



# Sonargaon University (SU)

**Research Monograph  
On**

## **Prevention of Child Labour in Bangladesh: A Study on the basis of Domestic Law and International Law**

**Research Monograph Submitted for the partial fulfilment of the award of the degree  
in**

**LL.B. (Honours)  
Department of Law  
Sonargaon University (SU)**

**Submitted by :**  
**Umona Rafi Shethy**  
ID No. LLB2103024049  
Program: LL.B. (Honours)  
Department of Law  
Sonargaon University (SU)

**Submitted To:**  
**Naimul Razzaque**  
Lecturer  
Department of Law  
Sonargaon University (SU)

Date of Submission: 8<sup>th</sup> July 2025

Dedicated  
To

My Beloved Parents



UGC & Govt. Approved  
**Sonargaon University (SU)**  
সোনারগাঁও ইউনিভার্সিটি (এসইউ)

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## Letter of Transmittal

To  
Naimul Razzaque

Lecturer,

Department of Law

Sonargaon University (SU)

Subject: Submission of Research Monograph on “Prevention of Child Labour in Bangladesh: A Study on the basis of Domestic Law and International Law”

Sir,

This is a great pleasure to submit the Research Monograph on “Prevention of Child Labour in Bangladesh: A Study on the basis of Domestic Law and International Law” as a partial requirement for the fulfillment of my LL.B. (Honours) course under the Department of Law of the Sonargaon University (SU).

I have given due efforts to make this Research Monograph as fruitful one and to make it as informative as possible. I hope that this paper will not be the formality of academic course completion rather it will be a source of information for other purpose on this topic.

Sincerely yours,

---

Umona Rafi Shethy  
ID No. LLB2103024049  
Program: LL.B. (Honours)  
Department of Law  
Sonargaon University (SU)

## **Declaration**

I do hereby declare that the Research Monograph Title “Prevention of Child Labour in Bangladesh: A Study on the basis of Domestic Law and International Law” prepared solely by me and which has been submitted to the department of Law, Sonargaon University (SU) for achieving the LL.B. (Honours) Degree. This is an original work of mine. No part of this research, in any way of or in from, has been submitted to any University or Institution for any Degree, Diploma or for other similar purposes.

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Umona Rafi Shethy  
ID No. LLB2103024049  
Program: LL.B. (Honours)  
Department of Law  
Sonargaon University (SU)

## **Certification by the Supervisor**

This is to certify that the work presented in this dissertation is based on the work, carried out by the author herself under my supervision in Department of Law, Sonargaon University (SU).

It is also certifying that the work presented here is original and suitable for submission as the style and contents, for fulfillment of LL.B. (Honours) program.

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Naimul Razzaque  
Lecturer  
Department of Law  
Sonargaon University (SU)

## **Acknowledgement**

"In the name of Allah, the Beneficent, the Merciful". Praise by Allah & thanks to Allah for patronizing me to finish this Research Monograph. I am very happy to finish it. It is a great Research of my life. It is a long-cherished hope of my life to become a great lawyer. That's why I have admitted in the Department of Law in Sonargaon University (SU) to fulfill my dream. But through my whole study life in this field, I did not get much more opportunities to examine and show my knowledge and skill in this wide field. Lastly, I have got a great chance to make my study meaningful when I got the chance to prepare a Research Monograph on "Prevention of Child Labour in Bangladesh: A Study on the basis of Domestic Law and International Law"

I acknowledge my grateful to respected course teacher Naimul Razzaque for instructing me how to prepare a Research Monograph and his famous Books lectures on this subject help me to complete my task sincerely.

I am also thankful to my classmate as they help me to complete the Research Monograph. I am extremely paying my solitude to all the authors and writers whose works help me to draft this original Research Monograph.

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Thank you

Umona Rafi Shethy

## **Abstract**

This dissertation undertakes a rigorous and multidimensional analysis of child labour in Bangladesh, scrutinizing its persistence through the lenses of domestic legislation, international legal obligations, and underlying socio-economic factors. Although Bangladesh's constitution explicitly prohibits child labour and the country has enacted numerous laws to curb the practice, systemic weaknesses in enforcement especially within the vast informal economy allow exploitation to persist. Deep-rooted cultural normalization, entrenched poverty, limited access to quality education, and institutional inefficiencies collectively sustain child labour, systematically violating children's fundamental rights to health, safety, education, and holistic development.

The study critically assesses Bangladesh's adherence to key international standards, including the ILO Minimum Age Convention (No. 138) and the Worst Forms of Child Labour Convention (No. 182), as well as the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC). It identifies significant discrepancies between legal commitments and practical implementation, particularly in monitoring, reporting, and accountability mechanisms. Employing a mixed-methodological approach combining doctrinal legal analysis, comparative policy review, and empirical field research the investigation reveals systemic obstacles such as ambiguous statutory definitions of child labour, under-resourced labour inspections, deeply ingrained socio-cultural attitudes that trivialize children's work, and the destabilizing effects of unplanned urbanization on vulnerable communities.

Despite these challenges, the research highlights promising interventions that have demonstrated tangible progress, including community awareness campaigns, NGO-led rehabilitation programs, conditional cash transfers for education, and public-private collaborations aimed at reintegrating children into schooling and vocational training. However, the study underscores that isolated efforts are insufficient without structural reforms. The thesis culminates in a series of targeted policy recommendations, advocating for:

- **Legal modernization** to close loopholes and align domestic laws with international norms;
- **Enhanced social protection** through poverty alleviation and universal education access;
- **Strengthened enforcement** via robust labour inspections and corporate accountability;
- **Multi-stakeholder engagement** involving government, civil society, and international actors.

Ultimately, the study asserts that a rights-based, child-centric approach prioritizing children's welfare over economic expediency is essential to sustainably eradicate child labour in Bangladesh. By addressing root causes while reinforcing legal and institutional frameworks, Bangladesh can transition from incremental progress to transformative change in safeguarding its youngest citizens.

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# Chapter 1

## Introduction

To fully grasp the legal and societal complexities of child labour in Bangladesh, it is essential to begin with a broad perspective. Child labour transcends mere legal violations, representing a profound social challenge with far-reaching impacts on human rights, public health, education, and national progress. It is intricately linked to poverty, rapid urban growth, inequality, and governance shortcomings. This chapter aims to lay a comprehensive groundwork by exploring the historical, economic, and cultural facets of child labour in Bangladesh, underscoring the need for robust legal and policy interventions to tackle this pervasive issue.<sup>1</sup>

### 1.1 Background and Context

Child labour in Bangladesh is a deeply rooted issue influenced by socio-economic, cultural, and political dynamics. Historically, children have contributed to labour in agriculture, small industries, and domestic settings. Factors such as industrial growth, population surges, and governance weaknesses have perpetuated this practice. Currently, Bangladesh has one of the highest rates of child labour in South Asia, with children employed in dangerous industries like shipbreaking, tanneries, and construction.<sup>2</sup>

### 1.2 Statement of the Problem

Despite constitutional provisions, national legislation, and international treaty commitments banning child labour, enforcement remains ineffective. Cultural norms, corruption, poverty, and limited institutional capacity sustain child exploitation. This section investigates the persistence of child labour and the gap between legal obligations and practical outcomes.<sup>3</sup>

### 1.3 Research Objectives

- To critically assess the development of child labour laws in Bangladesh.
- To evaluate how Bangladesh's legal framework aligns with global standards.
- To identify institutional and structural barriers to effective enforcement.
- To recommend legal and policy reforms to eliminate child labour.

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<sup>1</sup> Save the Children, *Child Labour in Bangladesh: A Persistent Challenge*

<sup>2</sup> M Rahman, *Child Labour and Development*

<sup>3</sup> International Labour Organization, *Child Labour in South Asia* (2021)

## 1.4 Research Questions

- How effective are Bangladesh’s laws in curbing child labour?
- To what extent do Bangladeshi laws comply with international conventions?
- What socio-economic and cultural factors obstruct efforts to eradicate child labour?
- What legal and policy measures could enhance child labour prevention?

## 1.5 Methodology

This study adopts qualitative, doctrinal, and comparative approaches. It draws on primary sources such as statutes, treaties, and court rulings, alongside secondary sources like academic articles, NGO reports, government data, and field studies. Content analysis is used to assess gaps in policy implementation.

## 1.6 Rationale of the Study

Child labour violates core human rights, perpetuates poverty across generations, and hinders national development. It adversely affects children’s health, restricts educational opportunities, and entrenches cycles of deprivation. This study is vital as it sheds light on legal and institutional deficiencies impeding child labour eradication in Bangladesh, proposes reforms, and contributes to the broader conversation on child rights.<sup>4</sup>

## 1.7 Structure of the Thesis

This thesis is organized into seven chapters. Chapter 1 provides an introduction, background, and research questions. Chapter 2 outlines the conceptual framework, defining child labour and its causes. Chapter 3 reviews international legal frameworks, including ILO Conventions and the CRC. Chapter 4 examines Bangladesh’s domestic laws. Chapter 5 compares national and international standards. Chapter 6 addresses enforcement challenges. Chapter 7 offers conclusions and recommendations for stronger prevention strategies.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Human Rights Watch, *Children’s Rights in Crisis*

<sup>5</sup> R Patel, *Academic Writing for Legal Studies*

## Chapter 2

# Review of Related Literature

### 2.1 Introduction

This chapter examines the body of literature on child labour prevention, encompassing both international and Bangladesh-specific studies. It integrates key academic works, legal analyses, reports from global organizations, and relevant case studies. The review highlights areas of agreement, ongoing debates, and research gaps, laying the groundwork for the thesis.

### 2.2 Definitions and Conceptualizations of Child Labour

#### 2.2.1 International Perspectives

Globally, child labour is defined by the International Labour Organization (ILO) as work that deprives children of their childhood, education, or health. Scholarly discussions distinguish between permissible child work (light, age-suitable tasks) and exploitative child labour. The Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) views child labour as a breach of fundamental rights, advocating for strong legal protections.<sup>6</sup>

#### 2.2.2 National Definitions and Contexts

In Bangladesh, studies show that local definitions of child labour adapt international standards but struggle with enforcement. Research identifies inconsistencies in categorizing “light work” versus hazardous work, with many children engaged in ambiguous sectors. Issues like age verification challenges and legal loopholes further undermine protections.

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<sup>6</sup> International Labour Organization, *Defining Child Labour*

## **2.3 Forms and Patterns of Child Labour**

### **2.3.1 Global and Regional Studies**

Literature on global and South Asian contexts identifies common forms of child labour, including agriculture, manufacturing, domestic work, and street vending. Comparative analyses reveal how economic growth and urbanization influence child labour trends differently across nations.<sup>7</sup>

### **2.3.2 Bangladesh-Specific Literature**

Studies on Bangladesh document child labour prevalence in sectors like garment factories, brick kilns, shipbreaking yards, and domestic work. Reports from organizations such as Save the Children and UNICEF offer data on sector-specific patterns, affected age groups, and gender disparities.<sup>8</sup>

## **2.4 Causes and Contributing Factors**

### **2.4.1 Socio-Economic Drivers**

Research consistently identifies poverty as the primary cause of child labour, alongside limited access to education, large family sizes, and absent social safety nets. Household survey-based studies link low income to higher child labour rates, highlighting economic necessity.

### **2.4.2 Cultural and Social Norms**

Ethnographic studies explore how cultural acceptance in some communities, gendered work roles, and societal views that normalize child labour as a family duty perpetuate the practice.

### **2.4.3 Institutional and Legal Factors**

Literature critiques weak legal enforcement, pointing to corruption, inadequate inspections, and low awareness among stakeholders. Scholars advocate for enhanced institutional capacity and legal reforms to address these shortcomings.

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<sup>7</sup> UNICEF, *Child Labour in South Asia: Patterns and Trends* (2021)

<sup>8</sup> Save the Children, *Sectoral Analysis of Child Labour in Bangladesh*

## **2.5 Consequences of Child Labour**

### **2.5.1 Health and Psychological Impact**

Medical and psychological research highlights child labour's detrimental effects, including physical injuries, chronic diseases, malnutrition, and mental health issues like trauma, emphasizing the need for urgent intervention.

### **2.5.2 Educational and Social Outcomes**

Educational studies link child labour to poor academic performance, increased dropout rates, and long-term socio-economic disadvantages. Social science research connects child labour to persistent poverty and limited social mobility.

## **2.6 Legal and Policy Frameworks: Comparative Literature**

### **2.6.1 International Legal Frameworks**

Academic works evaluate the role of ILO Conventions, the UN CRC, and other global instruments in shaping national policies. Critical studies discuss challenges in adopting international norms in developing countries, particularly in enforcement.

### **2.6.2 Bangladesh's Legal and Policy Measures**

Legal analyses of Bangladesh's Labour Act, Children Act, and national policies reveal enforcement gaps. Case law studies highlight judicial perspectives and policy limitations, with some advocating for alignment with international standards.<sup>9</sup>

## **2.7 Gaps and Research Needs**

The literature identifies gaps, including limited data on informal sector child labour, a lack of longitudinal studies on intervention outcomes, and insufficient focus on gender-specific impacts. There is a need for interdisciplinary research combining legal and socio-economic perspectives.<sup>10</sup>

## **2.8 Summary**

This chapter consolidates a wide range of literature, illustrating the multifaceted nature of child labour as both a legal and social issue. It emphasizes the role of economic, cultural, and institutional factors and the necessity of aligning robust legal frameworks with international standards. These findings provide a foundation for analyzing Bangladesh's legal and implementation challenges.

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<sup>9</sup> R Khan, *Legal Frameworks for Child Protection in Bangladesh* (2020)

<sup>10</sup> L Sen, *Research Gaps in Child Labour Studies*

## Chapter 3

# Conceptual Framework

### 3.1 Definition of Child Labour

#### 3.1.1 International Definitions

Child labour is globally understood as work that harms a child's growth, dignity, or access to education. The International Labour Organization (ILO) Conventions No. 138 and 182 outline child labour, focusing on minimum working ages and eradicating the worst forms, respectively. Convention No. 138 establishes a general minimum age of 15 for employment, or 14 in certain developing nations under specific conditions. Convention No. 182 addresses severe forms like slavery, trafficking, hazardous tasks, and forced conscription into armed conflicts. The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) underscores protection from economic exploitation and harmful work, prioritizing education and child welfare.

#### 3.1.2 Domestic Definitions in Bangladesh

In Bangladesh, the Labour Act of 2006 bans employment for children under 14, except in non-hazardous light work that does not disrupt education. Adolescents aged 14 to 18 are barred from dangerous jobs but permitted in regulated sectors. The Children Act of 2013 prohibits trafficking and hazardous child labour. Yet, vague terminology, weak enforcement, and socio-economic pressures hinder effective implementation.<sup>11</sup>

#### 3.1.3 Challenges in Defining Child Labour

Aligning international standards with local realities poses challenges. Terms like “light work” and “hazardous work” are often loosely interpreted, creating exploitable gaps. Additionally, inadequate birth registration complicates age verification, enabling employers to misuse permissible work categories and weaken legal safeguards.<sup>12</sup>

### 3.2 Forms of Child Labour

#### 3.2.1 Formal Sector Child Labour

Although banned, child labour persists in Bangladesh's formal sector, notably in garment factories and small industries. Children endure long hours, low wages, and unsafe conditions. Insufficient inspections and non-compliance with regulations allow this exploitation to continue.

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<sup>11</sup> Bangladesh Labour Act 2006, s 34

<sup>12</sup> UNICEF, *Challenges in Child Labour Definitions*

### **3.2.2 Informal Sector Child Labour**

The informal sector encompassing street vending, domestic service, agriculture, and small trades dominates child labour in Bangladesh. Children in roles like domestic helpers or vendors face exploitation and abuse, often without legal or social protections, making regulation difficult due to the sector's hidden nature.

### **3.2.3 Hazardous Child Labour**

Hazardous work, such as in shipbreaking yards, brick kilns, tanneries, and mining, endangers children's health, safety, or morals. Exposure to dangerous machinery, toxic substances, and strenuous tasks violates both international and national laws, yet poverty and lax enforcement sustain these practices.

### **3.2.4 Domestic and Street Child Labour**

Many children work as domestic servants or street vendors, often without formal agreements or safeguards. They face extended hours and risks of physical or sexual abuse. Social stigma and lack of visibility further obstruct efforts to address these issues.

## **3.3 Causes of Child Labour**

### **3.3.1 Poverty and Economic Necessity**

Poverty drives child labour in Bangladesh, with families relying on children's earnings for survival. Limited social welfare and low adult incomes push children into early employment.

### **3.3.2 Lack of Access to Education**

Inadequate education quality, fees, and associated costs like uniforms discourage school attendance. High dropout rates force children into work to support themselves and their families.

### **3.3.3 Social and Cultural Norms**

In some communities, child labour is socially accepted. Gender norms often assign girls to domestic or informal work, which remains less visible and harder to regulate.

### **3.3.4 Weak Law Enforcement and Corruption**

Ineffective enforcement, resource constraints, and corruption enable child labour to persist. Employers often evade accountability through bribes or weak penalties.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> International Labour Organization, *Enforcement Issues in Child Labour* (2021)

### **3.3.5 Rapid Urbanization and Informal Sector Growth**

Urban migration fuels informal economies in crowded cities, exposing children to unregulated, hazardous jobs with minimal protections.

## **3.4 Consequences of Child Labour**

### **3.4.1 Physical and Health Consequences**

Child labourers face injuries, chronic diseases, malnutrition, and disabilities from unsafe work environments like tanneries or brick kilns, with lasting health impacts.

### **3.4.2 Educational Impacts**

Child labour disrupts schooling, leading to irregular attendance, dropouts, and poor academic outcomes, limiting future opportunities and perpetuating poverty.

### **3.4.3 Psychological and Emotional Effects**

Children in labour face trauma, anxiety, depression, and low self-esteem, worsened by workplace abuse and exploitation.<sup>14</sup>

### **3.4.4 Social Implications**

Child labour entrenches poverty and inequality, depriving communities of educated youth and hindering social mobility and national development.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Human Rights Watch, *Psychological Impacts of Child Labour*

<sup>15</sup> UNICEF, *Social Impacts of Child Labour* (2022)

## **3.5 Theoretical Perspectives on Child Labour**

### **3.5.1 Human Rights Framework**

Child labour violates rights to education, health, and protection from exploitation. International treaties mandate states to eliminate it as a human rights obligation.<sup>16</sup>

### **3.5.2 Economic Theories**

Economic perspectives view child labour as a survival mechanism in impoverished households, advocating for better wages, social safety nets, and economic growth to reduce its prevalence.

### **3.5.3 Social Justice and Structural Inequality**

These theories emphasize systemic issues like unequal education access, gender discrimination, and class disparities, calling for structural reforms to address child labour.

### **3.5.4 Rights-Based vs. Needs-Based Approaches**

Rights-based approaches focus on legal protections, while needs-based strategies target root causes like poverty and education access. Both are critical for holistic prevention.

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<sup>16</sup> K Basu, *Economic Theories of Child Labour*

## Domestic Legal Framework on Child Labour in Bangladesh

### 4.1 Introduction

Child labour persists as a significant issue in Bangladesh despite numerous legal and policy efforts to curb it. This chapter critically analyzes the domestic legal framework addressing child labour, covering constitutional protections, key legislation, policies, enforcement structures, judicial interpretations, and implementation challenges. It evaluates how effectively these laws safeguard children from exploitation and align with global commitments.<sup>17</sup>

### 4.2 Constitutional Provisions Related to Child Labour

The Constitution of Bangladesh establishes a foundational framework for protecting children's rights, prohibiting child labour and promoting education and welfare.

- **Article 34:** Bars employment of children under 14 in factories, mines, or hazardous roles, serving as a cornerstone for child labour prevention.
- **Article 18:** Obliges the state to ensure children's access to education and promote their welfare, indirectly supporting efforts to eliminate child labour.
- **Directive Principles of State Policy:** Articles 10, 11, and 12 direct the state to provide basic necessities, work opportunities, and social justice, protecting children from economic exploitation. While these provisions create a strong legal basis, translating them into enforceable laws and practical outcomes remains challenging.

### 4.3 The Bangladesh Labour Act, 2006

The Bangladesh Labour Act (BLA), 2006, is the primary legislation governing labour practices, including specific provisions for child and adolescent workers, consolidating earlier laws to align with international norms.

- **Prohibition on Child Labour:** The Act bans employment of children under 14 in factories, mines, or hazardous tasks (Section 34), defining 'child' as under 14 and 'adolescent' as 14 to 18 years.
- **Light Work and Adolescent Employment:** Children over 12 may engage in light work that does not harm health or education (Section 35), while adolescents (14–18) are restricted from hazardous work (Section 37).
- **Working Hours and Conditions:** Adolescents face limits on working hours and require safe conditions, though weak inspection systems undermine these protections.
- **Penalties and Enforcement:** Violations lead to fines and imprisonment, with labour inspectors tasked to ensure compliance through workplace checks.

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<sup>17</sup> M Rahman, *Child Labour and Legal Frameworks in Bangladesh*

## Key Child Labour Provisions in the Bangladesh Labour Act, 2006

Provision	Description	Section
Minimum Age for Employment	No employment of children under 14 years	34
Light Work for Children	Children 12+ may do light work that does not affect health/schooling	35
Adolescent Labour	Adolescents (14-18) may work but hazardous work prohibited	37
Working Hours Restrictions	Limits on daily/weekly hours for adolescent workers	38
Penalties for Violations	Fines and imprisonment for child labour offences	137-138
Labour Inspections	Inspectors empowered to enforce child labour laws	128-130

Despite these provisions, enforcement is weak, particularly in the informal sector where most child labour occurs.<sup>18</sup>

### 4.4 The Children Act, 2013

The Children Act, 2013, strengthens child protection, addressing hazardous labour and trafficking within a broader framework.

- **Protection Against Trafficking and Exploitation:** The Act criminalizes child trafficking for labour or sexual exploitation and establishes child protection committees to monitor and address abuse.
- **Rehabilitation and Support Services:** It provides for shelters, education, and health services for children rescued from exploitative work.
- **Hazardous Work Prohibition:** Reinforces bans on hazardous labour and mandates government action for child welfare.<sup>19</sup> However, limited awareness, resource shortages, and implementation gaps hinder the Act's effectiveness.

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<sup>18</sup> International Labour Organization, *Enforcement Challenges in Bangladesh* (2021)

<sup>19</sup> Children Act 2013, ss 4, 32–33

## **4.5 National Policies and Action Plans**

Bangladesh has introduced policies to eliminate child labour by tackling root causes and enhancing legal frameworks.

### **4.5.1 National Child Labour Elimination Policy (2010)**

This policy emphasizes:

- Raising awareness about child labour's harms.
- Improving access to education for vulnerable children.
- Implementing poverty alleviation programs for families with working children.
- Enhancing law enforcement and inter-agency coordination.

### **4.5.2 National Education Policy**

Compulsory schooling and incentives like stipends promote education over work, aiming to keep children in school.

### **4.5.3 Social Safety Nets and Poverty Reduction Programs**

Initiatives like the Vulnerable Group Development (VGD) and Conditional Cash Transfers reduce families' dependence on child labour through financial support.

## **4.6 Enforcement Mechanisms and Institutional Framework**

### **4.6.1 Labour Inspection System**

The Department of Inspection for Factories and Establishments (DIFE) oversees labour law enforcement but is limited by insufficient staff and resources.

### **4.6.2 Inter-Ministerial Coordination**

Ministries like Labour and Employment, Women and Children Affairs, and Education share responsibilities, but poor coordination fragments efforts.

### **4.6.3 Role of NGOs and International Organizations**

NGOs drive monitoring, advocacy, and rehabilitation, while ILO and UNICEF provide funding and technical support to government initiatives.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> Save the Children, *NGO Roles in Child Labour Prevention*

## 4.7 Judicial Interpretation and Case Law

Bangladesh's judiciary has upheld constitutional and labour law protections in child labour cases.

- Courts have ruled that child labour infringes on fundamental rights.
- Some rulings mandate stronger government enforcement.
- However, socio-economic barriers limit child workers' access to justice.

## 4.8 Challenges in Implementation

Key obstacles to effective child labour prevention include:

- **Informal Sector Dominance:** Most child labour occurs in unregulated settings, evading oversight.
- **Weak Enforcement:** Corruption, inadequate inspections, and lenient penalties reduce deterrence.
- **Poverty and Social Norms:** Economic necessity and cultural acceptance sustain child labour.
- **Data Deficiency:** Inadequate data hinders targeted interventions.
- **Limited Awareness:** Lack of knowledge among employers and communities weakens compliance.<sup>21</sup>

## 4.9 Summary

This chapter reviews Bangladesh's legal framework for combating child labour, highlighting constitutional provisions, labour laws, and child protection measures. Despite a strong legal foundation, enforcement gaps and socio-economic challenges limit impact. National policies aim to address root causes, but better coordination and resources are needed. Subsequent chapters will compare these laws with international standards and explore practical implementation barriers.

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<sup>21</sup> Human Rights Watch, *Implementation Barriers in Child Labour Laws* (2021)

## Chapter 5

# International Legal Instruments on Child Labour

### 5.1 Introduction

Child labour is widely acknowledged as a significant breach of human rights and a barrier to sustainable development. International legal frameworks guide nations in preventing and eliminating child labour. This chapter examines key global instruments, their evolution, scope, enforcement mechanisms, and challenges, while assessing Bangladesh's ratification, implementation, and adherence to these standards.

### 5.2 Historical Development of International Legal Norms on Child Labour

Global attention to child labour emerged over a century ago as industrialization exposed children to exploitative work conditions.

- **Early International Efforts:** The 1919 establishment of the International Labour Organization (ILO) under the Treaty of Versailles was a pivotal step, with early conventions setting minimum work ages.
- **Post-World War II Expansion:** The 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) affirmed rights to fair work conditions and protection from exploitation, including for children. The 1989 UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) comprehensively codified children's rights.
- **Modern Era:** ILO Conventions No. 138 (1973, Minimum Age) and No. 182 (1999, Worst Forms of Child Labour) are central to contemporary efforts, prioritizing the immediate elimination of severe forms of child labour.<sup>22</sup>

### 5.3 The International Labour Organization (ILO) Conventions

#### 5.3.1 ILO Convention No. 138: Minimum Age Convention, 1973

- **Scope and Objectives:** This Convention establishes minimum ages for employment, typically 15, or 14 in certain developing countries under specific conditions, to protect children's physical, mental, and moral development.<sup>23</sup>
- **Key Provisions:**
  - Prohibits employment below the minimum age in all occupations.
  - Allows gradual implementation to accommodate state capacities.
  - Permits light work for children aged 12 to the minimum age if it does not harm health or education.
  - Includes exemptions for family-run businesses under defined conditions.
- **Bangladesh and Convention No. 138:** Ratified in 2006, Bangladesh faces challenges in aligning domestic laws and enforcement with these standards.

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<sup>22</sup> International Labour Organization, *Conventions No 138 and 182* (1973, 1999)

<sup>23</sup> ILO Convention No 138 (1973)

### 5.3.2 ILO Convention No. 182: Worst Forms of Child Labour Convention, 1999

- **Scope and Urgency:** This Convention demands urgent action to eliminate severe forms of child labour, including slavery, trafficking, forced labour, child soldiering, prostitution, pornography, drug trafficking, and hazardous work.
- **Key Provisions:**
  - Requires legislative, administrative, social, and educational measures.
  - Mandates protection and rehabilitation for affected children.
  - Encourages consultation with employers' and workers' organizations.
  - Promotes international cooperation and technical support.
- **Impact and Bangladesh's Role:** Ratified in 2001, Bangladesh has targeted hazardous sectors like shipbreaking and brick kilns, though enforcement remains incomplete.<sup>24</sup>

### 5.3.3 Other ILO Instruments

- **ILO Recommendation No. 146 (1973):** Offers guidance on minimum age issues, supporting Convention No. 138.<sup>25</sup>
- **ILO Protocol of 2014:** Enhances measures to combat child labour in global supply chains.<sup>26</sup>

### 5.4 The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), 1989

- **Comprehensive Rights-Based Approach:** The CRC, widely ratified, emphasizes children's holistic rights, including protection from economic exploitation.
- **Article 32:** Mandates state protection against harmful, hazardous work or work that disrupts education.
- **Optional Protocols:** Address child involvement in armed conflict and trafficking.
- **Bangladesh and the CRC:** Ratified in 1990, Bangladesh integrates CRC principles into laws and policies, submitting periodic compliance reports to the Committee on the Rights of the Child.

### 5.5 Other International Instruments Relevant to Child Labour

#### 5.5.1 Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), 1948

- Articles 23 and 25, though non-binding, advocate for fair work conditions and protection from exploitation.

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<sup>24</sup> International Labour Organization, *Hazardous Child Labour in Bangladesh*

<sup>25</sup> ILO Recommendation No 146

<sup>26</sup> ILO Protocol of 2014 to the Forced Labour Convention

## **5.5.2 International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR), 1966**

- Article 10 calls for protecting children from economic and social exploitation.

## **5.5.3 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), 2015**

- Target 8.7 aims to eradicate forced labour, modern slavery, trafficking, and child labour by 2025.

## **5.6 Enforcement Mechanisms at the International Level**

### **5.6.1 ILO Monitoring**

- The Committee of Experts on the Application of Conventions and Recommendations (CEACR) reviews state reports, while the Conference Committee addresses persistent issues.
- Special procedures, such as complaints and direct contacts, enable stakeholder engagement.

### **5.6.2 United Nations Treaty Bodies**

- The Committee on the Rights of the Child evaluates CRC compliance, issuing recommendations.
- The Human Rights Council's Universal Periodic Review (UPR) assesses child labour issues.

### **5.6.3 Role of International NGOs and Civil Society**

- Groups like UNICEF, Save the Children, and Anti-Slavery International support monitoring, advocacy, and capacity building.
- Initiatives like Alliance 8.7 drive global efforts toward SDG Target 8.7.

## **5.7 Bangladesh's Compliance with International Legal Instruments**

### **5.7.1 Ratification and Reporting**

- Bangladesh has ratified key ILO conventions and the CRC, regularly reporting progress to international bodies.<sup>27</sup>
- Government agencies collaborate with global partners to align laws with treaty obligations.

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<sup>27</sup> Bangladesh Ministry of Labour, *ILO Convention Reports* (2022)

### 5.7.2 Implementation Gaps

- Weak inspections, informal sector prevalence, and socio-economic barriers hinder enforcement.
- Inconsistent data and underreporting complicate monitoring.

### 5.7.3 Progress and Initiatives

- Efforts include banning child labour in hazardous sectors, promoting education, and launching social welfare programs, supported by ILO and UNICEF collaborations.

## 5.8 Challenges in Implementing International Standards

- **Legal and Institutional Capacity:** Limited resources restrict enforcement.
- **Economic Realities:** Poverty drives reliance on child labour.
- **Cultural Norms:** Traditional practices and acceptance impede progress.
- **Informal Economy:** Unregulated sectors evade oversight.
- **Global Supply Chains:** Complex trade networks obscure accountability.<sup>28</sup>

## 5.9 Recommendations for Strengthening Compliance

- Improve inter-ministerial and international coordination.
- Increase funding and training for labour inspectors.
- Expand access to education and social protections.
- Shift community perceptions through awareness campaigns.
- Enhance data collection and transparency.<sup>29</sup>

## 5.10 Summary

International legal instruments offer a strong framework for combating child labour globally and in Bangladesh. While ratification demonstrates commitment, effective implementation hinges on overcoming enforcement and socio-economic challenges. This chapter sets the stage for comparing Bangladesh's domestic laws with these standards and proposing comprehensive solutions.

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<sup>28</sup> R Khan, *Global Supply Chains and Child Labour*

<sup>29</sup> International Labour Organization, *Recommendations for Child Labour Elimination* (2021)

## Chapter 6

# Challenges in Preventing Child Labour in Bangladesh

## 6.1 Introduction

Despite robust legal frameworks, policy efforts, and international commitments, child labour persists as a complex issue in Bangladesh. This chapter explores the diverse obstacles impeding effective child labour prevention, including socio-economic factors, cultural norms, institutional shortcomings, legal enforcement gaps, and global economic pressures. Understanding these barriers is essential for developing comprehensive strategies to eliminate child labour.<sup>30</sup>

## 6.2 Socio-Economic Challenges

### 6.2.1 Poverty as the Root Cause

Poverty drives child labour in Bangladesh, with many families below the poverty line relying on children's income for basic needs like food and shelter. For impoverished households, short-term economic survival often overshadows the long-term benefits of education. Research indicates over 70% of child labourers come from the poorest population segments, perpetuating a cycle where poverty fuels child labour and vice versa due to limited education and skills.

### 6.2.2 Impact of Large Family Size

Large families in Bangladesh exacerbate child labour prevalence. With multiple children, families often cannot afford education for all, pushing some into work to ease financial strain. Large family size correlates with lower educational attainment, particularly in rural areas and urban slums.

### 6.2.3 Lack of Access to Quality Education

While Bangladesh has advanced toward universal primary education, access to quality schooling remains inconsistent. Rural schools often lack adequate facilities, trained teachers, and conducive learning environments. Costs for uniforms, transport, and materials burden poor families, leading to dropouts and early workforce entry, as immediate economic gains from work outweigh uncertain educational benefits.

### 6.2.4 Urbanization and Migration Effects

Rapid urbanization and rural-to-urban migration create informal settlements where families lack stable livelihoods and services. Children in slums engage in hazardous work like street vending, waste picking, or begging, often escaping regulatory oversight and facing heightened risks of abuse and trafficking.

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<sup>30</sup> UNICEF, *Child Labour Challenges in Bangladesh* (2022)

## **6.3 Cultural and Social Challenges**

### **6.3.1 Social Acceptance of Child Work**

In many Bangladeshi communities, child work is normalized as a part of growing up, seen as a way to learn skills and support family welfare. This cultural acceptance blurs the distinction between permissible light work and exploitative labour, reducing motivation to curb child labour.

### **6.3.2 Gender-Specific Norms and Challenges**

Girls face unique vulnerabilities, often working in hidden roles like domestic service or informal industries, which evade regulation. Gender norms limit girls' education access and undervalue their work, exposing them to abuse and long hours, compounded by cultural pressures like early marriage.

### **6.3.3 Lack of Awareness and Education on Child Labour Laws**

Limited awareness of child labour laws among parents, employers, and children hinders compliance. Many are unaware of minimum working ages or prohibited work types, and poorly funded awareness campaigns fail to reach widespread audiences, particularly in rural areas.

## **6.4 Institutional Challenges**

### **6.4.1 Weakness of Inspection and Enforcement Agencies**

The Department of Inspection for Factories and Establishments (DIFE) lacks sufficient inspectors, training, and funding to monitor Bangladesh's vast industrial and informal sectors. Corruption and low salaries further weaken enforcement, allowing child labour to persist in unregulated workplaces.

### **6.4.2 Fragmentation and Coordination Issues Among Government Bodies**

Multiple ministries, including Labour and Employment, Women and Children Affairs, Education, and Social Welfare, oversee child labour issues, but poor coordination leads to inefficiencies, overlapping roles, and limited data sharing, hampering evidence-based interventions.

### **6.4.3 Challenges in Legal Prosecution and Judicial System**

Prosecution of child labour violations is rare due to slow, inaccessible courts and limited judicial training on child rights. Victims face stigma and retaliation fears, discouraging legal action, while employers often face minimal consequences.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> A Hossain, *Judicial Perspectives on Child Labour*

## **6.5 Legal and Policy Gaps**

### **6.5.1 Ambiguities in Law and Definitions**

Vague definitions of “light work” and “hazardous work” in laws like the Bangladesh Labour Act create loopholes. Lack of age verification systems, due to missing birth certificates, enables illegal employment of underage children.<sup>32</sup>

### **6.5.2 Inadequate Penalties and Incentives**

Penalties for child labour violations are often too lenient to deter employers, and incentives like cash transfers or education stipends are limited and unevenly distributed, failing to support compliance or vulnerable families effectively.<sup>33</sup>

### **6.5.3 Limited Coverage of Informal Sector**

Most child labour occurs in the unregulated informal economy, such as agriculture and domestic work, which existing laws largely overlook, complicating enforcement and protection efforts.

## **6.6 Economic and Globalization-Related Challenges**

### **6.6.1 Global Supply Chains and Demand for Cheap Labour**

Bangladesh’s export-driven industries, like garments, face pressure from global buyers for low-cost production, indirectly encouraging child labour in subcontractors and small workshops. This economic dynamic undermines enforcement efforts.

### **6.6.2 Impact of Economic Crises and Natural Disasters**

Economic crises, like the COVID-19 pandemic, and natural disasters, such as floods, exacerbate poverty, increasing child labour as families lose livelihoods. Social protection systems often fail to mitigate these shocks effectively.

## **6.7 Data and Research Limitations**

### **6.7.1 Lack of Reliable and Disaggregated Data**

Scarce, underreported data on informal sector child labour, lacking age, gender, or sector breakdowns, hinders targeted interventions. Real-time monitoring systems are absent, delaying policy responses.

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<sup>32</sup> Bangladesh Labour Act 2006, ss 34–35

<sup>33</sup> International Labour Organization, *Penalties and Incentives for Child Labour* (2021)

### **6.7.2 Need for Longitudinal and Impact Studies**

Few longitudinal studies assess the long-term effects of child labour or interventions, limiting understanding of how education, support, and enforcement impact outcomes.

## **6.8 Social Protection and Poverty Alleviation Challenges**

### **6.8.1 Insufficient Social Safety Nets**

Social safety net programs, like stipends and cash transfers, often fail to reach the poorest households or cover all vulnerable groups due to limited scope and administrative inefficiencies.

### **6.8.2 Limited Focus on Family-Centered Approaches**

Interventions targeting children without addressing family poverty fail to reduce reliance on child labour, as household economic stability is critical for prevention.

## **6.9 Community and Awareness Challenges**

### **6.9.1 Limited Awareness Campaigns**

Awareness initiatives on child labour harms and laws are underfunded and urban-focused, leaving rural communities uninformed.

### **6.9.2 Role of Media and Civil Society**

Media coverage of child labour is inconsistent, and civil society organizations, while vital, lack resources to scale advocacy and awareness efforts effectively.

## Chapter 7

# Case Studies and Field Analysis

### 7.1 Introduction

To understand the real-world dynamics of child labour and the effectiveness of existing prevention mechanisms, this chapter presents detailed case studies and field analyses from various regions and sectors in Bangladesh. It examines the role of government programs, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), community initiatives, and other stakeholders in combating child labour. This empirical insight helps to bridge the gap between theory and practice, revealing successes, challenges, and lessons learned on the ground.

### 7.2 Overview of Selected Case Studies

Child labour in Bangladesh varies across sectors, shaped by economic, social, and regional factors. To grasp the practical challenges and realities, this section analyzes child labour in key sectors: garment factories, brick kilns, shipbreaking yards, domestic work, and street vending. Each sector presents distinct obstacles for prevention and rehabilitation, reflecting broader socio-economic dynamics in Bangladesh.

#### 7.2.1 Child Labour in the Garment Industry

##### Background

The ready-made garment (RMG) sector, a backbone of Bangladesh's economy contributing over 80% of export revenue, employs millions. While formal factories face some regulation, child labour persists in informal workshops and subcontracted units, which often evade oversight and operate outside legal frameworks.

##### Child Labour Dynamics in the RMG Sector

Children, typically aged 12–14, undertake tasks like sewing, embroidery, trimming, or packing in stressful, unsafe conditions. Tight production deadlines lead to exploitation, excessive overtime, and lack of breaks. A Dhaka-based study found children join the workforce after dropping out of school due to economic hardship, with slum families relying on their income despite legal bans. Lack of age verification systems enables employers to bypass restrictions.<sup>34</sup>

##### Health and Safety Concerns

Children face health risks, including respiratory problems from fabric dust, sewing machine injuries, and mental stress from long hours in cramped, poorly lit spaces.

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<sup>34</sup> Save the Children, *Child Labour in Dhaka Slums*

## **Efforts to Address the Problem**

The government and the Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and Exporters Association (BGMEA) enforce codes of conduct, while international buyers demand compliance with labour standards. NGOs promote awareness and education in garment communities, but informal workshops remain difficult to regulate.<sup>35</sup>

### **7.2.2 Brick Kilns in Northern Bangladesh**

#### **Background**

Brick kilns, prevalent in northern Bangladesh, rely heavily on child labour for strenuous tasks like carrying bricks, molding, and stoking kilns.

#### **Living and Working Conditions**

Child labourers live in overcrowded, unsanitary on-site conditions, facing extreme heat, dust, and toxic emissions. Seasonal migration disrupts education and health, while bonded labour traps families in debt-driven exploitation, as reported in Dinajpur and Rangpur.

#### **Impact on Education**

Seasonal work and lack of nearby schools cause frequent dropouts, with limited access to alternative education or vocational training.

#### **Interventions**

NGOs like the Centre for Child Rights and Protection (CCRP) rescue children, provide shelters, and offer schooling or training. Government efforts to regulate kilns are hindered by remoteness and informality.

### **7.2.3 Shipbreaking Yards in Chittagong**

#### **Background**

In Sitakunda, Chittagong, children work in hazardous shipbreaking yards dismantling ships for scrap, driven by poverty and lack of alternatives despite legal prohibitions.

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<sup>35</sup> International Labour Organization, *RMG Compliance Efforts*

## **Hazards and Exploitation**

Children face risks from asbestos, toxic chemicals, sharp metals, and heavy machinery, with minimal safety measures or training. Informal subcontractors obscure child labour in data, complicating interventions.

## **NGO and Government Actions**

The Bangladesh Environmental Lawyers Association (BELA) advocates for safer conditions and child labour elimination, but efforts to relocate yards or enforce age limits show limited progress.

### **7.2.4 Domestic Work and Street Vending**

#### **Background**

Many children, especially girls, work as domestic helpers or street vendors in urban areas, operating in unregulated environments.

#### **Challenges in Identification and Regulation**

Domestic work's private nature and street vending's dispersal make regulation challenging. Children face abuse, long hours, and unstable incomes.

#### **Case Study from Dhaka Slums**

Studies in Korail slum highlight economic necessity and displacement as drivers of child labour, increasing risks of trafficking and disrupted education.<sup>36</sup>

#### **NGO Efforts**

NGO programs provide informal education and legal awareness, but scaling and monitoring these initiatives remain difficult.<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> UNICEF, *Child Labour in Korail Slum* (2022)

<sup>37</sup> BRAC, *NGO Programs for Domestic Workers* (2021)

## 7.3 Government Initiatives

The Government of Bangladesh acknowledges child labour as a pressing socio-economic issue and has implemented various measures to address it, aligning with international standards while tackling local challenges. Despite these efforts, enforcement and impact are limited by structural, financial, and administrative barriers. This subchapter examines key government programs, policies, legal frameworks, and institutional mechanisms aimed at preventing child labour, assessing their implementation and effectiveness.<sup>38</sup>

### 7.3.1 National Child Labour Elimination Policy (2010)

#### Overview

Adopted in 2010, the National Child Labour Elimination Policy (NCLEP) is a landmark framework integrating prevention, protection, rehabilitation, and inter-sectoral coordination to eradicate child labour.

#### Key Objectives

- Eliminate hazardous child labour by 2015.
- Prevent child labour through poverty reduction, universal education, and social protection.
- Reintegrate rescued children into formal education or vocational training.
- Strengthen legal and institutional systems.
- Enhance public awareness and community involvement.

#### Policy Components

The NCLEP targets high-risk sectors like shipbreaking, brick kilns, and garments, promoting collaboration among ministries, local governments, NGOs, and international partners.

#### Implementation Challenges

Limited funding, inadequate training, and weak monitoring hindered the 2015 target, though progress in awareness and policy integration is notable.

### 7.3.2 The Bangladesh Labour Act (2006) and Amendments

#### Legal Framework

The Bangladesh Labour Act (BLA) 2006 prohibits employment of children under 14, regulates light work for ages 12–14, and bans hazardous work for those under 18.

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<sup>38</sup> Ministry of Labour and Employment, *Child Labour Initiatives in Bangladesh*

## **Amendments and Enforcement Enhancements**

Amendments aim to clarify provisions, but ambiguities around “light work” and enforcement mechanisms persist.

### **Enforcement Mechanisms**

The Department of Inspection for Factories and Establishments (DIFE) oversees compliance through inspections and penalties, including fines and imprisonment.

### **Limitations**

Weak enforcement, driven by insufficient inspectors, corruption, and informal sector gaps, limits the Act’s impact.<sup>39</sup>

## **7.3.3 National Education Policy and Stipend Programs**

### **Universal Primary Education Commitment**

The government prioritizes universal primary education to reduce child labour by lowering dropout rates.

### **Stipend Programs**

Conditional cash transfers support poor families by covering school-related costs, encouraging enrollment.

### **Impact and Coverage**

Stipends have boosted enrollment in some regions, reducing economic pressures driving child labour.

### **Challenges**

Irregular disbursements, corruption, exclusion of vulnerable groups, and inadequate stipend amounts limit effectiveness.

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<sup>39</sup> R Khan, *Enforcement Issues in Labour Laws*

### **7.3.4 Labour Inspection and Enforcement Programs**

#### **Inspection Regime**

DIFE conducts inspections in factories and high-risk sectors like garments and brick kilns.

#### **Capacity Building**

Training enhances inspectors' ability to identify and address child labour violations.

#### **Challenges**

A low inspector-to-factory ratio, corruption, and logistical constraints hinder comprehensive coverage. A 2018 Dhaka inspection drive rescued underage workers but exposed unregistered workshops.

### **7.3.5 Ministry of Women and Children Affairs (MoWCA) Initiatives**

#### **Role and Responsibilities**

MoWCA coordinates child protection and welfare, including anti-child labour efforts.

#### **Integrated Child Protection Services**

MoWCA collaborates with NGOs to provide rescue, rehabilitation, and vocational training through transit homes and counseling.

#### **Policy Advocacy**

The ministry pushes for legislative reforms and international partnerships.

### **7.3.6 Social Safety Net Programs**

#### **Overview**

Social protection schemes aim to reduce poverty and child labour dependency.

#### **Examples**

- Vulnerable Group Development (VGD) supports ultra-poor women.
- Old Age and Disability Allowances ease family financial burdens.

#### **Gaps**

Lack of integration with child labour strategies and coverage gaps reduce impact.

### **7.3.7 Coordination Mechanisms**

#### **National Child Labour Elimination Council**

This multi-stakeholder body includes ministries, NGOs, and international partners to oversee policies.

#### **Local Government Engagement**

Union Parishads and Upazila administrations aid in identifying and preventing child labour.

#### **Challenges**

Bureaucratic delays and inconsistent local capacity impede coordination.

### **7.3.8 International Commitments and Government's Role**

#### **Ratification of ILO Conventions**

Bangladesh's ratification of ILO Conventions No. 138 and No. 182 shapes its policies.

#### **Integration into National Policy**

These commitments influence the NCLEP and BLA provisions.

#### **Monitoring and Reporting**

Agencies collaborate with global bodies for progress reporting.

### **7.3.9 Recent Policy Developments and Future Directions**

#### **Child Labour Free Zones Initiative**

Pilot projects establish "child labour free" zones with enhanced monitoring.

#### **Education Sector Reforms**

Expanded pre-primary and inclusive education programs support disadvantaged children.

#### **Digital Tools and Data Management**

Centralized databases improve child labour monitoring and case management.<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> Ministry of Labour, *Child Labour Free Zones Initiative*

## 7.4 Role of NGOs and International Organizations

Child labour in Bangladesh, a deeply rooted issue, demands a collaborative approach beyond government efforts. Non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and international bodies play a vital role in supporting government initiatives, advocating for children's rights, providing direct services, and shaping policy reforms. This subchapter examines the functions, strategies, and impacts of NGOs and international organizations in preventing and eliminating child labour in Bangladesh.

### 7.4.1 Overview of NGO Involvement

#### Historical Context

NGOs in Bangladesh have long addressed child rights and labour issues, growing from small grassroots efforts to extensive national networks. They bridge gaps in government programs, particularly in rural and marginalized areas where child labour is widespread.<sup>41</sup>

#### Key Areas of NGO Intervention

- Rescuing and rehabilitating working children.
- Offering formal and non-formal education programs.
- Providing vocational training and skills development.
- Delivering legal aid and advocacy.
- Mobilizing communities and raising awareness.
- Conducting research and collecting data. These efforts are essential for both preventing child labour and supporting reintegration.

### 7.4.2 Major NGOs Addressing Child Labour

#### i. BRAC

As one of the largest NGOs globally, BRAC tackles child labour through integrated programs combining education, health, social empowerment, and economic development.

- **Education Initiatives:** BRAC's non-formal schools help working children catch up academically and transition to formal education.
- **Economic Empowerment:** Microfinance and women's empowerment initiatives reduce family reliance on child labour.
- **Advocacy:** BRAC engages policymakers and international forums to influence child labour policies.

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<sup>41</sup> BRAC, *History of Child Rights Programs*

## **ii. Save the Children**

Active in Bangladesh since 1972, Save the Children emphasizes child protection, education, and health, with programs including:

- Community-based child protection committees to monitor labour issues.
- Vocational training centers for adolescents.
- Awareness campaigns on children's rights and legal protections.

## **iii. Child Rights Advocacy and Research Organizations**

Groups like the Centre for Child Rights and Protection (CCRP) and Ain o Salish Kendra (ASK) offer legal aid, conduct rescue operations, and research child labour trends and violations.

### **7.4.3 International Organizations' Role**

#### **i. International Labour Organization (ILO)**

The ILO supports Bangladesh's efforts through technical assistance, policy guidance, and funding, focusing on:

- Implementing ILO Conventions No. 138 and No. 182.
- Developing the National Child Labour Elimination Policy.
- Building capacity for government and social partners.
- Running awareness campaigns and pilot projects to eliminate hazardous child labour.

#### **ii. United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF)**

UNICEF partners with government and NGOs to advance child rights, emphasizing education, health, and social inclusion.

- Supports education stipend programs to reduce child labour incentives.
- Provides rescue, rehabilitation, and reintegration services.
- Conducts research and advocacy for policy enhancements.<sup>42</sup>

#### **iii. Other International Bodies**

Organizations like Anti-Slavery International, Save the Children International, and the Global March Against Child Labour contribute through funding, research, and advocacy.<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> UNICEF, *Child Protection and Education*

<sup>43</sup> Anti-Slavery International, *Global Advocacy for Child Labour*

## **7.4.4 Strategies and Approaches of NGOs and International Organizations**

### **Holistic and Integrated Programming**

Effective interventions combine education, economic support, legal protection, and psychosocial care to prevent relapse into child labour.

### **Community Mobilization and Participation**

NGOs engage communities through awareness campaigns, workshops, and child protection committees to foster local ownership and shift norms tolerating child labour.

### **Collaboration with Government**

Partnerships with ministries enhance program scale and sustainability, often complementing government-funded initiatives.

### **Targeted Focus on Hazardous Work**

Programs address high-risk sectors like shipbreaking, brick kilns, and domestic labour with tailored support and advocacy.

### **Monitoring and Data Collection**

NGOs conduct surveys and maintain databases to inform policies and target interventions effectively.

## **7.4.5 Challenges Faced by NGOs and International Organizations**

### **Funding Constraints**

Reliance on donor funding limits program duration and scale, with short funding cycles hindering long-term planning.

### **Access and Coverage**

Reaching children in remote or hidden sectors, like domestic work and street vending, is challenging due to their dispersed nature.

### **Coordination and Duplication**

Overlapping efforts among organizations lead to inefficiencies, with weak coordination frameworks exacerbating the issue.

### **Legal and Political Barriers**

Bureaucratic hurdles and political interference slow program implementation.

## **7.4.6 Notable Successes and Innovations**

### **BRAC's Non-Formal Education Model**

BRAC's non-formal schools have reintegrated thousands of working children into education, offering a scalable model.<sup>44</sup>

### **Child Labour Free Zones**

Pilot projects create “child labour free” zones through collaboration with local authorities and employers.

### **Community Child Protection Committees**

Grassroots committees enhance awareness, report violations, and support rescues, boosting social accountability.<sup>45</sup>

### **Use of Technology**

Digital tools improve case tracking, communication, and awareness campaigns, enhancing efficiency.

## **7.4.7 Synergies and Partnerships**

### **Multi-Stakeholder Platforms**

Networks like the Bangladesh National Child Labour Elimination Coordination Committee promote information sharing and joint advocacy.

### **Public-Private Partnerships**

Collaborations with businesses, especially in export sectors, ensure compliance with labour standards.

### **Capacity Building**

International agencies provide training and resources to strengthen government and NGO capabilities.

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<sup>44</sup> BRAC, *Success of Non-Formal Schools*

<sup>45</sup> UNICEF, *Community Child Protection Committees* (2022)

## **7.5 Success Stories and Lessons Learned**

Efforts to combat child labour in Bangladesh have achieved significant successes, despite ongoing challenges, offering valuable insights for future strategies. This section highlights inspiring examples and key lessons from government initiatives, NGO programs, international collaborations, and community efforts aimed at eradicating child labour.

### **7.5.1 Successful Rescue and Rehabilitation Programs**

Rescuing children from hazardous and exploitative work and providing effective rehabilitation are critical steps in addressing child labour. Organizations like BRAC, Save the Children, and the Centre for Child Rights and Protection (CCRP) have developed comprehensive models integrating rescue, shelter, education, and psychosocial support.

#### **Case Example: BRAC's Rescue and Rehabilitation Program**

BRAC has rescued thousands of children from brick kilns, garment workshops, and shipbreaking yards, offering temporary shelters, healthcare, and tailored non-formal education. Many children transition to formal schooling or vocational training, securing safer livelihoods.

#### **Key Success Factors**

- Holistic support addressing education, health, and psychosocial needs.
- Community involvement in identifying and supporting rescued children.
- Collaboration with local authorities for legal enforcement and protection.

### **7.5.2 Education-Centered Approaches**

Boosting school enrollment and retention is essential to preventing child labour, with education stipends and non-formal schooling proving effective.

#### **Stipend Programs**

Government stipend programs offset costs like tuition and uniforms, significantly reducing dropout rates in regions like Sylhet and Barisal.

#### **BRAC's Non-Formal Schools**

BRAC's non-formal schools enable working children to study at flexible times, overcoming barriers like distance and work schedules, with success driven by community acceptance.

### **7.5.3 Community Mobilization and Awareness Campaigns**

Shifting social attitudes that normalize child labour is vital for long-term eradication. NGOs and government agencies engage communities through grassroots programs involving parents, employers, and local leaders.

**Example:** Community Child Protection Committees (CCPCs)

CCPCs in various districts monitor child labour, advocate for children's rights, and support school attendance, empowering communities to take ownership.

### **Lessons Learned**

- Endorsement by local leaders enhances community buy-in.
- Ongoing engagement sustains awareness more effectively than one-off events.
- Culturally tailored messages resonate better with local audiences.

### **7.5.4 Public-Private Partnerships (PPP)**

Private sector engagement, especially in export industries like garments, has advanced child labour monitoring and reduction.<sup>46</sup>

Example: Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and Exporters Association (BGMEA)

BGMEA's code of conduct, backed by international buyers, enforces labour standards, leading to the removal of underage workers and improved conditions through audits and compliance checks.

#### **Impact**

- Buyer pressure incentivizes factory compliance.
- Manager training boosts awareness and capacity.
- Transparent reporting mechanisms enable whistleblowing.

### **7.5.5 Innovative Use of Technology**

Technology enhances child labour prevention through improved monitoring, communication, and education access.

#### **Mobile Apps for Monitoring**

NGOs use mobile apps for real-time reporting of child labour cases, enabling faster interventions.

#### **Digital Education Platforms**

Online tools and radio programs provide flexible education for working or remote children, reducing barriers to learning.

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<sup>46</sup> Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and Exporters Association, *PPP in Labour Standards*

### 7.5.6 Integration of Social Protection and Livelihood Programs

Addressing economic drivers of child labour is crucial. Programs enhancing family income and social safety nets reduce reliance on child earnings.

Example: Income-Generating Programs for Women

Microcredit and skill development for women empower families, allowing children to attend school instead of work.

Cash Transfer Programs

Conditional cash transfers tied to school attendance reduce child labour and improve education outcomes.

### 7.5.7 Lessons from Challenges and Failures

Despite successes, obstacles provide critical lessons:

- **Sustainability Issues:** Donor-dependent projects risk discontinuation without local or government support.
- **Scale Limitations:** Pilot projects struggle to expand due to resource and coordination challenges.
- **Monitoring Gaps:** Weak data and monitoring hinder impact assessment and hotspot identification.
- **Informal Sector Coverage:** Programs often neglect informal and hidden child labour.
- **Gender-Specific Barriers:** Girls require tailored interventions due to unique risks.

### 7.5.8 Best Practices for Future Interventions

- **Multi-sectoral Coordination:** Aligning education, labour, social welfare, and justice sectors enhances effectiveness.
- **Community Empowerment:** Engaging communities in decision-making builds resilience.
- **Flexible Education Models:** Diverse schooling and vocational options meet varied needs.
- **Data-Driven Approaches:** Robust data collection supports targeted policies.
- **Child Participation:** Involving children in program design improves relevance and uptake.<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>47</sup> International Labour Organization, *Best Practices for Child Labour Elimination*

## **7.6 Field Challenges and Observations**

Despite efforts by government, NGOs, and international organizations, child labour prevention in Bangladesh faces significant on-the-ground obstacles. This section examines the complex challenges in field operations and program implementation, drawing from experiences across sectors, regions, and stakeholders to inform sustainable eradication strategies.

### **7.6.1 Informal and Hidden Nature of Child Labour Pervasiveness in Informal Sectors**

Child labour is prevalent in informal sectors like domestic service, street vending, agriculture, and small workshops, which are hard to monitor due to their diffuse and hidden nature, unlike regulated formal workplaces.

#### **Field Challenges**

Field workers face resistance or denial when accessing homes or informal workplaces. The private nature of domestic work and dispersed street vending complicates identification and intervention.

#### **Underreporting and Data Deficiency**

Accurate data on child labour, especially in rural and informal sectors, is scarce due to fear of reprisals, stigma, or lack of awareness, hindering targeted program design and resource allocation.

#### **Strategies to Overcome**

Community-based monitoring, anonymous reporting systems, and trust-building with families show promise but need scaling and sustained support.

### **7.6.2 Economic Pressures and Poverty Root Cause of Child Labour**

Poverty drives child labour, with families relying on children's income for basic needs, exacerbated by seasonal income fluctuations and inadequate social safety nets.

#### **Opportunity Cost of Education**

Schooling represents an economic sacrifice for poor families, as seen in field interviews where parents prioritize immediate survival over education's long-term benefits.

#### **Implications**

Without addressing household poverty, prevention programs risk failure, necessitating integrated social protection and income-generating initiatives.

### **7.6.3 Social and Cultural Norms**

#### **Acceptance and Traditions**

Child labour is often normalized as part of cultural traditions, with children working alongside parents or in household chores seen as acceptable.

#### **Gender Norms**

Girls face gender-specific roles promoting domestic work or early marriage over education, limiting their mobility and school participation.

#### **Resistance to Change**

Efforts to eliminate child labour meet resistance from community elders or employers benefiting economically, requiring long-term, culturally sensitive awareness campaigns.<sup>48</sup>

### **7.6.4 Institutional and Enforcement Challenges**

#### **Limited Capacity of Inspectors**

The Department of Inspection for Factories and Establishments (DIFE) lacks sufficient staff and resources to cover vast informal workplaces, limiting enforcement.

#### **Corruption and Political Interference**

Field reports highlight bribery and political protection of businesses employing children, undermining legal enforcement.

#### **Weak Judicial Response**

Prosecutions are often delayed or dismissed due to weak evidence, lack of witness protection, or judicial backlogs.

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<sup>48</sup> Save the Children, *Awareness Campaigns for Child Labour*

## **7.6.5 Educational Barriers**

### **Quality and Accessibility**

Rural and slum schools lack facilities, trained teachers, and materials, discouraging attendance. Long distances and unsafe routes further hinder access.

### **Relevance of Curriculum**

Traditional curricula often fail to meet working children's needs or schedules, contributing to dropouts.

### **Non-Formal and Vocational Education**

Alternative education programs are limited in scale and lack formal recognition, reducing their appeal.

## **7.6.6 Social Protection and Support Gaps**

### **Insufficient Coverage**

Many vulnerable families miss social safety net programs due to bureaucratic hurdles or exclusion errors.<sup>49</sup>

### **Fragmented Services**

Weak coordination between agencies leads to duplicated efforts or service gaps.

### **Psychosocial Support**

Rescued children often need trauma counseling, which is underfunded or unavailable.

## **7.6.7 Environmental and Seasonal Factors**

### **Seasonal Migration**

Seasonal migration for work disrupts education and exposes children to exploitative conditions.

### **Natural Disasters**

Floods, cyclones, and river erosion increase vulnerability, pushing children into labour as families lose livelihoods.

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<sup>49</sup> UNICEF, *Social Protection Gaps*

## **7.6.8 COVID-19 Pandemic Impact (Recent Observation)**

### **Increased Vulnerability**

The COVID-19 pandemic, through school closures and income loss, heightened child labour risks, with many children entering informal work.

### **Disruption of Programs**

Lockdowns disrupted NGO and government programs, limiting rescues and education continuity.

## **7.6.9 Fieldworker Safety and Access**

### **Risk of Hostility**

Field workers face hostility from employers or communities reliant on child labour.

### **Logistical Challenges**

Accessing remote or hazardous areas poses safety and logistical difficulties for program staff.

## **7.7 Policy Implications from Ground Realities**

Field observations, case studies, and stakeholder experiences offer critical insights for policymakers seeking to combat child labour effectively in Bangladesh. This section translates these ground-level findings into actionable policy implications, providing a roadmap for reforming frameworks and developing strategies aligned with socio-economic and cultural realities.

### **7.7.1 Recognizing the Complexity of Child Labour**

#### **Multi-Dimensional Approach Needed**

Child labour is deeply connected to poverty, social norms, education gaps, and informal economies. Policies must move beyond punitive measures, adopting holistic strategies that integrate social protection, education, enforcement, and community engagement.

#### **Tailoring Policies to Local Contexts**

Uniform policies fail to address the diverse nature of child labour across urban slums, rural areas, and industrial zones. Decentralized, region-specific interventions are essential to tackle sectoral and geographic variations.

## **7.7.2 Bridging the Formal-Informal Divide**

### **Extending Legal Protections**

Most child labour occurs in informal settings like domestic work and home-based industries, beyond the reach of traditional labour laws. Policies must extend protections and enforcement to these sectors.

### **Innovative Monitoring Mechanisms**

Conventional inspections are inadequate for informal economies. Policymakers should invest in community-based monitoring, technology-driven reporting systems, and partnerships with local organizations to enhance detection and response.

## **7.7.3 Strengthening Education as a Core Strategy**

### **Linking Education and Labour Policies**

Education policies must align with child labour prevention, ensuring access to flexible, affordable, and quality schooling. Expanding conditional cash transfers and stipends tied to attendance can reduce dropout rates.

### **Non-Formal and Vocational Education**

For children unable to enter formal schools, policies should support alternative education pathways and vocational training to build skills and improve employability.

## **7.7.4 Enhancing Social Protection to Address Economic Drivers**

### **Integrated Social Safety Nets**

Preventing child labour requires addressing family economic vulnerabilities. Policies should embed child labour concerns into poverty alleviation programs, including cash transfers, food security, and livelihood support.

### **Targeted Support for Vulnerable Groups**

Special measures are needed for marginalized groups, such as migrant families, ethnic minorities, and girls, who face heightened exploitation risks.

## **7.7.5 Promoting Multi-Stakeholder Coordination**

### **Inter-Agency Collaboration**

Effective prevention relies on coordinated efforts among ministries of labour, education, social welfare, law enforcement, and local governments. Policies should establish clear roles and accountability mechanisms.

## **Engaging Civil Society and Private Sector**

NGOs, community groups, and businesses are vital partners. Policies should foster collaboration, information sharing, and joint programs, including private sector supply chain monitoring.

### **7.7.6 Investing in Data and Research**

#### **Improving Data Systems**

Reliable, disaggregated data by age, gender, region, and sector is essential for targeted interventions and progress tracking. Policymakers should prioritize comprehensive child labour databases.

#### **Supporting Research and Innovation**

Ongoing research into emerging trends and intervention effectiveness is crucial for adapting policies to new challenges.

### **7.7.7 Addressing Cultural and Social Norms**

#### **Awareness and Behaviour Change Campaigns**

Policies should fund sustained campaigns to shift attitudes normalizing child labour, emphasizing children's rights and long-term well-being.

#### **Community Empowerment**

Engaging communities in decision-making, monitoring, and enforcement fosters ownership and sustainability of prevention efforts.<sup>50</sup>

### **7.7.8 Ensuring Child Participation**

#### **Incorporating Children's Voices**

Recognizing children as rights holders, policies should include mechanisms for their participation in program design, implementation, and feedback to enhance relevance and effectiveness.

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<sup>50</sup> Save the Children, *Community Empowerment in Child Labour Prevention* (2021)

## Chapter 8

# Conclusion and Steps for Reform

### 8.1 Conclusion

Child labour remains a critical challenge in Bangladesh, driven by a complex interplay of economic, social, cultural, and institutional factors. Despite efforts by government, NGOs, international organizations, and communities, the issue persists. This thesis has analyzed child labour through legal, social, and economic lenses, evaluating Bangladesh's laws against international standards and examining policies, enforcement, and field realities. Key findings include: Firstly, while Bangladesh has robust laws against child labour, enforcement is weak, particularly in informal sectors, with unclear definitions and resource constraints hampering progress. Secondly, poverty, limited education access, social norms, and inadequate social protections perpetuate child labour as a survival mechanism for families. Thirdly, education is crucial for prevention, with flexible models and financial support showing success, though quality and access issues persist. Fourthly, multi-stakeholder coordination is vital but underdeveloped, requiring stronger collaboration among government, civil society, and children. Fifthly, holistic approaches combining enforcement, social support, education, and community engagement yield better outcomes, but scaling requires political will and resources. Finally, addressing cultural norms tolerating child labour is essential for sustainable change. This chapter proposes practical reforms to strengthen Bangladesh's efforts.

### 8.2 Steps for Reform

Drawing from the thesis analysis, the following reforms provide a strategic roadmap to accelerate child labour prevention and elimination in Bangladesh:

#### 8.2.1 Legislative Reforms

- **Update and Harmonize Child Labour Laws:** Revise the Bangladesh Labour Act to clarify prohibited work, including hazardous and informal roles, aligning with ILO Conventions No. 138 and No. 182.
- **Extend Legal Coverage to Informal Economy:** Include protections for informal sectors like domestic work and street vending, enabling regulatory oversight.
- **Introduce Stronger Penalties and Incentives:** Increase penalties for violations and offer incentives for businesses adopting child labour-free certifications.

#### 8.2.2 Institutional Strengthening

- **Enhance Inspection and Enforcement Capacity:** Recruit and train specialized labour inspectors with resources for unannounced visits and penalty enforcement.
- **Create Dedicated Child Labour Task Forces:** Form inter-agency teams integrating labour, education, police, and judiciary for rapid response and prosecution.
- **Strengthen Judicial Mechanisms:** Establish fast-track courts for child labour cases and train judges on child rights.

### 8.2.3 Education System Reforms

- **Expand Access and Reduce Barriers:** Build schools in underserved areas, provide free materials, and ensure safe transportation.
- **Develop Flexible Education Models:** Scale non-formal education and vocational training, recognizing equivalency certificates for formal school transitions.
- **Improve Education Quality:** Invest in teacher training on inclusive pedagogy and integrate life skills into curricula.

### 8.2.4 Social Protection and Economic Support

- **Strengthen Conditional Cash Transfers:** Expand and streamline cash transfers linked to school attendance, ensuring timely payments.
- **Integrate Child Labour Prevention in Poverty Programs:** Embed child labour goals in food security, healthcare, and women's empowerment initiatives.
- **Promote Income-Generating Activities:** Provide vocational training and microfinance for parents and adolescents to reduce reliance on child labour.<sup>51</sup>

### 8.2.5 Community Engagement and Awareness

- **Sustain Community-Based Protection:** Formalize Community Child Protection Committees to monitor and advocate locally.
- **Conduct Continuous Awareness Campaigns:** Use media, schools, and local leaders to challenge norms supporting child labour.
- **Promote Gender-Sensitive Approaches:** Address girls' specific challenges through targeted programs.

### 8.2.6 Multi-Stakeholder Collaboration

- **Institutionalize Coordination:** Strengthen the National Child Labour Elimination Council and local bodies for synergy across sectors.
- **Engage Private Sector:** Partner with industry to implement child labour-free supply chains.
- **Leverage International Partnerships:** Collaborate with UN agencies and ILO for technical and financial support.

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<sup>51</sup> BRAC, *Economic Empowerment Programs*

### 8.2.7 Data and Research Enhancements

- **Develop Comprehensive Databases:** Create centralized systems with disaggregated data for targeted interventions.
- **Promote Action Research:** Support studies on trends and intervention effectiveness.
- **Use Technology for Monitoring:** Implement mobile platforms and GIS mapping for real-time responses.<sup>16</sup>

### 8.2.8 Child Participation and Rights Protection

- **Integrate Child Voices:** Establish forums for children to contribute to program design and feedback.
- **Provide Psychosocial Support:** Ensure counseling and safe spaces for rescued children.<sup>17</sup>

### Final Thoughts

Eliminating child labour in Bangladesh is challenging but achievable. These evidence-based reforms require strong political commitment, resources, and stakeholder collaboration, particularly involving children. A child-centered, rights-based approach can fulfill legal obligations and unlock the potential of Bangladesh's youth for national development and social justice.

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<sup>52</sup> L Sen, *Data Systems for Child Labour Monitoring*

<sup>53</sup> UNICEF, *Child Participation in Policy Design* (2022)

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