



Our Story

Child Led Alternative Report

(Short version)

Child Rights Situation of Bangladesh
In Response to 5th State Party Report, Bangladesh
March 2013



Background and methodology

The National Children's Task Force (NCTF) is a nationwide organization for children in Bangladesh with networks in all 64 districts. This dynamic child led organization, which started in 2003, has approximately 25,000 members who engage in both local and national advocacy to improve the situation for children.

Since 2010 NCTF members have monitored the child rights situation all over the country under the project titled “Our Reports Towards Our Bangladesh (ORTOB)” with the ultimate aim to develop an alternative report to submit to the Child Rights Committee in Geneva.

256 child researchers from 64 Districts (2 girls and 2 boys from each District) received training and have collected information on the child rights situation in their own areas. Additionally 80 child facilitators collected information from children from socially disadvantaged communities such as child laborers, indigenous children, *Dalit*, *Bede* (gypsy) communities, children of sex workers, street children, children from *Haor* and *Char* (shoal areas), and children from cyclone (*Aila* and *Sidr*) affected areas.

The child researchers collected data corresponding to the different sections of the UN Child Rights Convention, UNCRC. They used various methods including case studies, stories, group discussions and newspaper reports about child rights published in local and national newspapers. Based on the information collected from July 2010 to December 2012 NCTF members prepared and published 4 issues of “Our Story” book. These are the basis of the Child Led Alternative Report.

Observation and Finding

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**Civil Rights
and Freedom**

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**Family Environment and
Alternative Care**

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**Basic Health and
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**Education, Leisure and
Cultural Activities**

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**Special Safety and
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Birth registration and physical punishment

Children are still admitted in some public and private schools without providing their birth registration certificate. Also it has not been possible to combat child labour due to lack of birth certificate for every child. In most of the cases, the employer does not ensure the child has birth certificate when providing job to them.

Despite the Government's strict order to stop physical punishment, it has not been possible to stop the physical punishment of children completely. Many children, especially children with disabilities, working children, and students of some schools and Madrasha are still subjected to physical punishment. Children residing in children homes (Shishu Paribar) and adolescent development centers still continue to receive physical punishment.

Recommendations

- Submission of Birth Registration Certificate should be mandatory during admission in all primary schools. Employers should ensure all children working for them have birth registration certificate. Mobile birth registration booth needs to be established as quickly as possible.
- The government should prioritize the consideration of recommendations made in the concluding observations to stop physical punishment in school. Also, the government needs to formulate laws and implement them appropriately along with developing effective campaigns, and awareness programs to stop physical punishment in schools. The government should strongly monitor Shishu Paribar (Children Home) to stop physical punishment.



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Family Environment and Alternative Care

The government's initiatives are inadequate and even those initiatives are project-based. Children living in shelter homes or outside of family environment suffer from different kinds of physical and mental abuse.

Children separated from parents, abuse and neglect

Children living on the street suffer more than others. In most of the cases, they live in the worst condition having no proper food and are vulnerable to different kinds of physical and mental abuse. The government's initiatives are inadequate and even those initiatives are project-based. Children living in shelter homes or outside of family environment suffer from different kinds of physical and mental abuse. Children confront abuse and neglect within the family by their parents, stepmother, relatives and neighbors. Apart from violence in the family, children also feel unsafe when their parents fight.



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Recommendations

- The law barring a child below 14 years to be employed as domestic worker should be enforced and more effort is needed to ensure its implementation. The government should introduce a special education system for children compelled to engage in income generating activities. The special education system should include reintegration of working children into mainstream schools.



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"I don't know what age is called an early age, but in our area boys and girls are usually married off at the age between 8-14 years"

Early marriage and drug abuse

Girl children continue to be victims of early marriage as the rate of dowry increases with her age. The practice prevails mostly in rural areas, slums, and remote or hard to reach areas i.e. Char areas. According to a survey conducted by an NGO, 65% of adolescents (both female and male) are victims of early and forced marriage (30 June 2012, Page 16, the Daily Jugantor; Our Story, January-June 2012). Early marriage is a regular phenomenon in some areas of Bangladesh. A child from such an area said, "*I don't know what age is called an early age, but in our area boys and girls are usually married off at the age between 8-14 years (Our Story, January-June 2012, Page 24).*" There is weakness in enforcement of laws related to early marriage. In most cases, persons involved in childhood marriage are almost never penalized. At least 24 reports on resistance against early marriage were published in 6 national and local newspapers during July- December 2011. Only one report mentioned the punishment of a person involved in facilitating early marriage. Many times these early marriages take place in front of people involved in law enforcement agencies and they tacitly support such marriages. (Our Story, July-December 2011).

The "Campaign for Clean Air" conducted a survey and found 43.67% of smokers in the country began smoking in childhood. Children usually start smoking as fun and then become addicted to drugs. (Our Story, January-June 2012). Children are involved in drug peddling, as well as drug use. In most of the cases, the age of children drug users' ranges from 8 to 17. Drug dealers use children to sell and traffic drugs. Sometimes children become involved in it unknowingly, but often they do it for money. Children of poor families living near cross country borders work as drug carriers.

Recommendations

- The government should enhance the stipend program (*Upa-britti*) for girls as girls are the main victims of child marriage. The stipend should not be allocated only on the basis of merit but it should also focus on disadvantaged children. There should be an enhanced campaign against early and forced marriage especially in the hard to reach areas of the country. Awareness raising programs are needed among people involved in facilitating early marriage (e.g. marriage registrar, UP Members). Birth registration should be ensured. The law related to childhood marriage needs to be updated.
- The government and non-government agencies need to take proper measures to stop children being used in drug peddling. Separate rehabilitation centers for children addicted to drugs need to be established.

Children with disability

The Government of Bangladesh (GoB) Report stated that children with disabilities are being admitted in general school, but in reality children with disabilities face a lot of barriers to get admission in mainstream schools. There is a lack of suitable infrastructure at schools. A physically challenged child participant shared her experience saying ***she has been refused admission by at least 5-6 well known schools in Dhaka. "I am studying in a reputed English medium school in Dhaka. There is no toilet facility for children with special needs. Due to this, every day in school I have to spend 5 hours without drinking water and not using the toilet", she said.***

According to our research, many guardians reported abuse against disabled students in schools. Many guardians are removing their children from these schools due to physical abuse (Our Story, July-December 2011). Funds provided to address disability issues are



not spent for the right purpose, rather they are misused due to the lack of clarity on disability issues at policy level and amongst the general population. The government does not have any authentic information on number of children with disabilities. Children with disabilities are deprived of their right to education due to an absence of specialized materials and books required for them. Students of general schools receive their books at the beginning of the year, but students with special needs do not get their books until the middle of the year. They have to wait for a long time and need to pay extra money even if they get their books.



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Recommendations

- The government needs to conduct a survey to ascertain the number of children with a disability, including the types and causes of disability. The GoB and other stakeholders need to ensure infrastructural facilities for them in public places including all transport, bathrooms, stairs, and lifts. The GoB should issue a directive to schools to arrange ramps for students with disabilities, and/or to locate classes for students with disabilities on the ground floor.

Road accident, general and adolescents health services

Road accidents are one of the major reasons of the unnatural death of the children in Bangladesh but the government report did not mention it.

Children from ethnic minority groups, children with disabilities and children from remote areas are discriminated against when accessing basic health care facilities. A UNICEF report reveals there are many areas of Bangladesh where health care during the pregnancy period is inadequate and some citizens have not seen a health worker even in their whole life.

Rema of Sribardi, Sherpur relates a similar story. Rema is the mother of four children, two of whom died in their infancy. The first child died within two days of birth while the second one died after one and a half month. Rema said, "I do not know any field worker of family planning office until now. I have no idea where they come from and what they do." (The Daily Jugantor, 27 May 2012).

Health advice is very important during adolescence. All our physical and mental changes take place at this point in time. In many cases we cannot accept the changes we face and think we are experiencing some problems or disease. There is no facility, time, or opportunity in the hospitals to discuss reproductive health issues and problems related to adolescence. Teachers at schools do not discuss the issues/chapters in books related to the problems of adolescence and reproductive health.

Recommendations

- The government must take measures to increase awareness on preventing road accidents and road safety. Laws should be enforced to stop anyone driving a vehicle without certification. Traffic laws should be strict and transport businesses should be encouraged to employ skilled drivers. The government must be vigilant in repairing roads regularly.
- The government needs to take measures to ensure health services for the most vulnerable children in the country, especially the children from *Char* land, *Haor* (it is wetland ecosystem in the North Eastern part of Bangladesh) and Chittagong Hill Tracts.
- All the health services measures taken by the government for adolescents need to be publicized. Teachers need to be trained appropriately to discuss the chapters in text books on the problems of adolescence and reproductive health. These should be included in the regular curriculum.

Quality of education, drop out, material of education and infrastructure, leisure, recreation and cultural activities

Though the dropout rate is decreased, in some areas it still prevails due to poverty, lack of physical security and early marriage. The Ministry of Education has taken a 'Zero Tolerance Policy' to stop sexual abuse but girls are still abused in educational institutions. Many children stopped going to school due to sexual abuse while many commit suicide because of eve teasing. Socially disadvantaged and marginalized children are more victimized than other children.

A Gypsy (*Bede*) child stated, **“we have seen sexual abuse on the roads, markets, Para (neighborhood), school-college and even in our own home.”** A child of a sex worker told, **“When we go to school or to other places by road, even the little boys say that we live in 'home' (brothel). We feel so bad, when they look at us differently, and they misbehave with us by indicating our social identity (Our Story, January-June 2012)”**.



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The majority of academic institutions are failing to provide quality education. In many cases it was seen that teachers are not providing proper lessons within the classroom and are encouraging students to take private tuition with them. Discrimination exists among different geographical areas in regard to get opportunity and quality of education. The infrastructure of academic institutions in remote areas is very vulnerable and it is almost impossible to provide and receive quality education there. In many cases, there are separate toilets for the boys and girls, but no management to keep them usable. Indigenous children are still required to take the 5th grade board examination in Bangla compromising their right to learn in their own language (Source: Representative of Bandarban at the session of 9th Child Parliament).

There is a shortage of equipment for indoor games in many schools. There is often no facility or meager facility of sports and games for the girls. There is no play ground in the cities. The school libraries suffer from a lack of resources. Marginalized children do not have any opportunity to take part in cultural training programs and other programs delivered by the Bangladesh Shishu Academy.

Recommendations

- The government's school feeding and mid-day meal program needs to be expanded in order to stop children dropping out of school. An alternative education system needs to be introduced in flood affected areas during floods to ensure children continue their education.
- The term sexual abuse should be used instead of “eve teasing”. The government should provide training to the teachers to become more sensitive and responsive towards the rights of the children.
- Increased budget allocation for education is needed to improve attendance of the children from hill and coastal areas and also to improve the infrastructure to ensure the quality of education.
- Quality entertainment systems need to be arranged in schools. The Bangladesh Shishu Academy, whose responsibility it is to provide support for the mental growth and talent of the children, is active in all the districts. It should be more active and increase communication with local schools. The government can support local theatres and cultural organizations to take effective steps for children.



Khadiza was admitted in the hospital after suffering severe injury from physical torture by her employer. Grimacing with pain, she said, “I will never go to Dhaka. They used to beat me if I couldn't do the work. They had given me rice only twice in 4 days”

Child labor, street children, sexual exploitation and abuse, sale of children and trafficking, and arrest, detention and imprisonment of children

The under aged children are still engaged in different hazardous works. The age of the child laborers ranges from 7 to 17 years. Children without parents engage in child labor due to poverty (Our Story, July-December 2011). A huge number of children work as domestic workers and often become victims of torture and abuse sometimes leading them to fatal injury. In some cases, the domestic workers even died due to severe torture and injury.

Khadiza was a domestic worker in a house in Dhaka and she was admitted in the hospital after suffering severe injury from physical torture by her employer. Grimacing with pain, she said, “I will never go to Dhaka. They used to beat me if I couldn't do the work. They had given me rice only twice in 4 days (the daily Kaler Kantho, 14 February 2012).”

The government Report mentioned pre-primary schools without any specific information about whether the children living in street are receiving the services. The government introduced mandatory primary education in 1992, but there is no impact on the children living in streets (Our Story, January-June 2012). Around 250,000 children are involved in begging in the capital and many of them are also involved with violence and theft. Many of them are drug addicts too (the Daily Jugantor, 29 August 2011, page 3). These children are very often exploited and tortured by the brokers or middlemen. **A case study sent by a Child Researcher mentioned the brokers take away majority of daily earning by children living in street. According to our research, 51% of street children are being scolded and are victims of abuse by others. At least, 20% of children suffer from physical torture and 46% of girls are the victims of sexual abuse and torture. Overall 14.5% of children living in street suffer from sexual abuse/torture (Our Story, July-December 2011).**

Sexual abuse, torture and harassment did not decrease at all in Bangladesh. According to our research, it is seen that almost all girl children are victims of physical and mental



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torture/harassment by the spoiled boys and adults in their areas. It is to be mentioned that marginalized children, especially children of sex workers and children of Gypsies and Dalits suffer the most from sexual abuse. Pornography has become a tool for sexual abuse. These incidents are happening more in the small town and rural areas than in the urban areas (Our Story, January-June 2012). The instances of sexual abuse in rural areas are sometimes settled by the perpetrators paying a minimum amount of money and sometimes by force. In most cases the perpetrators threaten the victims or the families of the victims either not to file a case or to withdraw a case already filed (Our Story, January-June 2012).

Trafficking of girl child is alarming. At least, 86 girl children were kidnapped from different areas in the country during the 6 months from January-June 2012. It is assumed that most of these kidnapped children have been trafficked to India and the Middle East to be used in sex business. Even children are kidnapped to be used as sex workers within the country. At least 500 among the 4,000 sex workers in the Daulatdia brothel are children. Most of them were trafficked to the brothel by the pimps (Our Story, January-June 2012).

We found different problems related to children in prisons, juvenile justice and also with rehabilitation centers. For example, news analysis of the 6 national dailies revealed that 3 children were arrested by the police and charged of theft, while they were aged only 7, 8 and 10 years. Police tortured them severely.

Recommendations

- It is necessary to implement the steps taken by the government immediately to combat child labour. A separate law should be formulated for domestic workers. Children should be employed in different professions according to their age. An evening school system needs to be established for working children.
- A survey is needed to find out the causes of increased number of children living in street as the number is increasing regularly. The government must take bigger measures to ensure health, education and shelter for children living in street as the project based activities are not sufficient.
- The government has to come forward to reduce sexual abuse. This could be stopped if law enforcing agencies, administration, people's representatives and the politicians take effective steps against perpetrators. Awareness among parents, schoolteachers and others is also required. A separate hot line number needs to be introduced for children allowing all children to utilize it.
- Children should not be kept with adult inmates in prisons and should be kept in the Adolescent Development Centers to bring them back to a normal life.

Reference

- Child rights situation report "Our Story", July- December 2010; published by Our Report towards Our Bangladesh (ORTOB), Save the Children in Bangladesh, March 2011
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