

Employers' Perceptions of Changing Child Labour Practices in Bangladesh

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SUMMARY

This study aimed to know how and what factors have contributed in changing the patterns and perspectives of the employment of children over the last 15 years. Based on an in-depth research on 120 children and 40 employers of child labour in a Dhaka slum and a rural community in the poor northern district of Nilphamari this paper articulates employers' perspectives on child labour, with particular emphasis on understanding what factors have caused them to change their own practices over time. The paper addresses four main issues: a) why employers depend on child labour; b) how the types and forms of children's employment are believed to have changed over the last 15 years; c) factors that employers believe have contributed to these changes; and d) how employers are adapting to the changing situation with respect to the employment of children.

Firstly, we tried to show why employers depend on child labour. It has been found that certain tasks were deemed to be reserved for children since adults were unwilling to execute those tasks. These tasks effectively 'institutionalize' children's work, usually within informal setting. The physical structure of the children was found to be vital. Since they can move in and out very easily around the busy work places it has made their existence well-liked. In many of the cases the adults withdrew themselves from many tasks performed by children on grounds of status, particularly if they were seen as dirty tasks. Also employers were found less willing to pay full-time adult employee wages for tasks, which are intermittent, unskilled or low priority.

The report takes a close look at the perspectives on how child labour practices have changed in the last 15 years. It explored the employers' view on how practices of child labour had changed, particularly with respect to the numbers of children working or the extent of child labour; the types of and opportunities for work; wages and compensation; and access to education. The employers believed that the job opportunity for the children had increased in great deal which has changed the child recruitment process. Different types of work are now available both in the village and urban areas. Previously, both in urban and rural areas, formal contracts and conditions rarely applied whereas contractual arrangements are now clearer, firmer, and more likely to involve cash payments.

Three factors were found to have critical influences on how and whether employers recruit children: a) the increase in work opportunities; b) the

related matter of change in family earnings; and c) education policy. Improvement in the communication system has created much opportunity for work both in the rural and urban areas. People now travel to various places for work. There has been a lot of change in the family earnings as well. Many people are running their own businesses by taking loan from the NGOs and making their children work for them. Employers are now facing problem in recruiting children because of the development of family business and also the massive expansion of primary and more recently secondary education.

However, the employers in the areas studied were under considerable pressure. The change in employment opportunity for children, the choices of sectors including better-paid and more attractive new sectors, as well as the flexibility and security of home-based work are mainly the reasons behind the pressure. The research found that employers had adjusted their behaviour in various ways in an attempt to retain children workers. The employers said that they now behaved well, kept the children in good working conditions with attractive remuneration, gave them constant care, extra benefits and also met the basic needs and rights to some extent.



INTRODUCTION

In this study we tried to know what factors have contributed to changes in patterns and perspectives of the employment of children over the last 15 years? The paper is based on an in-depth research undertaken on 120 children and 40 employers of child labour in a Dhaka slum and a rural community in the poor northern district of Nilphamari over a nine-month period in 2007. The study was designed to explore sources of pressure and factors contributing to changes in the practices of employers with respect to recruitment, use and treatment of child workers. This paper presents findings from one aspect of the overall research project; a fuller report presenting findings from the entire research project will be finalized by the end of 2007.

We discussed findings from employers' perspectives on child labour, with particular emphasis on understanding what factors have caused them to change their own practices over time. Four main issues were addressed a) why employers depend on child labour; b) how the types and forms of children's employment are believed to have changed over the last 15 years; c) factors that employers believe have contributed to these changes; and d) how employers were adapting to the changing situation with respect to employment of children.

The rationale behind the 'Employers of Child Labour' research on which this paper draws was that understanding how and why employers of child labour change their practices would constitute a valuable contribution to policy and research debates about how to bring about change in the nature or extent of child labour, including to create safer conditions for working children. During the period in question, Bangladesh has made substantial gains in school enrolment and poverty reduction. But how has this affected the extent and nature of children's work?

A common assumption is that the best way of protecting children from harmful work is to keep them out of employment below a certain age. On the other hand children have a right to the benefits arising from work appropriate to their age (whether paid or unpaid), and that vulnerable children may be harmed rather than protected by preventing them from working and particularly from earning (Michael 2006). One view is that poverty alleviation is a pre-condition for eliminating or at least minimising child labour (BBS, 1996b). Another view from Bangladesh has been that employers feel that if they did not employ children, it would mean more misery for the poor people, and that where

opportunities for children to work exist, poor families may be reluctant to send their children to school (Ahmed and Quaseem, 1991).

By the end of the twentieth century the issue of child labour has gained recognition as a central concern of development discourse (King 2001). However, not all agree that poverty is a determining factor in the prevalence of child labour. In a classic study of child labour in India, Weiner emphasises culture and public policy as key factors shaping children's participation in the workforce in India (Weiner 1991). He also argued that compulsory primary education may be an effective instrument through which children may be removed from work. In Bangladesh, however, despite policies of compulsory primary education and the existence of large-scale stipend programmes to support poor households in sending their children to school, there are 5 million children, around 12% of children aged up to 17, who are working and not going to school (National Child Labour Survey 2003). The strong public policy emphasis on universal primary education has had some impact on attitudes towards children's work: based on research with communities with high levels of extreme poverty, one study found a generalized expectation that all children should be attending school, and failures to send children to school could only be justified in terms of extreme poverty: 'These changes in the ideology of childhood in Bangladesh should challenge the moral tenor of arguments used by children's employers to justify their employment' (BRAC/SCUK 2005: 26).

Most recent estimates for Bangladesh, based on the second Child Labour Survey (CLS 2003) found that of the 42.39 million children aged between 5 and 17years, 7.42 million children were 'economically active'¹, and 3.18 million children were considered 'child labour'², or 7.5% of all children. The CLS also estimates that 53% are involved in agriculture; 15% in industry; 14% are in various business enterprises, and another 19 % are involved in other income generating activities. According to the survey there is on average at least one working children in every household. Around 1.3 million children are involved in hazardous work.

¹ According to the NCLS 2002-03 children who were working one or more hours for pay or profit or working without pay in a family farm or enterprise or organization during the reference period or found not working but had a job or business from which he/she was temporarily absent during the reference period (last seven days) is a working child in the case of current activity status.

² Child labour as referred to in the NCLS consists of all children under 18 years of age who are economically active except (i) those who are under five years old and (ii) those between 12-14 years old who spend less than 14 hours a week on their jobs, unless their activities or occupations are hazardous by nature or circumstance. Added to this are 15-17 year old children in WFCL (including hazardous work and or working 43 hours and more per week).

From the perspective of employers of children in two different settings, this paper sheds light on what factors and influences have contributed to changes in the employment of children over the last 15 years, a period during which substantial gains have been made with respect to primary education and poverty reduction in Bangladesh.

The paper is in eight sections. Section 2 outlines the methods used in the 'Employers of Child Labour' research project. Section 3 briefly describes features of the case study communities. Section 4 outlines factors associated with employers' dependence on children's labour. Section 5 presents findings on how perspectives on child labour appear to have changed over the period. Section 6 looks at how policies and other national processes have affected child labour. Section 7 explores the impacts of these factors on employers' practices. Section 8 concludes.

METHODS

This study was designed to provide in-depth information, cross-checked on the basis of multiple sources and informants, on practices of child labour in two contrasting communities a poor community in Nilphamari in the district northern part of Bangladesh and a slum in the centre of Dhaka city. Data were collected through survey of households and all businesses, in-depth interviews and focus group discussions (FGD).

A major potential source of contrast is in poverty levels and economic opportunity so the communities were sampled to capture this. The sample village was chosen purposively from Nilphamari district, where poverty reduction has been slow over the last one and a half decade (Bangladesh Economic Review 2007); In contrast, the urban community is situated in the heart of Dhaka city, and its population can be assumed to have benefited from the wide range of economic opportunities available.

In the two areas, a survey was conducted in 565 households and 600 workplaces. The children (boys and girls, aged 6-10 and 11-17 years respectively) who work under employers were selected purposively from various working places. Their guardians and their employers were also identified through the children. Consent was sought from the selected respondents and each was issued an invitation letter to join in the study. Through this work a cordial relationship was established between the adults and the children, which had a positive impact on the study. Data were gathered from the selected children, their guardians, employers, local elites, and influential people of the society on changes in patterns and perspectives of the employment of children over the last 15 years. Non-participant observation, 18 FGDs and 100 in-depth interviews were conducted (Table 1).

Table 1. Interview and FGD participants

| Participants | Focus group discussions | | Individual interviews | | Participant Observation | |
|------------------------|-------------------------|-------|-----------------------|-------|-------------------------|-------|
| | Rural | Urban | Rural | Urban | Rural | Urban |
| Children(4 groups) | 4 | 4 | 20 | 20 | - | - |
| Employers/Workplaces | - | - | 20 | 20 | 20 | 20 |
| Guardians (4 groups) | 4 | 4 | - | - | - | - |
| Local community Leader | 1 | 1 | - | - | - | - |
| Influential Person | - | - | 10 | 10 | - | - |
| Total | 9 | 9 | 50 | 50 | 20 | 20 |

Before data collection a checklist was prepared for each group of participants, and pre-tested through four FGDs and four in-depth interviews.

There were some limitations in data collection. Slum dwellers are non-permanent residents. A small number (19 children) of children who were identified during the survey left before data collection started. In addition, the street-side shops in the rural community were demolished during the government's drive against illegal establishments³.

³ The interim caretaker government, which took office in January 2007, instituted a nation-wide drive to evict businesses and households which had encroached on government land.

THE CASE STUDY COMMUNITIES

The rural community in Nilphamari is more than 400 km away from Dhaka, a poor area predominantly reliant on agriculture. The population of the study site community is 175,507 and 76.82% of which are mainly dependent on agriculture (Upazila administrative office). Jute production, important in the past, has declined, while dairy production has become increasingly important. Other significant enterprises are involved in thread, bamboo, wood, cutlery, gold, metal and tailoring. There are four large bazaars and almost 100 smaller shops. Rice, potato, tomato, and onion are exported to the rest of the country. Communication and infrastructure have improved in recent years, with electricity arriving in the early 1980s, and road construction around the same time. Cinemas and television were also introduced around this time, as were NGO operations. In 2000, cable networks, oil mills and cold storage were also introduced.

Conditions in the Dhaka slum study site are different. Tenure rights are highly insecure, although the High Court has given an injunction against abolishing slum in 2 August 2003. There are 8,914 households and 32,725 people living in the area (BRAC Health Programme). Most are migrants from different districts of the country, in particular Jamalpur, Barisal, Mymensingh and Kishoreganj. There are three big bazaars and around 500 shops all together. Many of the men work as rickshaw-pullers except the landlords and employers and many women work in the garment factories. There are nine NGOs working here, twelve NGO schools, three health centers, one water supply center, one grave yard, two mosques and one Eidgah⁴ in the slum. There is one bazaar committee and one welfare committee working for the management of the slum. Recently after few slums were abolished this slum has become over populated as many of the evicted people started living here.

⁴ An open field where prayers are offered on Eid day. Eid is the largest religious festival of Islam.

FACTORS ASSOCIATED WITH EMPLOYERS' DEPENDENCE ON CHILD LABOUR

We assessed of why employers depend on child labour in the two study sites. It seems that many employers view child labour in their workplaces as necessary or inevitable:

One cannot work alone. I am a mechanic so I will need an assistant. Before becoming an expert mechanic one needs to work as an assistant. They need to learn from a very early age to become experts gradually. This is the advantage. When the child grows older he will also become an expert mechanic and keep an assistant to assist. This is how it goes on. (Owner of a steel shop).

The view being expressed here is that it is both as a skilled worker that child labour is needed, and in order to develop adequate expertise that a worker needs to learn the skill through working at it for a long period. It is clear that employers who had themselves worked as children see this as a crucial period of apprenticeship. As a motor workshop owner explained,

I started working when I was 13 or 14 years old. I have learned how to work since then and I am still working. When I will be forty I will not be able to work, my body will be in pain. That is why I am teaching the child to work so that he can replace me when I am old. They will become expert mechanics as well. This is the rule and everybody does this and children are kept for these reasons.

An important point made here is the idea of a 'rule' or established practice associated with child employment, which is universal ('everybody does this'). This means that not only is the employment of children necessary, it is also sanctioned by the fact that 'everybody' teaches children a trade in this way.

Just as the world of work is highly gender segmented, there are also very clear and firm distinctions to do with age. This study found that certain tasks were deemed to be reserved for children since adults were unwilling to do those tasks. These tasks effectively 'institutionalize' children's work, usually within informal settings.

Box 1. Tasks which are (seen as) exclusively children's work

Hot food shop & tea stalls: Opening the shop in the morning, lit fire in the stove, sweeping the floor, serving water, cleaning tables, removing the used plates and glasses from the table, getting cigarettes and betel leaf for the customers, meeting the owners' orders, sleeping inside the shop as a protector.

Motor & steel workshop: Cleaning the equipments, helping the chief mechanic by serving the utensils, wiping the vehicles after it is repaired, serving tea, snacks, cigarettes and betel leaf to the head mechanic and the owner of the cars, cleaning motor parts, changing oil, working in "hard-to-reach" spots or inside the drawer compartment of the steel closets.

Rural houses: Cattle-rearing.

Urban houses: Working as a playmate of rich employer's children.

Handicraft: Stuffing cotton wool inside the dolls.

Mudi shop (small convenience store): Helping the customers by serving them goods, borrowing from other shops if any product runs out, grocery shopping for the employer, picking and dropping the children of the shop owner to school, watching out for the shop when the owner/others are out, dusting the products, filling the water jar for the shop, picking up lunch for the shop owner from his house.

Grocery shop: Washing the vegetables, taking out and putting vegetable into the sack.

Furniture shop: Making the sharp edges smooth by using the scraper blade.

Nursery: Filling the plastic pack with mud and putting one seed in each pack,

Clothing shop: Calling the customers who are passing by the shop, bringing food for the shop owner, cleaning their plates and glasses.

Tailoring shop: Stitching the buttons, hemming the clothes.

Bidi factory: Making bidis (hand-rolled local cigarette).

Waste collection: Collecting wastes, spare parts from the streets and dustbins.

A number of points stand out from Box 1. Firstly, a significant proportion of 'children's tasks' are those that are seen as best done by small agile bodies – the 'nimble fingers' claim. In a striking example, children who work in steel workshops have to work inside the compartments of *almirah*, the steel cupboards used to store valuables. In the motor workshop it is very easy for a child to get under a car. The physical size

of the person doing the task is therefore seen as vital. Small children also dart easily in and around crowded workspaces.

A second factor is that adults shy away from many tasks performed by children on grounds of status, particularly if they are seen as dirty tasks. Adults are often also reluctant to take on positions that require them to take orders, particularly to do menial jobs (such as cleaning).

A third factor is that the low cost of children's labour makes it possible to use their labour inefficiently. Few employers will be willing to pay full-time adult employee wages for tasks which are intermittent, unskilled or low priority. For example, small boys are employed in tea shops and restaurants where their main roles are wipe tables, sweep, and run errands. Customers are repulsed by being served by the same person who cleans the table, so adults are not involved in cleaning. And employers prefer not to employ adults just for this job because of the expense. Similarly, children are attractive as domestic workers as they can live at no additional cost in the employer's house, and can be available constantly, including to perform low-priority tasks like entertain the employer's children. The higher cost of adults would make this an inefficient and costly use of their time.

PERSPECTIVES ON HOW CHILD LABOUR PRACTICES HAVE CHANGED

This section explores employers' views on how practices of child labour have changed, particularly with respect to the numbers of children working or the extent of child labour; the types of and opportunities for work; wages and compensation; and access to education.

The extent of child labour

Employers believe that work opportunities have risen dramatically, and that this has changed child recruitment practices. In rural areas, even adults had fewer work opportunities 15 years ago, both on and off the farm. A shoe-shop owner explained:

15 years ago only a single crop used to be grown once a year, but now there are crops three times a year. The production has also been increased. So the scope of work in agriculture has also increased since then.

There were also fewer shops and other businesses at that time. A motor workshop owner stated that there were only four or five hot food shops in the bazaar 10 to 15 years ago, but now there are 40 or 50, in each of which a child is employed. The transport sector has also developed, and people travel far more than previously. A tea stall owner remarked,

The scope of work is much better at present. We do not see any cart now-a-days. Now there are vans, rickshaws, car, trucks all around. Loads of children are riding, assisting the driver or driving these vehicles themselves.

The pattern of change has been similar in the urban context. A carpenter said, 'There were very few dwellers in the slum during 1990-92 and very few furniture or wood shops. Now there are about 100 shops, with kids working in every shop.' A hot food shop owner explained how the local economy grew, 'First I came here to the slum then my brothers and other relatives came along. Then the place became densely populated. Everyone started their own business and the scope for work has increased for others.'

Most employers felt that smaller children, particularly those aged 10 years and below, were far less likely to work than previously. It had become extremely difficult to find girls willing to work as domestic

servants. Many also, however, felt that the proportion of children working was higher now than in the past (Table 2).

Table 2. Employers' estimates of the percentage of working children in their communities

| Estimated % of children working in the community | Early 1990s | Present (2007) |
|--|-------------|----------------|
| 0-20 | 23 | 0 |
| 21-40 | 5 | 3 |
| 41-60 | 2 | 10 |
| 61-80 | 0 | 16 |
| 81-100 | 0 | 2 |
| Total | 30 | 30 |

Source: semi-structured interviews with employers

In the views of both rural and urban employers, while around one-fifth of children worked previously, that proportion has more than doubled, particularly in urban areas. Rural employers estimated that between 41% and 60% of children now work, rising to between 61% and 80% among urban employers.

National statistics on child labour have not provided a clear picture of changes over time at the national level, as the National Child Labour Survey and the Labour Force Survey changed either the definitions of work or the ages of children being surveyed during the 1990s. According to survey findings, however, there were 6.3 million children aged 5-14 years working in 1995-96, compared to nearly 5 million in 2002-03. However, by 2002-03, the National Child Labour Survey also includes data for children aged 15-17 years: it seems that some 7.9 million in this age group were employed. One factor in why employers believe that the total number of working children has increased may therefore be that there have, as they state, been increases in the number of older children working, as national figures suggest is the case.

A second factor is likely to be sectoral changes: there has been an almost 10% shift in children's employment away from the relatively hidden agricultural sector, and into the relatively more visible non-agricultural, particularly service sectors. As we will see below, this may also help to account for the perceived rise in older children working.

Diversity of employment

Rural employers of children explained that children in the past used to work either as domestic helpers or in agriculture throughout the year, without variation in their work. This meant that children were mainly at home or working in their own households, and their involvement in other

sectors was nominal. Among those, working as carpenters, in hot food shops, and as tailors were most popular in the past. At present, children are commonly found in carpentry, tailoring and hot food outlets, as well as working as day labourers, assistants to bus and tempo (scooter) drivers, 'katha' stitching, masonry work, rickshaw and van pullers, assistants in motor workshops, grocery shops, jewelry shops, brickfields, and as helpers in the cold storage. In short, children work almost everywhere as opportunities available. A jeweler shop owner said, 'At present everyone is greedy about money. Children work where they can get more money.' Some employers felt that children worked as part of a strategy for bettering themselves. The owner of a small convenience store said, 'children are inclined to learn technical jobs nowadays, so that they can earn better in the future.'

Urban employers felt that children were mostly working as domestic worker or doing other strenuous tasks in the past, such as rowing boats. Other than these the employers mentioned that children were found working in shops, motor workshops, hot food shops, tailoring shops, tea stalls, working as office assistants and also as boatmen. More children aged 14 to 15 years are believed to be working in the garment factories than was the case 15 years before. Slum children are also involved in collecting and processing waste, an activity which has increased dramatically over the last 15 years. Present day children also pull rickshaws, collect water for grocery shops, sell food items on the street, work in battery workshops, poultry farms, rice mills, video game stalls, and in the phone and fax shops.

Contractual arrangements⁵

Both urban and rural employers felt that significant changes had occurred with respect to contractual arrangements for working children. In the past, both in urban and rural areas, formal contracts and conditions rarely applied. Parents were primarily interested in securing a place for their children in which they could both learn through work and earn their food and shelter. As a bicycle shop owner explained:

Before the parents used to come to my shop and said that they did not require any salary but asked me to take their son for work. They wanted their son to learn first before we start paying. They only wanted their children to be fed, that's all.

The informal arrangement was that employers were to teach the children various skills and lessons, give them food, help them buy a piece of land or get them married. Rural children would sometimes receive Tk. 10-15

⁵ This section also contains information from interviews and FGDs with children and parents.

as pocket money, while urban working children would get cash salaries of Tk. 400 to Tk. 500 per month or Tk. 20 to 30 per day, after having worked 3 to 4 years. Children who worked in clothe stores earned similar amounts.

Most employers felt that while in some sectors children can still be hired in the same way and under the same conditions as before, but in most cases, the type of work, salary and other benefits have to set out clearly before recruitment. A grocery shop owner remarked, 'we talk to the parents prior to recruiting the children- we tell them how much would the salary be and what extra benefits the child would get. Even after all these efforts children quit their jobs if they get a better offer.'

Contractual arrangements are now more clear, firm, and more likely to involve cash payments. In the rural areas children working in the agriculture sector, hot food shops, and other retail outlets earn Tk. 40-50 daily, which they receive on a daily basis. In the agriculture sector children also work on a contractual basis, earning Tk. 400-500 per month for working in a 'bigha' (33 decimals) of land. In Dhaka, some children earn as much as Tk. 700-1,500 per month working in the garment factories, as assistants in the departmental stores, mobile phone shops, motor workshops, and many more.

Given the particularly vulnerable position of child domestic workers, it is important to note the significant changes that are believed to have taken place in this sector. In the past, child domestic workers did not receive regular cash payments as wages (although there was an expectation of support to the family if in crisis and in particular, financial support to enable girls to marry). While in the past it was seen as enough for domestic workers to receive their food and keep, now it is common for cash payments to be required. A rural employer of domestic workers commented:

I married off the girl who used to work in my house. But now I cannot find anyone to work for me. I hear that at present parents are demanding the amount of money that is needed to get their daughters married off. They say they will get their daughters married when it is the appropriate time, but before letting their daughters work they want the money.

In addition to the fixed or agreed salary some children are also paid a little extra pocket money.

A significant change appears to have occurred in terms of a shift from what was in many cases, bonded labour, to a situation in which parents and even children appear to have considerably more bargaining power over what and how they are remunerated.

INFLUENCES ON CHILD LABOUR: POLICIES AND PROCESSES OVER THE LAST 15 YEARS

What do employers see as the factors that have wrought these changes in child labour? Three factors are seen as critical influences on how and whether employers recruit children: a) the increase in work opportunities; b) the related matter of change in family earnings; and c) education policy.

Increase in work opportunities

The last 15 years has been a period of rapid change in the structure and size of the economy, with agricultural growth and diversification into non-farm and off-farm activities in rural areas accompanied by rapid increases in communication infrastructure and mobility. The economic growth rate rose from 4.5% (early to mid 1990s) to 5.2% (second half of the 1990s), and then to 5.6% in the first half of the 2000s (table 3 in annex). The proportion of the population living in poverty declined, from 59% in 1991-92 to 49% in 2000, declining faster in the 2000s to reach 40% by 2005 (Table 5 in annex). Employment statistics also show that the number of day labourers has decreased, while work within households and self employment have increased (Economic Review 2007).

These changes have not occurred evenly across the country, and the rural community studied here is in one of the poorest districts in the country, in one of the divisions which has seen slower progress than in others. However, even here rural employers note that employment opportunities have risen. Where previously only paddy and jute had been produced, now various crops are produced throughout the year. Water pumps, tractor, high breed seeds, improved fertilizer and pesticides are believed to have lead to increased production and generated more employment.

The retail and service sectors have also expanded in the rural community during that time. Numerous shops have popped up in recent years, a development which has been helped by improvements in communications. At present the rural study cite contains three large *bazaars*, in each of which children work for Tk. 20 to 50 per day.

After the construction of the Jamuna Multi Purpose Bridge the mobility of the people of the northern region increased. People migrated from local towns to district towns, and then on to the capital city. People from North

Bengal travel to the south during harvest, find work as rickshaw pullers, domestic workers, and garment workers. There is strong demand for labourers in Dhaka, and the role of children is important here as well.

Urban employers identify a major growth in opportunities for daily labourers in the city. Urban employers noted that when the slum was first established, around 15 years before, there were very few shops. At present there are some 500 shops in two different bazaars, offering a wide range of jobs to children both in and outside the slum.

Figure 1. Urban employers on the numbers of enterprises in early 1990s compared to present

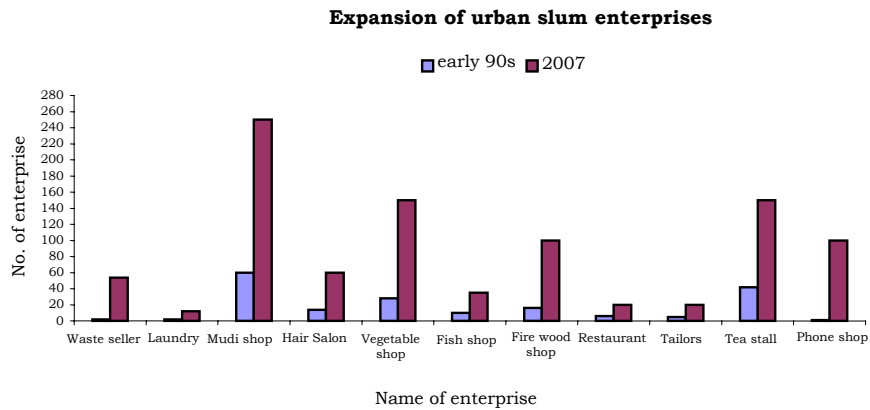


Figure 1 shows that in the Dhaka slum enterprises that employ children have increased in the last 15 years. Figures for the early 1990s are estimates and for 2007 were taken from the census of businesses in the locality conducted as part of this research. The number of shops in the early 1990s were few compared to 2007. There were only 2 shops buying waste from children in the early 1990s, compared to about 54 at present; grocery or convenience stores increased from 60 to 250, tea stalls from 42 to 150; and mobile phone shops from 1 to 100 . These are the major working places for the children and areas of expansion.

The impact of increased opportunity according to employers is that children and their parents are in a better position to choose better jobs. New networks are established with the co-workers, customers, other employers and peer friends who work in other places. Through the network the children get to know about more job opportunities and can think about their future benefits.

Box 2. Why it has become difficult to retain child workers

An owner of a hot food shop in the Dhaka slum has been running his business since 2006. During this period five children have worked in his shop. The first four have left to find better opportunities.

1. The first boy was 12 years old. He worked for a month for got Tk. 500. His father used to sell fruits in the slum. All of a sudden the father got a job and left the slum and took his son with him. He was confident that the boy would get a better job.

2. The second boy was 16 years old and experienced. He worked for five months at the rate of Tk. 1,000 per month. His complaint was that he did not get enough time to sleep properly. He had to wake at 5a.m. and never slept before midnight. He left to get a less stressful job.

3. The shop owner brought a 14 years old boy from the village to work for him at a monthly salary of Tk. 600. He worked for only eight days. Since he had studied up to class nine, he got a job in an office as a night guard.

4. The employer recruited a close relative, an experienced 16 years old boy, for Tk. 1,500 per month. Before starting the job he made it clear that he expected a raise after six months. This was agreed. He then demanded a raise after two months. His salary was raised by Tk. 200. He again demanded for raise after 6 months. The owner declined and the boy left the job.

5. The current employee is a 14 years old boy who has been working for the last two months at Tk. 800 per month. The owner knows that he might leave at any moment as he complains constantly of not enjoying his work. The owner feels there is nothing he can do about it.

Owners of small businesses and employers of child domestic workers are under pressure due to increasing work opportunities for children. Since small business owners do not pay much, children leave jobs after gaining some experience.

A particularly interesting finding is that parents in rural areas are no longer interested in sending their children to the city to work as domestic workers, partly because there are more options created in the rural areas as well. Children living in the slums prefer working in the garment factories or other places as they get paid better, feel they have a better status and enjoy some independence. Those who work as domestic workers prefer part-time work, where they earn between Tk. 400 and Tk. 600 per households per month⁶; if they can cover four to five houses each day, they can earn at least Tk. 2,400 per month. They also have the independence and opportunity to rest in the afternoon and to work in

⁶ If a domestic worker is involved in three different types of work in a house then he/she gets paid separately for each work. If he/she is paid 200 hundred taka for each work then in total it comes to 600 hundred taka.

their own houses afterwards. By contrast, full-time domestic workers earn only Tk. 500-700 per month in addition to food and shelter, but have little autonomy. They also have the fear of being sexually abused.

Education policy

The massive expansion of primary and more recently secondary education has also created pressures on employers of children. A rural landowner stated:

Now children are not available for the whole day. We can get them for half a day for work. They are now in schools. It takes three days for them to finish one days work. Then again they can work full time on weekends.

In the rural study site, the education office estimated that some 98% of children aged 6 -10 years were enrolled in primary schools. They also suffered from a dropout rate of 29% between Grades 2 and 4. In the study union, there were 7 BRAC schools and 2 pre-primary schools in which 388 students (male 133, female 155) are enrolled. It is worth mentioning that in order to get children enrolled in government schools they are given stipend and text books. In the NGO schools the books, paper and pens are given free of cost.

The urban slum children need to travel 1.5 km to get to the nearest government school, which the headteacher estimates around 40% of the children of that slum attend. There are 12 other schools, most run by NGOs, and most established at different times since 2001. Now all together there are about 1,000 children enrolled in these schools. The schools are providing books, notebooks, pens, uniforms, snacks and health services besides education. There are two schools where they provide education up to class eight and after that they get the opportunity to receive vocational training. Unfortunately the education facility is not adequate for the children in the slum. There is not adequate opportunity for the children to join the secondary education after they finish the primary level.

Rural employers believe that government policies to encourage poor children to enroll in schools have had an impact, noting too, that NGOs play a similar role by providing books, notebooks, uniforms, bags and umbrellas. The stipend for secondary school going girls has also attracted many more girls than boys into secondary level in the rural study research site. In the rural study area there are 6,324 boys and 7,892 girls enrolled in secondary schools.

According to the employers they can hire more boys after their primary schooling but not the girls. An urban employer said:

Young kids are not available nowadays for domestic work. If they are your poor relative then you can get them. Parents are now more eager to send their children to the NGO schools as these schools gives a lot of benefit. They can study up to class five free of cost. Children were more available 15 years back as there were no NGO schools then..

Some children are available now on a part time basis which sometime is a problem for the owners. A pharmacy owner stated:

Since there are so many schools and all of them giving benefits, more children are getting enrolled. We cannot get them for the whole day so I have to work a lot on my own. And I get tired working like that.

Would-be employers of domestic workers found it particularly difficult to attract girl children. Parents are more concerned about their daughter's marriage prospects, and see schooling as improving their prospects, as compared to domestic work, which was seen to make girls vulnerable in terms of marriage. Since a domestic worker is in a vulnerable position of being sexually abused and many do believe they are, the prospect of marriage decline for them. A rural employer of domestic labour stated that, 'It's a blessing to find a girl for work. Parents do not allow their daughters to work anymore, they let them study and get them married later on' (Box 3).

Box 3. Even the ultra poor prefer not to work as domestic workers

Ruma Akhter is a 13 years old girl. Due to harsh poverty her parents sent her to work in other's house. The father is a van puller and the mother is a domestic worker as well. The parents worried a lot about Ruma's marriage as it is difficult to get good marriage proposals when a girl is working as a domestic worker. At one stage the mother became a member of the BRAC's TUP programme and she got a cow. She needed someone to look after it, so she asked her daughter quit her job to look after the livestock. She also got Ruma enrolled in a school. After few days the mother got a spinning wheel from the programme. Now Ruma works at home and earns about 100 to 150 taka by spinning thread. She also takes care of the cow simultaneously. In the mean time she was able to finish her primary education as well.

Changes in household income

In the rural community, there have been significant changes in the agriculture sector. While in the past, middle and upper class farmers used to hire smaller farmers to work for them under their supervision, the present generation are more inclined towards education and formal sector employment. They are involved in different occupation within the country and abroad. This generation of landowners cannot supervise

agricultural activity, therefore, lease their lands to other farmers. With loans, mainly from NGOs, tenant farmers are now farming larger amounts of land than they previously had access to. They also involve their children in this work.

In the rural study site, many households had also established small businesses with loans from NGOs. BRAC's CFPR programme was working in the area, under which the ultra poor people were receiving livestock and seeds for vegetable gardening, benefiting some 966 household members. Many of the families were also provided with spinning wheels. In most cases, new employment opportunities have also involved the children of these families.

Box 4. Changes in agriculture in the eyes of a rural landlord

"I am 55 years old. Three of my children are working and one goes to school. I own 40 bighas of land. Ten years ago, I used to hire farmers and work with them in the field. Now as I have grown older I cannot give much time and my children are very busy themselves. "Chinese" (irri) cultivation started ten years back in our area. By giving our fullest effort we would get only 30 maunds of paddy. Nowadays we can get many farmers who are willing to take lease of our land and work. We need to give either Tk. 1,500 or one maund of rice after they have worked on a bigha of land. Usually the tenant farmers are inclined to take the money and they provide with all the necessary equipments. In this way I can earn money with less hassle. The tenant farmers make their wives, children to work in the field. They do not need to hire anyone else but also are involved in other works. Those who were totally landless are being able to build their houses on a piece of land. They also are being able to keep their children working with them. The children are being able to go to school as they work part time in the fields."

Similarly, in the urban slum area many residents have managed to start their own small businesses by taking loans or with savings from other sources. Their children are also working in those family businesses. Those who were involved in other jobs are joining the family business as well and some also go to school (Box 5).

Box 5. Combining school, income-earning and household domestic work

Moni is a nine years old girl studying in a NGO school in the slum. She works with her mother at their cake (pitha) shop after attending school. She has another sister who is 4 or 5 years old. Mr. Abdul Mannan (Moni's father) is a day labourer. Receiving advice from some relatives, Moni's parents with their two children moved to the slum in Dhaka four years back. Nurjahan Begum, Moni's mother, was a full time domestic worker but now she works regularly. At the beginning when they started living in the slum, Moni sometimes used to help her mother at the houses where her mother worked. For extra income Nurjahan had set up the "cake" shop with her savings one and a half years before. Even though Moni was allowed to help her mother initially but now she no longer work as a domestic helper. When Nurjahan goes to work in other's houses Moni sells cake at the shop. Moni also looks after her little sister simultaneously. Upon Nurjahan's return from work, Moni goes to school.

A change can be observed in terms of earnings in the poor households both in the rural and urban areas. The children of those families have more opportunity for work now. They are helping their parents in agricultural field work, cattle-rearing and spinning. In some very poor households, children are being withdrawn from other places of work to work on the household enterprise. Perhaps as a result of this new flexibility, some of the children also attend school after work.

This creates pressure on the rural employers who previously used to hire children. The working children are now joining their family work, and on the other hand many children enter the work force by getting involved in the family from the very beginning. So many poor children are not available to work for other employers.

IMPACTS ON EMPLOYERS' PERCEPTION AND PRACTICES

The employers of child labour in the areas studied are under considerable pressure as a result of working children's increased work opportunities and choices of sectors, including better-paid and more attractive new sectors, as well as the flexibility and security of home-based work. These increased opportunities had impact on their working conditions. The employers have changed their behaviour in the following ways in an attempt to recruit and retain child workers:

- **Good behaviour.** Most rural and urban employees claim that they speak nicely and try to avoid getting angry with children if they make any mistakes at work. Some stated that they no longer physically or verbally abuse child workers.
- **Good working conditions/attractive remuneration.** Most rural and urban employers stated that they had to raise salaries of their child employees regularly in order to keep them in the job. Extra leave was also another factor mentioned by employers.
- **Constant Care.** All employers interviewed commented that they are more alert about the children's health-related needs.
- **Extra benefits.** Some employers also pay small bonus payments or provide good food as rewards for good work.
- **Meeting basic needs and rights.** Some employers felt it was important to pay attention to children's basic needs and rights in order to make them stay. The most important of these were: allowing the children to rest when they are unwell; giving them time to bathe and have lunch; giving them three meals a day, new clothes several times a year and a place to stay. In addition, the employers give some money for snacks, allowing them to go out for half an hour everyday, providing them with daily essentials like oil and soap, asking them about their health every now and then, and help them getting medication if they fall sick. Some employers of domestic workers supported children's schooling and study.
- **Concern for the future.** Parents and guardians are particularly concerned about employment which they do not think the child is learning enough in, or in which he or she may not have future prospects. This makes employers concerned about teaching tasks which should be beneficial for the children's future.
- **Other.** Employers also listen to children's opinions, stand up for employees if there is a complaint against them, assign work

according to capacity, avoid discrimination and they treat the children as their own family members.

- **Negative strategies.** Oppressive means of keeping child workers in work continue to be common. Few employers of domestic workers allowed them to leave the house, out of the fear that they would be 'spoiled' or leave the job. Others use threats, such as false allegations of theft and threats to file cases against children if they leave. Sometimes employers pay wages in tiny installments and do not allow them to go to their villages on leave. Even if the leave is granted the children may not be allowed to go unless they repay loans which they have taken previously.

CONCLUSION

While searching the answer for the question "how what factors have contributed to changes in patterns and perspectives on the employment of children over the last 15 years?" this research has found that perspectives on the advantages of child workers, the economic status of parents and the advantage and profit of the employers are intertwined.

Employers believe that the scope of work for children has increased in the last 15 years. According to rural employers, the proportion of children working has doubled. Agricultural diversification and intensification and increased opportunities in the retail and service sectors, particularly transport played major role. In terms of increasing economic opportunities, the situation is similar in the urban slum. Mostly rural children used to work either in agriculture or as domestic workers, but the range of opportunities appears to have increased. For example, many urban children now work in the garment factories.

Employers also believe that younger children, aged 10 years or less are now less likely to be working. With the change in types of work and opportunity for work, contractual arrangements are also reported to have changed. There are increasing requirements for clarity and agreement about the scope of the work, salary and benefits. There appears to be greater capacity on the part of parents and children to negotiate with employers on salary and benefits.

Employers regard agricultural growth and diversification, including the advancement of technology in agricultural production, as having expanded economic opportunity, including for children. Children are now in a better position to select jobs of their own choice and exercise choice in moving between positions. An important factor has been improved access to schooling both in the urban and rural areas. Employers are less able to recruit children who are below 10 years old; older girls are also less available for work, partly as a result of the secondary school stipend programme.

Poor rural households have seen their own household production increased, partly through increased access to tenancy and partly through home-based production facilitated by NGO loans. In the urban areas, many more families are also reportedly involved in small home-based businesses. The parents reportedly be more inclined to employ children in household enterprises, and less inclined to send them out for work for others.

These factors taken together result in some new pressures on employers to recruit and retain child labour. Employers reported that they treated child workers better than in the past, paid better salaries, and gave other benefits such as healthcare and leave.

Overall, it seems that the key factors behind changes in how children are employed over the last 15 years have been economic growth and diversification, and rising educational opportunities. There exist pressures on and incentives for households to send their children to school, particularly among the primary school going age group. While the research found few indications of a general decline in the acceptability of child labour, the rise in school enrolment appears to have changed norms about childhood, and entails the expectation that very young children (aged 10 and under) will attend school rather than work. While NGO and Government advocacy campaigns against child labour may have played some role in changing public attitudes towards children's work, the impact was less evident than the impact of changing economic imperatives and new incentives created by public policy. One area that clearly merits further exploration is that of the impact of NGO and government advocacy campaigns against child labour. However, there were no indications of a general change in attitudes towards employment of children that would suggest a decline in the acceptability of child labour. There were no signs that the overall preference for employing children has been influenced by NGO or government advocacy campaigns against child labour.

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APPENDIX

Table 1. Types of work in the urban

| Serial No. | Working places at the urban slum | Starting from | Number of working places at the beginning (Approx) | Number of working places at the present (Approx) |
|------------|---|---------------|--|--|
| 1 | Bhargri | 1995 | 2 | 54 |
| 2 | Laundry | 1994 | 1 | 12 |
| 3 | Mudi shop | 1992 | 6 | 250 |
| 4 | Hair salon | 1992 | 2 | 60 |
| 5 | Video games shops | 2003 | 1 | 8 |
| 6 | CD shop | 2004 | 1 | 20 |
| 7 | Grocery shop | 1993 | 6 | 150 |
| 8 | Fish shop | 1993 | 6 | 35 |
| 9 | Fire wood shop | 1993 | 2 | 100 |
| 10 | Hot food shop | 1992 | 3 | 20 |
| 11 | Tailor shop | 1993 | 2 | 20 |
| 12 | Tea stall | 1992 | 12 | 150 |
| 13 | Mobile phone shops: for recharging credits and making calls | 1995 | 1 | 100 |

Table 2. Schools in the Urban Slum

| Sl No. | Name of schools | Number of schools | Year of establishment | Number of students | Age of the students | No of shifts | Classes | Benefits |
|--------|---|-------------------|-----------------------|--------------------|---------------------|--------------|------------------------------------|---|
| 1 | BRAC | | | | | | | |
| 2 | Bangla-German Pothokoli | 1 | 2006 | 120 | 6+ | 2 | Nursery-2 nd | Books, note books, pencil, snack, slate, health service |
| 3 | Intervida | 1 | 2001 | 60 | Children of all age | - | - | Toys, art classes, educational elements |
| 4 | Working children project | 2 | 2001 | 80 | 9 - 12 | 2 | 3 Years long project | Vocational training is provided after 2.5 years |
| 5 | Intervida Path shala-1 | | 2001 | 292 | 6+ | 2 | 1 st to 8 th | |
| 6 | Intervida Path shala-2 | | 2001 | 252 | 6+ | 2 | 1 st to 8 th | |
| 7 | Child and elderly learning center | 1 | | | | 2 | 1 st to 2 nd | Chocholates at the begining, milk, banana, egg, biskites |
| 8 | Urban development center | 2 | 2000 | | 4-6 | | Play group | Books, note books, pen, toys |
| 9 | Fulki Community based Project for Girls' | 1 | 2007 | 45 | 7 - 18 | 2 | | Books, note books, pen, slate, music lessons, vocational training |
| 10 | Madrasatul Madina Al Manwara | 1 | 2003 | 121 | Various age | 2 | Moktob | - |
| 11 | Nurani Hafezia Islami Madrasa and Orphanage | 1 | 1996 | 120 | Various age | 1 | Hafezi | - |

Table 3. Economic Growth Trend based on GDP

| | |
|-----------------|----------|
| 1990/91-1994/95 | 4.487678 |
| 1995/96-1999/00 | 5.159318 |
| 2000/01-2005/06 | 5.602429 |

Source: BSS 1990-2006

Table 4. Status of Employment

| Major Industry | 1995-96 | 1999-2000 | 2002-2003 |
|---------------------------------------|---------|-----------|-----------|
| Self-employment/own account worker | 39.7 | 46.67 | 44.70 |
| Employer | 0.4 | 0.3 | 0.38 |
| Employee | 16.8 | 16.67 | 13.77 |
| Unpaid family helper | 18.9 | 12.0 | 18.28 |
| Day labourer | 24.2 | 24.36 | 20.09 |

Table 5. Recent Poverty Trend

| | 1991-92 | 2000 | 2005 |
|------------|---------|-------|-------|
| Head count | | | |
| National | 58.8% | 48.9% | 40.0% |
| Urban | 44.9% | 35.2% | 28.4% |
| Rural | 61.2% | 52.3% | 43.8% |

Source: BSS 2005