



# Formulation of the National CSR Policy for Children: Perspectives and Recommendations

*Save the Children and The Daily Star have recently organized a roundtable on "Formulation of the National CSR Policy for Children: Perspectives and Recommendations". We publish a summary of the discussion* -Editor

**Shahida Begum, Programme Director, EYE Programme, Save the Children**

In Bangladesh, current net enrolment in primary school is about 98%. But, access to primary schools of the disadvantaged children groups, specially working children, is yet low. In the studies of Save the Children and ILO we have seen that 67% working children are out of any kind of education. A large number of enrolled students drop out before completing grade five. It is the situation of both urban and rural working children.

Generally, disadvantaged children are referred to vocational training. But attendance of working children in vocational education is also very low because they lack prerequisite basic education. Our vocational training institutions, their teaching staffs, curriculum, machineries are not up to the demand of our industries. So, vocational institutions fail to impart quality training to the disadvantaged students.

Child labour, education and labour market are closely interlinked. In Bangladesh, drop out rate is huge; almost 50% students drop out before completing grade five. These children are engaged in informal sectors. Works in informal sector is hazardous for these children. So we have to find out the reasons behind drop out. Access to primary education is one of big problems. Though overall access rate has increased but in terms of rural and urban working children it is still very low. Formal schools follow centralised time table. So it becomes really difficult for the working children to attend schools during this time schedule. Their parents prefer engagement to job to enrolment in school because they have doubts about the long term benefit of education.

Now, how can the private sector contribute to change this situation? They can play a great role in the development of soft skill and quality vocational training. Usually, we provide training on hard skills. But these children really lack socialization skills. These skills are closely related with the overall improvement of the livelihood of children. We can create a win-win strategic cooperation among corporation, development agencies, government and NGOs so that they can work as a team and create a sustainable impact on the society.

We are working with 62 international buyers. Most of them practice CSR in philanthropic mode. They do not invest in long term sustainable mode. We want their long term participation in every effort be it small or large. We are trying to include this sustainability issue in the CSR policy.

We are also advocating for child rights business principle. If corporations adopt this principle in their core business policy it will definitely benefit disadvantaged children. We often see 'No Child Labour' notice hanged on factory gates. So when we approach any company to allow some of our students for training or apprenticeship they avoid our request referring to the notice. But apprenticeship is part of education. It is not child labour. So there should be a clear indication about this issue in our CSR policy.

In Bangladesh we do not have any clear guideline or unified policy on CSR. We have recently signed a MoU with the government to formulate a national CSR policy for children. It will expedite CSR activities for the development of our future generations. It will also help implement national child labour elimination policy, national education policy, skill development policy and other international conventions regarding children, particularly ILO Convention 182.

**Shahamin S. Zaman, Chief Executive Officer, CSR Centre**

Now, CSR is a globally highlighted topic. In 2012, Indian government prepared national CSR voluntary guideline and it has been being implemented. Their private sectors have also come up with responsibilities. Pakistan has been also implementing their national CSR policy which was prepared in 2013. These South Asian countries are really doing a great job because implementation of such policies is not very easy in the context of developing countries. So, Bangladesh should ponder over this issue and take immediate action.

It is a matter of hope that along with CSR national policy for children, we are also working national CSR guideline under the leadership of Planning Ministry. These two policies will be interlinked. We are also emphasising on private sectors.

In CSR policies we are trying to preserve basic rights of working children. So we have to carefully deal with the child labour issue. There is dilemma in child labour perspective. Child labour cannot be eliminated from the developing countries unless alternative measures are adopted to secure their rights. Private sector can play a great role in this case.

CSR is not philanthropy or charity. It should be long term and sustainable. It should be linked with national developmental policy. Every country has different development priorities and the CSR policy should be prepared along that line.

**Arthur Sears, Chief Technical Adviser, ILO, TVET Reform Project**

Bangladesh government has a national skills development policy that clearly shows government's priority in skill development. We should seriously engage with this policy to expedite our skill development programmes and CSR policies. This skill policy is the pathway for the people who do not have grade 8 education to get into the skills development system. There are also lots of avenues to engage private sector in skills development both on and off the job.

**Dr. Syed Farhat Anwar, Professor, IBA, DU**

Recently Dhaka University has introduced CSR in the curriculum of social science faculty, business faculty and IBA to create an understanding among students how CSR can help develop a nation.

Primarily, we have to separate CSR from policy and compliance issues. Compliance is something obligatory but CSR is voluntary. The focus of CSR is to benefit both the company and society. It is a win-win situation. Otherwise it will not be sustainable.

We usually focus on CSR of manufacturing sector but we should also think of the responsibility of service sector in this regard.

CSR is a strategy as well as an innovation. You cannot limit scopes of innovation by policies. We should only give companies guideline they will work out their own way to implement it.

There are many success stories about CSR in Bangladesh. We should communicate these stories to other companies



## PARTICIPANTS



Shahida Begum



Shahamin S. Zaman



Arthur Sears



Syed Farhat Anwar



Khondkar Morshed Millat



Adnan Nafis



Shamim Ul Huq



Emranul Huq Chowdhury



Yasmin Sultana



Khandoker Mostan Hossain



Shabnaaz Zahereen



Ratan Sarker



Michael McGrath



Mikail Shipar

so that people can learn how they will get profit as well as contribute to the development of the country.

**Khondkar Morshed Millat, In-charge, Green Banking and CSR Department, Bangladesh Bank**

First we should start with personal social responsibility (PSR). If employers think of the well being of their employees then the livelihood and working condition of employees will definitely improve. It will create positive impact in their family as well as society.

CSR activities must be sustainable otherwise it will not be able to bring any positive change. So our CSR policy should focus on sustainability of the CSR activities.

In our present economic condition total elimination of child labour is not possible. We should rather emphasise on that how the children can learn both the hard and soft skills through their work.

Bangladesh Bank has a policy guideline regarding CSR activities of financial institutions. It follows consultative approach. We have different clusters of work area. If we include child rights issue as one of the clusters then financial institutions will emphasise on the issue. But Bangladesh Bank is not technically sound on child rights issue. So we need support from child rights organization to prepare that policy. We will give special weight to those financial institutions who honour child rights in their activities.

**Adnan Nafis, Head of Trade promotion (Bangladesh) and social responsibility, BGCCI**

Bangladesh-German Chamber of Commerce & Industry (BGCCI) has around 600 members. We have been thinking of the CSR issue for quite a long time. Our member companies are doing a lot of work in this sector. We are trying to communicate these success stories with other companies. We have already arranged two Global Social Responsibility Conferences to promote these success stories. It helped other players in the industry understand how

CSR was helping both the society and the company.

The studies conducted by the BGCCI show that there is a serious lack of skill workers in Bangladesh and existing skills do not match industry requirements. But positive news is that many private companies are expressing their interest to get involved in the skill development programmes and provide the skilled labours better salary and benefits. Bangladesh government is also very supportive to such efforts. BGCCI is working towards bringing the industries, NGOs and the government together in CSR activities. BGCCI believes if they are involved from the very beginning it will yield more result as a private sector gateway.

**Shamim Ul Huq, President, Nordic Chamber of Commerce and Industry in Bangladesh**

All the chambers should be included in this effort. We can form a core group comprising not only of the CSR responsible but core business leaders of the countries corporate world to monitor the development of the CSR policy and its implementation.

We have to emphasise on creating more awareness among business professionals about child rights.

**Emranul Huq Chowdhury, Chairman, Bangladesh Shishu Odhikar Forum (BSAF)**

In Bangladesh child poverty line is about 40% that means about 30 million children are still under poverty line. So there is huge task to reach these disadvantaged children which the government can not do alone. So private sectors have to come forwards. That's why we need a guideline. CSR policy will be an effective instrument in this regard.

We find involvement of private sector CSR programmes in different social welfare activities but they are not very much interested to associate with child rights issues. So we should motivate them to come up and share responsibility for building a better generation.

Microfinance is itself a social business. Microfinance

institutions do a lot of social activities. They can also be an important stakeholder in this effort.

**Yasmin Sultana, Joint Secretary, Ministry of Industries**

To make the CSR policy effective, we have to clearly define what CSR is, how the policy will be implemented, what would be the roles of different stakeholders, who will monitor and how long it will continue. We have many policies but we cannot implement those because we do not have proper monitoring system. We can form a cell to monitor implementation of the CSR policy.

We should also offer some rewards to those organisation who will properly implement the CSR policy.

**Khandoker Mostan Hossain, Joint Secretary (Labour), Ministry of Labour and Employment**

In our labour law, it is clearly said that children below 14 cannot be employed in any work. We have also ratified ILO convention 182 on hazardous work. We have finalized a list of 38 hazardous works in line of ILO Convention 182. We have adopted Child Labour Elimination Policy 2010 and prepared a plan of action. Now we have to implement this plan of action. There is a clear indication who will do what. We have national monitoring committee up to Upazilla level. I think the policy document will be very much relevant to preparation of the CSR policy.

**Shabnaaz Zahereen, Child Protection Specialist, UNICEF**

First of all, we have to create mass awareness about CSR.

Any child related policy has to give focus on the best interest of children and ensure his or her rights according to UNCRC. This is equally applicable for the national CSR policy for children. We have National Children Policy. Recently we have adopted Children Act 2013 which is very much in line with UNCRC. These policies should be considered with utmost significance in preparing the CSR policy for children.

We have to distinguish between child labour and working child. Child labour has to be banned absolutely. We have to know the parameter of child labour. The definition of working child is not clear. Corporate sectors do not have any clear idea about this. So we have to make them aware of this issue.

We have to also create awareness among parents of child labours who can play a big role in changing the situation. If we can give children proper childhood it will be a sustainable initiative. We can invest some of our CSR resources to create this awareness.

Another big area is child sensitive social protection. Our safety net programmes monitor this issue and give parents conditional funds so that they cannot engage their children in any work. CSR can also play a big role here.

**Ratan Sarker, Focal Person, Together with Children Network**

First, the CSR policy should be child friendly. Secondly, companies that ratify the CSR policy should be made accountable to their commitment. They should publicly disclose these accountability reports.

**Michael McGrath, Country Director, Save the Children**

CSR means the private sector giving back to the community. Giving back is more than just compliance with the law. It is not just doing no harm, but doing good. It can be the provision of cash support, technical advice and support, advocacy for changes to relevant laws or increased funding for necessary government programs, and so on. It should be long term, and focused on bringing about sustainable changes.

I think a few things need to be included in the CSR policy. First, it should be clearly defined what is CSR for children and what is not. Secondly, to what extent should companies be obliged to follow the policy? It is unlikely that the policy will be legally binding, but companies need to feel at least morally bound to adhere to the provisions of the policy. What general and sector-specific guidelines should be included in the policy? What monitoring system should be there? I think that civil society should be involved in the monitoring system, and any reports generated should be publicly released, to recognise the efforts of leading companies and encourage other companies to follow suit.

The best CSR is CSR that is good for both business and the community. CSR can benefit a company not only by building the market (and thus generating more profits) and improve the company's image. However, often the greatest benefit of CSR for a company is the positive impact on the morale of employees, which in turn helps a company to retain good employees and attract good applicants.

Of course the CSR policy will include guidelines regarding best practice, but companies should be given the opportunity to innovate. The last and perhaps the most important thing is that the CSR policy should be written in the language of the corporate sector, not the language of NGOs or the language of government. Companies, including boards and senior management, should immediately be able to understand what the CSR policy involves, what it will cost and how it will benefit the company and the community.

**Mikail Shipar, Secretary, Ministry of Labour and Employment**

The government is very sincere about the CSR policy. For the first time we are going to formulate CSR policy for children. I hope it will contribute a lot to the improvement of the life of disadvantaged children.

In Germany there is a kind of dual education where companies provide both education and training to students after their completion of grade 8. Companies bear all the responsibilities of the students. After successful completion of this dual education students get job in these companies according to the company requirement. In this system student not only get opportunity to continue their education but also contribute to their families. Families also get interested to send their children to schools. Through this system companies also get skilled manpower. This is a win-win situation.

If we can introduce such system for disadvantaged children in our country it will definitely reduce child labour. We will be able to create a large number of skilled manpower. Our industries will also get benefit from increased productivity of their workers. Our CSR policies should consider this example.