

# Children are to be nurtured, not tortured



SHAHEEN ANAM

Shaheen Anam is the executive director of Manusher Jonno Foundation (MJF).

MANY societies have their own sources of shame. Genital mutilation, honour killing, sexual abuse of children in religious institutions—there are many such practices that go against all norms of a civilised and humane society. What is ours? I can think of at least two: child marriage and child labour. I call them shame as both are condoned and enjoy social acceptance, yet violate the fundamental principles of human rights and dignity—the right to a life of freedom and security.

The IGI Global, which conducted research on child labour with the support of the International Labour Organization (ILO), estimates that there are 420,000 child domestic workers in Bangladesh, of whom 83 percent are female, and 132,000 work in Dhaka city.

The government has committed to phase out child labour in Bangladesh and enacted a policy to this end in 2010, and issued an order in 2013 prohibiting all children under 18 years of age from working in 38 identified hazardous jobs. However, there is no implementation of this regulation as children continue to work in hazardous and dangerous situations, such as welding, in biri factories, as helpers in human hauliers, stone-cutting, etc. As for domestic work, it did not even make it to the list of hazardous work. Child rights experts, on the other hand, say that child domestic workers are particularly vulnerable as their work is inside people's homes and evades scrutiny from the authorities or those children's families. It is unregulated and unmonitored, leaving children at the total mercy of their employers. Parents with low income hand over their children, often as young as eight, to work in middle- or lower middle-class households in the hope that they will be looked after, at least get better nutrition, and also contribute to their families' income.

Alas! Contrary to their expectations, domestic child workers face regular abuse and neglect. The abuse ranges from overwork, insufficient food, no recreation or education, etc to unspeakable torture such as sexual violence, severe beating, starvation, burning, scalding with hot water and so on—sometimes resulting in death.

As per reports compiled by rights organisations such as Ain o Salish Kendra (ASK), Manusher Jonno Foundation (MJF), Bangladesh Shishu Adhikar Forum, etc. in the last five years, at least 200 child domestic workers were found dead in their employers' homes. Meanwhile, 365 were tortured physically, and 62 girls were sexually abused. In 2020-2021, as per reports compiled by MJF from six newspapers, 44 child domestic workers were victims of torture, of whom 16 died, and four died by suicide. Unless there is severe injury or death, such cases are not reported, nor are criminal cases filed. Only 30 percent of the cases of such torture are filed, with no known example of perpetrators ever getting punished for such heinous crimes against children.

The recent case of Farzana, a domestic worker aged 17 years, employed by a banker's family in Kalabagan, Dhaka revealed that physical and mental abuse can continue for years without anyone knowing about it. She suffered continuous torture for seven years, after which she finally sought help. Her

entire body shows marks of old and new wounds. She is now lying at a hospital, undergoing treatment. Her parents have filed a criminal case, but the perpetrator is already out on bail.

This is not a one-off incident. We read about such inhuman acts inflicted by members of the so-called educated or elite class on their domestic helps every so often. In November last year, little Tania, an eight-year-old child from Fulbaria, Mymensingh, was found with blade cuts all over her body. Daughter of a poor tea seller, she was hired as a household help for a monthly salary of Tk 1,000. A criminal case was filed, but again the perpetrators are out on bail. Last year, the 44 reported cases of torture inflicted on child domestic workers all tell the same story of brutal assault, starvation, scalding with hot water and iron, and so on. Medical help was given only when the child faced imminent death. Criminal cases were filed against some, but no one has faced any punishment for their act of such extreme cruelty.

Reports of suicide or attempted suicide by adolescent female domestic workers are common. Most are found hanging from the ceiling fan. Investigation into the cause of suicide is mostly inconclusive without enough evidence to file criminal cases. There is, however, strong suspicion of sexual assault by male employers.

As is obvious, the unreported cases outnumber the reported ones. No one takes notice unless the torture is severe, and the victim lands in a hospital or is dead. Cries for justice go in vain. Not a single perpetrator accused of torturing domestic help has ever been convicted. Being economically solvent, perpetrators are able to prevent cases from being filed or negotiate with the victims' families, who are too poor and powerless to continue with the cases and usually agree to out-of-court settlement.

The government has committed to eliminate all hazardous work by children by 2024 and completely eliminate child labour by 2030. By all standards, setting a deadline that is years away indicates the lack of urgency in implementing any system or policies that will end child labour soon. In the meantime, children continue to fall prey to predator employers, who think they own them and can do whatever they want.

What can we do to make child labour socially unacceptable? What kind of campaign will result in putting to shame those who employ children and mistreat them? The narrative that our socio-economic situation will not permit elimination of child labour has gone on for too long. But why should children pay the price of our inability to build a society where everyone's basic needs are met? When will children enjoy the fruits of our so-called middle-income country status?

The government should consider expanding the social safety net programmes for parents who are forced to send their children to work. An important first step is to address the invisibility of child domestic workers, because once they enter the homes of their employers, they lose all identity and often their parents are not allowed to visit them. They should be registered with the social welfare department, and given ID cards with a hotline number to call in case of emergency. The social welfare department can also organise spot visits on a trial basis to at least give the impression that there is a system in place to monitor how these children are being treated.

The other issue is that of justice. If the law is supposed to work for everyone, then how come not a single case filed against these cruel employers of child domestic workers has ever resulted in conviction? This has given the message that they will not be held to account, no matter what



Childhood is supposed to be full of laughter and wonder, not hard labour.

FILE PHOTO: ANISUR RAHMAN


cruelty they perpetrate on these children.

But a more fundamental question is: What drives normal people to such acts of cruelty? How can people—couples with families—have such double standards of adoring and protecting their own children, but slap, pinch, or worse, starve and burn others' children with hot iron? I don't think we have the answer; perhaps this phenomenon needs further study.


Finally, many of us dream of the kind of society we want. Mine is the following: The mention of "child labour" is greeted with astonishment. "Child labour! What is that? How can the two words, child and labour, go together? The only words that can be associated with children are laughter, playfulness, naughtiness, and joy!" Is this my wishful thinking, or can it be a reality some day?

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শেখ হাসিনার নির্দেশ  
জলবায়ু সহিষ্ণু বাংলাদেশ।



**Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh**  
**Bangladesh Forest Department**  
**Sustainable Forests & Livelihoods (SUFAL) Project**  
Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change  
Ban Bhaban, Agargaon, Dhaka-1207, Bangladesh  
[www.bforest.gov.bd](http://www.bforest.gov.bd)



Memo No. FD/SUFAL/Procurement/SD-33/11/2021/219

Date: February 2, 2022

**Request for Expressions of Interest (REOI)**

Country: Bangladesh  
Name of the Project: Sustainable Forests & Livelihoods (SUFAL) Project  
Credit No. 6325-BD  
Assignment Title: Consulting Services for Market study for wood chips, saw dust and other wood products including furniture (demand and supply)  
Reference No. Package No. SD-33  
Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh has received financing from the World Bank towards the cost of the **Sustainable Forests & Livelihoods (SUFAL) Project** and intends to apply part of the proceeds for consulting services.  
Brief objectives of this assignment are:

- Conducting market study for wood chips, saw dust and other wood products including furniture (demand and supply);
- Reviewing and recommending for updating policies and regulatory reforms to ease procedures, costs and barriers for tree growers, sawmill owners and exporters;
- Developing and operationalize an online wood-based market information system, including mobile app with database of nurseries and wood processing units based on the survey (demand, supply and forecast of timber) for using by the stakeholders;
- Conducting feasibility study on the adoption of forest certification of forest management e.g. Forest Stewardship Council (FSC)/Pan-European Forest Certification (PEFC).

The detailed Terms of Reference (TOR) for the assignment and soft copy of Prescribed Format for Submission of Expression of Interest can be found at the following website: [www.bforest.gov.bd](http://www.bforest.gov.bd) .  
The Bangladesh Forest Department (BFD) now invites eligible Consulting Firms ("Consultants") to indicate their interest in providing the Services. Interested Consulting Firms should provide information as per Prescribed Format mentioned above that they have the required qualifications and relevant experience to perform the Services.

The required qualification and experience of the firm/firms are as follows:

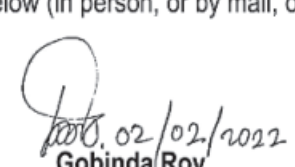
- A registered consulting firm with minimum 10 years of general experience and substantial experience of working in natural resource sector;
- Similar nature assignment experience i.e. conducting forests/wood-based market study/survey etc. within the last 10 years from the date of submission of EOI.
- Experience of working under donor funded projects will be an added advantage;
- The consulting firm shall have sufficient and relevant managerial, financial and organizational capabilities and logistics for the assignment.

Key Experts will not be evaluated at the shortlisting stage.  
Attention of interested Consultants is drawn to Section III, paragraphs, 3.14, 3.16, and 3.17 of the World Bank's "Procurement Regulations for IPF Borrowers" July 2016 (Revised November 2017 and August 2018) ("Procurement Regulations"), setting forth the World Bank's policy on conflict of interest.  
Consulting Firms may associate with other firms to enhance their qualifications, but should indicate **clearly whether the association is in the form of a joint venture and/or a sub-consultancy**. In the case of a joint venture, all the partners in the joint venture shall be jointly and severally liable for the entire contract. It is preferable to limit the maximum number of firms within 03 (three) in an association including the Lead Firm.

A Consulting Firm will be selected in accordance with the Consultant's Qualification-based Selection (CQS) method set out in the Procurement Regulations.

Further information can be obtained at the address below during office hours.

Expressions of Interest must be delivered in a written form to the address below (in person, or by mail, or by e-mail) by **February 27, 2022 up to 2:30pm**.

  
**Gobinda Roy**  
Project Director  
Sustainable Forests and Livelihoods (SUFAL) Project  
Bangladesh Forest Department (BFD)  
Ban Bhaban, Agargaon, Sher-e-Bangla Nagar, Dhaka-1207, Bangladesh  
Phone: +880-2-55006786  
E-mail: [sufal.pmu@gmail.com](mailto:sufal.pmu@gmail.com)

GD-202

**CROSSWORD BY THOMAS JOSEPH**

**ACROSS**

1 Zilch

5 Be boastful

9 Out of bed

10 Company symbols

12 Disturbed

13 In the know

14 Halloween scarers

16 Pewter component

17 Urgent call

18 Halloween scarers

20 Snare

22 Tortoise's rival

23 Eat away

25 Opera piece

28 Settle by yeas and nays

32 Halloween scarers

34 Train stop: Abbr.

35 Band blaster

36 Halloween scarers

38 Black card

40 Welcome

41 Energy choice

42 Abrasive powder

43 Unexciting

44 Houston and Rayburn

**DOWN**

1 Japan, to the Japanese

2 Help out

3 Some bucks

4 Dove's stance

5 Explosion

6 Squabble

7 Christie of

mysteries

8 More gruesome

9 Charlotte — (rich dessert)

11 Reason

15 Capsize

19 Trumpeter Baker

21 Paper pack

24 Rx amounts

25 Accumulate

26 Drunkard, in slang

27 African runner

29 High regard

30 Everyone else

31 Mean

33 "If—a Rich Man"

37 "—La Douce"

39 River stopper

WRITE FOR US. SEND US YOUR OPINION PIECES TO [dsopinion@gmail.com](mailto:dsopinion@gmail.com).

**YESTERDAY'S ANSWERS**

B	A	T	S		S	O	B	S	H
A	V	R	I	L		E	N	O	C
R	A	I	S	E		D	E	B	R
E	T	C		A	M	A	S	S	E
R	A	K	E	S	I	N	F	A	T
R	O	V	E	D		C	O	M	E
		R	E	D		B	A	R	
A	M	T	S		B	O	L	A	S
M	A	R		P	R	O	M	P	T
I	R	E	P	E	A	T		P	R
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