in the social protection programme aimed at children. The success of this programme is quite significant, where at the time the programme began to run, from 2000 to 2010, there was a significant reduction in poverty, from 49% to 31.5%. This



is still quite high, but efforts to identify and eradicate poverty in Bangladesh are being made to ensure social protection. The government of Bangladesh has been spending 11.87% per cent of its total national income every year to better meet the poverty reduction target in the following years. The next problem is self-marriage. Bangladesh has one of the highest rates of underage marriage among other countries. Before Bangladesh ratified the convention, one-third of the total female population aged 20–24 were married at the age of 15, and the rest were married at the age of 18. There was a positive development after ratification with a reduction to 64% of marriages occurring before the age of 18, although this is still one of the highest rates when compared to other developing countries. This progress has been less rapid as cultural factors and indoctrination are still strong and further socialisation is needed so that the interests of the child can be prioritised. The level of participation based on freedom of expression has also increased in Bangladesh with the formulation of the Children Policy 201 and the Children Act 2013, where the drafting of the fate of their lives is informed by the direct participation of the children while assessing whether the standards set will ensure their survival in the future (ASK, 2014).

Exploitation, trafficking, and violence towards children

Because of the importance of children's wellbeing in regards to the future of a nation, it is no wonder that improving their welfare and safety, especially during early childhood, impacts their overall livelihood in the long term. In their literature, Rashid et al. (2023, p. 208) revealed that giving children a healthy start in life, wherever and under whatever circumstances they are born, is the moral obligation of every one of us. This implies that the life and well-being of children should be something that can be fully guaranteed by the state within the constitutional framework. Mohajan (2014, p. 207) argues that by nature, children are human beings who need to be moulded into adults through quality learning and life experiences. Therefore, the government of a country should be able to guarantee the social welfare of each of its citizens, especially to groups of children through a series of existing laws and regulations. In line with this statement, most studies say that the majority of developing countries in the Southern hemisphere are analysed as having failed to protect and realise children's rights, and Bangladesh is no exception. According to data compiled by Mohajan (2014, p. 208), around 30 percent of Bangladesh's population lives in extreme poverty, leaving many families unable to meet their basic needs, which in turn forces them to engage minors in high-risk work.

Poverty is unsurprisingly the root cause for the high number of child labour. In Bangladesh, child labourers are paid much less than adult workers (Mohajan, 2014, p. 213). Many employers consider that children are recognised as capable of doing heavy work, easy to control, and less demanding. Furthermore, many studies outline that many of them are children who are forced to work, either by their families or others in a higher position. This is certainly a crucial point that shows the violation of human rights against children, especially at an age when they should be pursuing proper education. Data also shows that the prevalence rate of male child labour is higher than that of girls with percentages

of 17.5 per cent and 8.1 per cent respectively (Mohajan, 2014, p. 214). This condition is exacerbated by the fact that most child labour, such as domestic work, commercial sex work and illegal smuggling, is done in secret, so it is not recorded in official figures. They are engaged in unskilled manual work such as rickshaw pulling (17%); day labour (18%); transport work (12%); agricultural activities (10%); and other menial jobs (Khanam, 2006, p. 598). It is also considered an irony that while the number of child labourers is decreasing in other South Asian countries, it is increasing drastically in Bangladesh, which confirms the failure points of both the Government of Bangladesh (GoB) and civil society (Mohajan 2012, p. 5).

Table 1 Data on violence against children in Bangladesh over the past five years (2019–2023)

Years	Total child abuse (All categories included)	Reports title	Sources
2019 (Covid '19 pandemic period)	4381	Status Report: Violence against Children in Bangladesh ⁵⁸	Save the Children
2020	1843	The Situation of Children in Bangladesh 2020: Analysis of Newspapers ⁵⁹	Manusher Jonno Foundation (MJF)
2021	1941	Child abuse, deaths, higher in 2021: study ⁶⁰	Md. Muhiburrazzaman, Additional Secretary, Ministry of Women and Children Affairs
2022	1088	Bangladesh's persistent child abuse woes ⁶¹	Ain o Salish Kendra (ASK)
2023 (January-September)	786	Quarterly Child Rights Reports January–March 2023 ⁶² April–June 2023 ⁶³ & July–September 2023 ⁶⁴	Ain o Salish Kendra (ASK)

Source: Rashid et. al, 2023. Child Rights in Bangladesh: A Comparative Analysis on National and International Legal Framework

As if the exploitation in the manual labour industry isn't bad enough, children also faces the high rate of violence. UNICEF (2005) shown that The Bangladesh Health and Injury Survey has reported that violence against children has occurred regardless of place, such as in homes, schools, workplaces, and public areas. Of the various forms of violence, Rashid et al. (2023, p. 218) in their study mentioned that sexual violence is the most difficult to investigate, given the shame caused and the risks faced by children in reporting it. Another finding also revealed that in terms of physical violence against children, which in this case leads to child beating, Bangladesh has one of the highest cases in the world (Mohajan, 2014, p. 221). The main reason for violence against children is allegedly due to the conflict of interest and inequality of 'position' between adults and children. Parents often struck their children out of anger and frustration, as well as their ignorance of the significant negative impact of any form of violence. Again, the findings emphasise that this point is one that contributes to taking away the rights of children in Bangladesh to live freely.

Forced child marriage and sexual exploitation

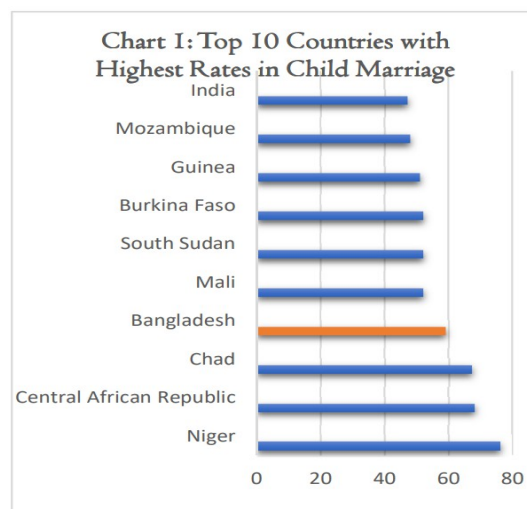


Figure 1 Bangladesh ranks fourth in the world as the country with the highest percentage of child marriages.

Source: Tahmid & Siraj (2020). Child Marriage in Bangladesh: Policy and Ethics

In terms of cultural values, this has a strong correlation with the majority of Bangladesh's population who follow Islam. As per Tahmid and Siraj's (2020, p. 25) literature, the percentage of child marriage in Bangladesh is the highest in the Asian region, with 52 per cent of girls required to marry under the age of 18, and 18 per cent marrying under 15. Furthermore, Tahmid and Siraj (2020, p. 25) also added that Islamic law sets the minimum age for marriage at 15 years old or when puberty begins, because Islamic values encourage early marriage to prevent extramarital relationships that are recognised as haram. In terms of the formal marriage age, Islamic law is very different from the international law that most countries currently follow. This then becomes a cultural factor that contributes to the high rate of child marriage in the country.

In the last ten years, the number of children involved in the sex industry in Bangladesh has allegedly increased. As Shoji and Tsubota (2022, p. 104) point out, again and again, children enter the sex industry for pressing reasons. The main reasons, according to them, are threefold, including (1) living in poverty; (2) wanting to escape from an abusive family; and (3) being a victim of human trafficking (Islam & Smyth, 2016, p. 90). In order to holistically understand the breakdown of human rights violations against children in this context, the author has created an analytical chart as can be seen below.

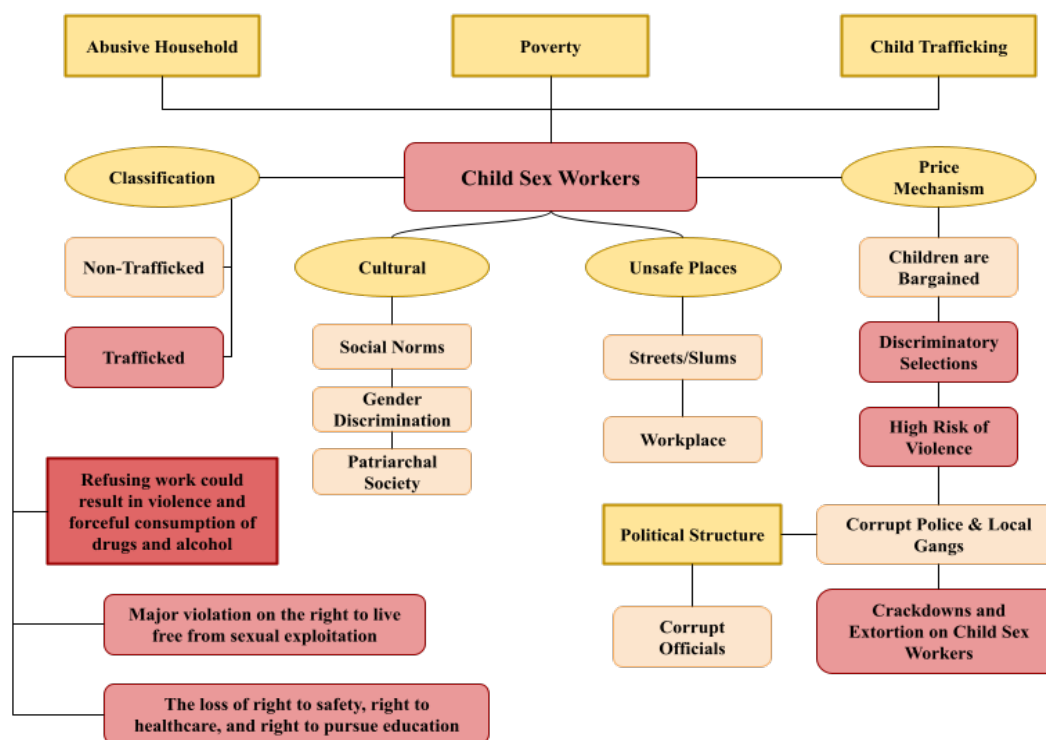


Figure 2 Breakdown of violations of rights and exploitation of children as sex workers in Bangladesh
Source: Author's interpretation based on Shoji & Tsubota (2022). Sexual exploitation of trafficked children: Survey evidence from child sex workers in Bangladesh

As the chart above shows, it can be seen that the exploitation of children to become commercial sex workers still has and continues to have a negative effect on the lives of children in Bangladesh, especially the girls there. Therefore, it is important to remember that all forms of child human rights violations are still and remain the biggest homework for the government of Bangladesh, especially in terms of policy pioneering and strict implementation.

Causes for the lack of proper education in Bangladesh

In international law, there are sections that specifically regulate human rights, children's rights, and women's rights which are inherent to an individual and children in Bangladesh are no exception. Although the local government has ratified the law and made it a national law, the fulfilment of children's rights in the country is still one of the main issues that has received international attention. Citing UNICEF, millions of children in Bangladesh experience events that go against the fulfilment of their rights, namely violence, abuse and exploitation committed by those who are supposed to protect them. The author argues that the intention of UNICEF in the last sentence is that it is the people closest to them who give inappropriate treatment to children in Bangladesh. According to Tanjung & Tyas (2012), the root cause of unfulfilled children's rights in Bangladesh is the low economic level that naturally leads Bangladesh to a high level of poverty which has an impact on the poor accessibility of education. Supporting this statement is the early marriage of girls and the normalisation of working

children into a culture. Parents assume that this way of life is the best way of life without prioritising education. Since education is the foundation of a country's human resources, Tanjung & Tyas (2012) said that UNICEF together with the Bangladesh government has been trying to conduct various educational programmes aimed at working children given the high rate of child labour in the country. Even so, the Government of Bangladesh is considered unable to fulfil human rights, especially children there, which has received international attention. According to data, 23% of families in Bangladesh are homeless (Tanjung & Tyas, 2012). This reflects the high level of poverty in Bangladesh which directly affects the education of the people there. In addition, the inconsistency and ineffectiveness of the policy implications and the fact that education infrastructure in Bangladesh is not prioritised as a national priority have reduced the effectiveness of budget and resource allocation, resulting in an uneducated society.

The international community responded negatively towards the Bangladeshi government's response to the case of early marriage, which has become a culture for the people of Bangladesh (Oktavianti, 2022, p. 21). The response has prompted the Bangladeshi government to do something that can solve the existing cases to their roots, namely economy, education, and culture. The case of early marriage that has been considered a culture by the people of Bangladesh reflects the lack of law enforcement by the government because the country has a regulation that states that early marriage is illegal since 1929. However, economic dependence and low levels of education bind the social conditions in Bangladesh to remain as such. The understanding that women are housewives who should be at home is the underlying understanding of the early marriage culture in Bangladesh. Thus, early marriage will hamper the education of the younger generation as there is a tendency not to continue their education. Furthermore, the exploitation of children through child labour will not stop if the government is not strict in enforcing the law because it is supported by the lower cost of child labour. According to ILO, there are 3.2 million child labourers in Bangladesh, providing a social class contrast. In relation to the poverty that is the basis of child labour, it is also a challenge for the said organisations to provide the best solution because it neglects children in the education sector (Hutabarat & Tjarsono, 2017, p. 1). Bangladeshi children who become workers are vulnerable to violence, harassment, and other human rights violations by the Bourgeoisie (Mauredyta, 2022) in addition to the people who are supposed to protect them as the author has written above. This is also a factor in the lack of fulfilment of human rights in the field of education because it is undeniable that cases like this will have a negative influence on their physical and mental growth which can significantly hinder education.

Furthermore, the ILO confirmed that they have been working to stop child labour in Bangladesh since 1994. The ILO also sees that the work done by children is work that should not be done so this is one of the factors that attract international attention. Children are vulnerable to health and mental problems caused by the type of work they do. This can indirectly hamper their education which ends in the quality



of human resources that are less educated. In this regard, there is an ILO convention on the worst forms of child labour (1999) which was signed by the government of Bangladesh in 2001 to achieve its goal of stopping child labour as it negatively affects all aspects of social life. In addition, the Government of Bangladesh has also ratified the ILO convention number 138 on limiting the minimum age for entering the workforce. Bangladesh needs to put concrete practices in place to face this challenge by legally ensuring that no child labour is allowed for commercial purposes (ILO). While law enforcement and advocacy in Bangladesh still need a strong international push, the local government has been working to stop child labour and fulfil their human rights to education and healthcare. Meanwhile, the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), a convention for the protection of children's rights, was ratified by the government of Bangladesh in 1990. In this regard, the government undertook legal reforms to align its national laws with the UNCRC such as the National Child Policy 2011 and the Children Act 2013 in addition to initiating legislation for child protection that prevents exploitation.

Government programmes and policies to protect children's rights

In order to protect children's rights in Bangladesh, the government of Bangladesh has implemented several policies and measures. The Ministry of Women and Children's Affairs in Bangladesh spearheads the implementation of all policies related to children's rights. Reportedly, this ministry is developing a policy related to early childhood development. Under the National Child Policy of 2011, a comprehensive policy framework for the promotion and protection of children has also been provided. This is one of the main policy bases that reflects the CRC principles more explicitly than the 1994 policy (Mohajan, 2014). The Children Act 2013 legislates on various aspects of child rights protection, including the treatment of children in the criminal justice system, protection from violence and exploitation, and the provision of care and rehabilitation for children in need. The Child Marriage Restraint Act 2017 is one policy that contradicts the high rate of early marriage in Bangladesh. This policy confirms the increase in the minimum age of marriage to 18 years old for women and 21 years old for men, and stipulates penalties for those who violate it. The high rate of child labour in Bangladesh also resulted in a 2013 amendment to the Labour Act 2006 that set a minimum age for working in various sectors as well as a ban on hazardous work for children. One policy that protects children from domestic violence is The Domestic Violence (Prevention and Protection) Act 2010. In addition, the existence of the Anti-Trafficking Act 2011 is a new policy used to dispel any kind of exploitation and provide the best way of parenting. Bangladesh's legal framework and constitution have adopted many provisions to protect children's rights in line with international standards.

The National Education Policy ratified in 2010, has become an important momentum for the development of education in Bangladesh. The main objective of the National Education Policy 2010 is to transform the education system to ensure quality education for all by focusing on human resource development and economic growth. As per the objective, there are crucial aspects in this policy. These



aspects include education for all which guarantees eight years of basic education for all children, human resource development by prioritising education to promote economic growth, modern and scientific education with the incorporation of Information and Communications Technology (ICT) to cope with global development, eradication of socio-economic discrimination, development of leadership and skills as a contribution to the advancement of pro-people development, establishment of a uniform curriculum and textbooks to ensure equal opportunities for all children, integration of ICT in education to build a knowledge-driven and digital Bangladesh, and expansion of primary and secondary education to develop vocational skills in students (Ministry of Education Bangladesh, 2010, pp. 1–6); Iqbal and Nasrullah, 2018, p. 62). The National Education Policy 2010, which was considered a significant step in advancing education in Bangladesh, faced challenges in its implementation. The policy has been criticised for its ineffective implementation process in the field and its contribution to the National Human Resource Development (NHRD) is considered alarming (Iqbal & Nasrullah, 2018, p. 70). The success of this policy is influenced by the willingness and ability of the government and educational institutions to implement its rules effectively. However, the National Education Policy 2010 marked a significant change in education in Bangladesh by recognising the importance of education in developing human resources and promoting economic growth.

Another comprehensive framework that was ratified the following year is the National Children Policy, that aims to ensure the welfare and protection of children in the country (Ministry of Women and Children Affairs Bangladesh, 2011, p. 4). Adopted in 2011, the policy applies to all children regardless of age, gender, religion, occupation, social identity, region or minor ethnic group. Its key principles include guaranteeing children's rights in accordance with the Bangladesh Constitution, the Children's Act, and International Charters/Conventions, alleviating poverty among children, and eliminating all forms of violence and discrimination, including those targeting girls (Ministry of Women and Children Affairs Bangladesh, 2011, p. 11). The policy also emphasises children's participation in decision-making processes and acceptance of their views in protection and planning. The main objective of the policy is to ensure the best development and growth for children through standardised services in education, health, nutrition, security, recreation, and other rights (Ministry of Women and Children Affairs Bangladesh, 2011, p. 4). Initiatives are taken to expand facilities for girls, disabled children, and children with special needs, as well as create an educational and child-friendly environment that fosters patriotism, honesty, and responsibility. The policy also encourages scientific curiosity among children, ensures a pleasant family environment, and makes necessary legislative provisions to realise children's rights. The implementation of this policy falls under the responsibility of Bangladesh's Ministry of Women and Children Affairs, which runs various programmes and initiatives to ensure the rehabilitation of poor and deprived children, reduce child labour, prohibit the exploitation of children for political purposes, and provide educational and recreational opportunities for their physical and mental development.



In addition to enacting the two policies above, the Bangladeshi government is also working with UNICEF to address education issues and create a child-friendly environment in the country. One such collaboration is the handover of 110 child-friendly classrooms to the Government of Bangladesh by UNICEF, benefiting more than 8,000 children in Cox's Bazar (UNICEF, 2022, p. Xinhua, 2022). In addition, UNICEF supported NGOs to provide education to 16,260 out-of-school children (55% girls) in 2019 using the accelerated ability-based learning (ABAL) model (UNICEF, 2019, p. 2). In an effort to improve early childhood education, UNICEF initiated an integrated ECD programme in collaboration with the government in the Chittagong Hill Tracts, reaching more than 45,400 children (34% girls) with early learning and pre-primary education through para-centres in 2019 (UNICEF, 2019, p. 3). The Government of Bangladesh also used the School Level Improvement Plan (SLIP) to provide grants to 64,300 schools serving more than 15 million children. UNICEF supported this effort by revising guidelines to emphasise safety and risk reduction in schools. In the area of curriculum development, the National Curriculum and Textbook Board (NCTB) developed the first comprehensive curriculum framework in Bangladesh, integrating life skills, child safety, sexual and reproductive health and rights, gender, climate change, and formative assessment, with support from UNICEF (UNICEF, 2019, p. 3). In teacher training, UNICEF and the National Academy of Basic Education partnered to revise the Basic Education Diploma Programme, the main training programme for primary school teachers, to ensure they are equipped to implement the new curriculum. In addition, UNICEF is supporting education services in humanitarian settings, including in Cox's Bazar, where schools are teaching about climate change and continuing education for 54,000 disaster-affected children (UNICEF, 2019, p. 4). In the area of private sector engagement, UNICEF established a private sector engagement and resource mobilisation team to support private sector integration into its country programme, with over 100 ready-made garment companies engaged in integrating children's rights into their operations (UNICEF, 2019, p. 6). This collaboration demonstrates the commitment of the Bangladesh government and UNICEF to improving education and creating a child-friendly environment in the country.

Towards a liveable childhood

Addressing the problem of child abuse in Bangladesh lacks maximum effect so the government needs to consider more effective solutions. While Bangladesh's legal framework and constitution have adopted many provisions to protect children's rights in line with international standards. For implementation challenges require further efforts, including increased public awareness, stronger law enforcement, and provision of adequate support services for children. With collaboration between the government, civil society and the international community, Bangladesh can continue to improve the situation of child rights protection and ensure that every child has the opportunity to grow and develop optimally. Quoting Mohajan (2014, pp. 234–235), there are several suggestions in his article to overcome the problem.



First and foremost (1), the government should address the root causes of the problem such as education, poverty, and other primary services for the community to support the reduction of child abuse. Broadly speaking, the Bangladeshi government has done well in reducing poverty in recent decades. However, issues such as poverty, education, social awareness, and expectations still drive 3.45 million children aged five to seventeen in Bangladesh to work (ChildHope, 2024). Many of these working children spend time on the streets; joining homeless children who are forced to live on the streets. UNICEF (2022) posted data that these street-dwelling children are in high numbers and 82.9% of them experience violence and sexual harassment by the community with 49.8% of them experienced in the workplace. The second solution (2) suggests that children especially those who live on the street (either for work or as a place to live) should be subsidised and compensated for basic rights such as education, health, shelter, and food. The stated data also states that 71.8% of these children have difficulties in reading or writing. This structural problem is indeed like an endless circle that is linked to poverty, lack of education, other infrastructure in life so that these children cannot improve their lives. The UNICEF study (2024, p. 30) shows that children who have to work in Bangladesh are indeed affected by poverty so that they cannot go to school to get training and a good mindset for their future or to pay for health care for their sick parents.

The third solution (3) suggests that the Bangladesh government needs to utilise media such as films and videos as well as seminars to raise public awareness in eradicating these structural problems that massively affect children. UNICEF (2023) has previously worked on this programme by organising a recording process for children living on the streets. The aim is to gain public empathy through the delivery of messages from these children to the wider public through social media. Through this programme, the children were introduced to a new learning curve in video making as well as gaining empathy from the wider public to increase protection and support from the community. The important role of educational media is not only in the problem of street children but also other problems affecting children, such as child trafficking. The fourth solution (4) requires the government to increase prevention in the form of educative media. Whilst actively increasing its border protection and establish a security apparatus that actively tackles the problem of trafficking both inside and to outside of the country. Children Rights Foundation (2019) revealed that child trafficking in Bangladesh is often carried out by coercion and around 40,000 to 50,000 children and young women are victims abroad and tens of thousands more are trafficked domestically. The United Nation Human Rights (2022) feels that Bangladesh should indeed step up efforts to prevent and combat human trafficking by promoting the protection of victims.

The final solution (5) further emphasises the government's role in tackling the problems that is the protection of children from discrimination, violence, exploitation, and creating a safe environment for victims to return to society. According to a report by World Vision International (WVI) (2019, p. 4)



laws issued by the Bangladeshi government have not been able to cover all forms of discrimination against children. Laws related to sexual violence, for example, are unable to protect children under the age of majority from sexual violence in child marriages or fully exempt children from sexual exploitation from child trafficking. In addition, Bangladesh's laws still fail to protect children from exploitation and discrimination from developmentally damaging work. This is because the law is limited to work that interferes with children's education and some hazardous work without protecting children from almost all work that damages children's physical, mental and social development. The previous statement refers to the sixth solution that states should develop their laws regarding the exploitation of children in employment and protect them from all forms of occupational violence and ultimately stop all forms of child labour outside of the law. These things can be done by revising the existing laws to be more detailed to the problems that exist in Bangladesh. In addition, there is a need for rules that can strictly help the community, especially children, to report cases that can be responded to properly by security forces and increase prevention measures and public awareness of child abuse (WVI, 2019, pp. 5-8).

CONCLUSION

Bangladesh itself is still classified as having major problems in fulfilling children's rights. Therefore, Bangladesh has gradually formed co-operation and unity in child protection such as Domestic Violence (Prevention and Protection) Act 2010 and Anti Trafficking Act 2011. However, structural problems such as poverty, lack of education, and public awareness are at the core of child abuse and exploitation in Bangladesh. The most dominant problems include child labour, child trafficking, and sexual and physical abuse of children. Awareness of these problems has led international organisations to take a role in addressing them, such as the Bangladeshi government's partnership with UNICEF. However, these efforts still show minimal activity as there are still challenges in resolving these cases in Bangladesh. Therefore, there is still room for suggestions and solutions from experts such as revising regulations and tightening laws as well as preventive measures that need to be followed up by the government. These solutions are expected to overcome cases of child rights violations in Bangladesh.

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