

Eliminating Child Labor for a Better Future

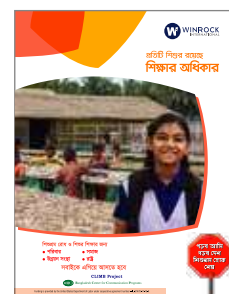


Though most undesirable, Child Labor is still prevalent at an unexpected level in many sectors, including the dried fish sector, in Bangladesh. The Dried Fish Sector (DFS) in Bangladesh practices some worst forms of Child Labor (CL). Cox's Bazar is one of the districts where sea fish drying largely takes place as revenue earning source of the producers, traders and workers. Nazirtek, Sonadia Island, Maheshkhali Upazila areas of the district are predominantly used for producing dried fish where a large number of children are engaged in processing dried fish which is a hazardous sector as children are exposed to saline weather under the sun, work with knives, wear no protective gear, lift heavy weight and climb on unstable drying racks. Parents who send their children to work in the dried fish sector may not understand the risks and illnesses that children face from working long hours in hazardous conditions. They have to work for at least 5 hours a day under the scorching sun. Many children are forced to work in the "Shutkee Mahals". Their parents may have taken advanced payment from the owners, or they had been appointed on agreement that their children won't leave their jobs on their own accord.

On this background, the Winrock International (WI) awarded BCCP a partnership as the 'Media Partner of CLIMB Project' for working for the period from November 10, 2019, to April 30, 2021 with the support from United States Department of Labor (USDOL)/Bureau of International Labor Affairs (ILAB) to implement the Child Labor Improvements in Bangladesh (CLIMB) Project. Main purposes were to improve civil society's awareness of child labor in southeast Bangladesh's DFS, promote acceptable working conditions through more focused efforts by the Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) and contribute to the Government of Bangladesh's efforts to reduce child labor.

As the media partner, BCCP facilitated and supported the selected national and local level journalists of print and electronic media and CSOs who collect and disseminate information related to child labor issues, cover the news events, organize local level awareness and BCC campaign. Before initiation of the field level implementation activities, BCCP conducted a communication needs assessment of journalists, stakeholders of this project and CSOs within the project area. Following the findings of needs assessment, BCCP developed BCC materials, outreach event guidelines, campaign guidelines etc.

BCCP also organized stakeholder sharing sessions to influence policy planners and the local government institutions to make them aware and responsive to the strategic development of the children and conducted some talk shows, magazine programs, roundtable through print and electronic media. Prothom Alo, Radio Today, and TV Channel News24 joined with BCCP with their media power to connect the people. Capacity building initiatives for developing user-friendly messages and BCC materials resulted in active contributions from CLIMB partners, CSOs, faculty members of the University of Chittagong who were involved with CLIMB research team.



Feeding the family

A 12-year-old child at a Shutkee Mahal of Niziratek, washes fish and prepares these to be dried. A few years ago, while they were living in the hilly area of Chokoria Upazila, a leech had entered his father's ear and he fell seriously ill. His mother divorced his father, remarried and went away. He then took responsibility of the family and came to Naziratek along with his father and two young brothers. He took up dried fish processing work. He said unless he worked, his father and two brothers would go hungry. (Prothom Alo, 9 December, 2020)

Moreover, different outreach events also created a buzz to aware local people. Development of six video documentary as survivors voice created attention of the audience to the child labor of the dried fish sector. Media leveraging activities resulted in 78 exclusive news on child labor of the sector.

The whole assignment of BCCP was conducted during the project period for a meaningful change of life of the children and to capacitate the CSOs including the Journalists' pool for effective communication, advocacy and report writing on child labor. BCCP believes that this could help in designing the next courses of action by CSOs and Journalists' Pool for elimination of child labor from the dried fish sector and thus pave the way to create scope for a better future for the children, the ultimate goal of the project. For this to happen, communication should be the steering wheel, not a spare wheel.