



Child Labour, Education Policy, and Lived Experiences in Rajshahi's Slums: A Qualitative Case Study

**Maliha Khan Puspita¹, MD. Foridul Islam Labu², MD. Saroar Jahan³, MD.
Kamruzzaman Fahad⁴, MD. Sud Uddin Sadi⁵ & MD. Nurkutubul Alam⁶**

¹*Department of International Relations, University of Rajshahi, Rajshahi-6205, Bangladesh*

^{2,3}*Institute of Education and Research, University of Rajshahi, Rajshahi-6205, Bangladesh*

⁴*Department of Mass Communication and Journalism, University of Rajshahi, Rajshahi-6205, Bangladesh*

^{5,6}*Institute of Education and Research, University of Rajshahi, Rajshahi-6205, Bangladesh*

Corresponding Author: Maliha Khan Puspita, **Email:** malihaakhaanpuspita@gmail.com

Received: 8th May 2026

Accepted: 20th July 2026

Published: 6th September 2026

ABSTRACT

The study examines the relationship between child labour and education policy in the slum areas of Rajshahi City, Bangladesh. The research used a qualitative case study. Bangladesh has multiple frameworks and national commitments to eliminate child labour, such as the National Education Policy (2010). Despite this, many slum children remain excluded from necessary educational access. Through conducting semi-structured interviews with 25 households and a focus group discussion, the research explores how families view education policies and survive the competing demands between school and survival. The study's findings show a significant gap between education policy promises and lived realities. Despite primary education being formally free of cost, other hidden barriers, like economic insecurity, social stigma, and an unfavourable academic institutional environment, block slum children's educational participation. Through the lens of Amartya Sen's Capability Approach and the Policy-Implementation Gap Framework, the study shows that slum children are deprived not only of resources but also of the liberty to choose education over labour. The paper argues that "Education for All" will remain ineffective for marginalised urban communities unless policy-making addresses their economic vulnerability and institutional exclusion.

Keywords: Child labour, Education policy, Slum communities, Educational access, policy-implementation-gap, Capability Approach, Urban poverty

INTRODUCTION

Child labour has emerged as a social problem worldwide. The Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) emphasises protecting children from economic exploitation and any form of hazardous work. Nevertheless, a joint report published by the International Labour Organisation (ILO) and UNICEF reveals that around 138 million children were involved in child labour in 2024, of whom 54 million were engaged in hazardous work, hindering their education, health, safety, and overall development. As education, the economy, and labour laws expanded, child labour decreased (UNICEF, 2025). However, child labour is still a widespread problem in many parts of the world in both developed and developing countries. As agriculture developed, children were again forced to work, mostly for their families rather than in factories. The main causes of child labour are the lack of schools and poverty (Miller, 2013).

Bangladesh is a developing country. Among the many problems in this country, one is achieving inclusive education. Child labour still remains one of the major challenges to achieving inclusive education. In urban slums where poverty, precarity, and social marginalisation define everyday life, many children are compelled to work for survival rather than attend school. Poverty causes families to send children to work, often in hazardous and low-wage jobs, such as brick-chipping, construction, and waste-picking. Children are paid less than adults, with many working up to twelve hours a day (Hossain, 2012). A report published by the ILO and UNICEF shows that in 2024, 3.5 million child workers were involved in child labour in Bangladesh, of which 1 million were engaged in hazardous work. While there is a picture of a decline in child labour in the Asia-Pacific region, the situation in Bangladesh is completely different. In 2013, the rate of hazardous child labour in the country was 3.2 per cent, which decreased to 2.7 per cent (around 1.07 million children) in 2022. However, during the same period, the overall rate of children aged 5 to 17 engaged in labour increased from 8.7 per cent to 8.9 per cent (UNICEF, 2025).

Rajshahi is one of Bangladesh's major metropolitan and large cities. It has many slums, where crises like child labour are particularly severe. Most residents are migrants, primarily displaced from adjacent rural regions. Rajshahi's population is largely due to migration from its peripheral rural areas. Most migrants from rural areas are poor, so urban areas remain numerically dominated by the poor (Farhana & Mannan, 2019). Due to a lack of money and insecure livelihoods, families are forced to choose income over education to survive, which

leads to an increase in child labour. But the 2010 National Education Policy emphasises universal access and equity in education; its goals often conflict with slum dwellers' lived realities.

Background

Child labour in Bangladesh stems from a wide range of factors with complex roots in the country's overall socioeconomic conditions, including widespread poverty; rapid population growth, especially among the poor; and limited access to quality primary education (Rahman et al., 1999). According to the National Education Policy 2010, initiatives have been taken to introduce school feeding programs in government primary schools to ensure food and nutrition services for students and to increase their participation in school. But these policies have not been implemented equally in urban slums. Because of poverty, they must balance education and survival, which often prevents them from attending school.

Due to poverty, children in slum areas are unable to attend school. For slum children and their parents, economic pressure creates a stark choice between school and work. Existing studies have highlighted the tension between schooling and labour (Shafiq, 2007). As a result, families often depend on children's earnings to sustain livelihoods, which disrupts their education.

This paper aims to analyse how families interpret education policies, how they navigate the competing demands of work and schooling, and how they attempt to balance children's roles as both learners and workers.

LITERATURE REVIEW

This paper demonstrates how the areas of child labour and education policy meet 'on the ground' in the city slums of Rajshahi. It examines how slum families view education policies, child labour as a survival strategy, and disparities between policy aims and the lived experiences of slum children. By foregrounding households' qualitative experiences, this review provides the theoretical basis for examining the structural and socio-economic barriers slum children face in pursuing education while working.

The intersection of child labour and education is recognised as a major global challenge. According to the International Labour Organisation (2021), around 160 million children

across the globe continue to be involved in child labour while struggling to attend school (Chudgar et al., 2022). In Bangladesh, undermining international initiatives like SDG 4 and SDG 8.7, which seek to ensure education for all and eradicate child labour, studies from Africa and South Asia indicate that poverty is a key factor constraining children from engaging in work (Thi et al., 2023).

Child labour is widespread in both rural and urban Bangladesh, according to reports, although the overwhelming focus has been on people in rural areas. Slum areas, such as those in the city of Rajshahi, accommodate child labour within informal sectors such as street vendors, domestic help and small-scale industries (Ahad et al., 2021). As Rahman et al. (1999a) and Zaman et al. (2014) note, this work is motivated mainly by poverty; children are working to help support family income. Urban slums have been relatively neglected in the literature, with much of the debate focusing on rural child labour (Rahman, Khanam, and Absar 1999b). Poor kids, particularly the children of poor families in Rajshahi, end up working when they should be in school and are regularly forced to work long hours in unsafe conditions (Reza & Bromfield, 2019).

Here, children are not students to be taught or customers in a system that must show results. According to Hoque (2023), many urban children in Bangladesh, primarily in slums, are informally employed as scavengers, recyclers and housemaids. These may be less visible pursuits, but they provide essential services for families contending with high unemployment and low wages. The motivation to survive underlies the work children do in the slums, with immediate income benefits taking precedence over potential future educational opportunities. This is consistent with the perspective of (Wahba, 2017), who asserts that in poor areas, children's contributions to labour may be necessary for family survival.

In Bangladesh, the government has adopted several education policies to increase access to school, such as free primary schooling for all children and financial support in the form of stipends as well (National Education Policy 2010). However, these policies have not overcome the economic and social obstacles slum households face. Despite long-standing, well-intentioned government education policies, Ahsan et al. (2017) criticise them for ignoring the economic capacity of slum families. Although children should enjoy their right to schooling like other countrymen, many cannot because they can neither afford the hidden costs of education nor find transportation from far-flung slum areas, making it impossible to attend school.

Similar challenges appear in other developing countries. In India and Kenya, despite free primary education policies, child labour remains prevalent as hidden schooling costs and ongoing family poverty continue to push children into work (Biscaye et al., 2025; Choudhury et al., 2023). This shows that financial hardship and systemic barriers can weaken even well-designed education reforms.

These obstacles are even more challenging in slum areas, such as Rajshahi, where child labour also plays a major role in supporting families (Kabir & Maitrot, 2017).

Secondly, although policy emphasises school attendance, it does not account for the quality of education in slum areas, which are usually characterised by overcrowded classrooms and a shortage of resources (Cameron, 2010). Reza and Bromfield (2019) and Aggarwal and Chugh (2003) also point out that teachers in slum schools are often unqualified, and the curriculum is designed in ways that do not reflect the realities of poor communities. Furthermore, (Shohel, 2014) adds that one major problem with this stress on academic achievement is the fact that it fails to take into consideration some of the specific challenges slum children go through, such as hunger, diseases and emotional scarring, neglecting their educational potential.

In slums like Rajshahi, child labour is not an added burden but a way of surviving poverty. One common reason children are forced to work is to help support their families. According to Kabir and Maitrot (2017), the economic imperative of urban poverty is child labour because parents, excluded from adult formal employment, make child labour compulsory. In Rajshahi's slums, children are often found selling merchandise on the streets, working in garment factories and even doing household chores in affluent households. Although these tasks are economically advantageous, they come at the cost of their education.

As Zohir et al. (2024) note, households are likely to prioritise child labour over schooling out of the need for income in an increasingly competitive economic and social environment, as seen in urban slums with near-full employment at wages so low they cannot sustain families. (Nasrin, 2012) also reports that in slums like Rajshahi, children who are unable to contribute to income have obligations to their family and encounter social stigmas and psychological stresses from which it is difficult to recover, with potential long-term impact on self-confidence-building processes.

In Bangladesh, there is a serious lack of alignment between educational policies and the realities being faced by slum children. As the Bangladesh Labour Act (2006) and National Child Labour Elimination Policy (2010) advocate on behalf of children and demand their right to education, the opportunity costs associated with attending school, such as expensive uniforms and transportation, render schooling out of reach for many slum families. Students in slums attend overpopulated schools that lack quality education and have high dropout rates (Cameron, 2010).

Under the Bangladesh Labour Act (2006), children under 14 are forbidden from working in most industries and must attend school. But children of the slums continue to be subjected to forced labour because of their social status. National Child Labour Elimination Policy (2010) seeks to eradicate child labour by 2025 and facilitate the reintegration of children into the educational system, but it does not go far enough. Bagheri (2013) points out that slum children are overcome by deficiencies such as inadequate jobs, overcrowded homes and a lack of emotional support, which jeopardise educational reform efforts and, as such, poverty is perpetuated.

While some initiatives like non-formal education and school reintegration do exist, they are generally poorly financed and fragmented, with inadequate outreach to all children (National Plan of Action to Eliminate Child Labour, 2021). The disjuncture between policy and practice is resulting in widespread denial of quality education to slum children, which only reinforces their place within the poverty loop.

Even though research on child labour and education in Bangladesh is vast, there exist a number of important gaps. First, although there are quite a number of studies on rural child labor urban slums, including Rajshahi, however, are to be an area of low research. We also need qualitative work to explore how child labour and education interplay for the families in Rajshahi's slums, taking into account urban poverty, migration and work in the informal sector.

Further, current literature generally ignores the subjective experiences of slum children and their families. Future research should focus on in-depth interviews, participant observation, and the organisation of focus groups to identify the affective, cultural, and psychological reasons for enrolling and withdrawing children from work or enrolling in school. By talking directly to families, researchers can develop a deeper understanding of the obstacles children

face in slum communities and develop policy recommendations that make sense on the ground. Moreover, while global studies have highlighted links between poverty, child labour, and schooling, little research has explored how these dynamics unfold in smaller urban centres like Rajshahi. Therefore, this study contributes to international debates by linking policy ideals with the real-life experiences of slum families.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This study uses two complementary approaches, Amartya Sen's Capability Approach and the Policy-Implementation Gap Approach, to assess the disparity between Bangladesh's education policy and child labour in Rajshahi City.

The Capability Approach, first put forth by Sen in the early 1980s and later elaborated by Nussbaum (2000, 2002), defines development as enhancing individuals' fundamental freedoms to pursue lifestyles they consider valuable. This approach emphasises that development should be measured not just by economic growth but also by the expansion of actual possibilities and capacities that allow individuals to achieve well-being. From this viewpoint, education is a fundamental capability, a crucial element of human excellence and socio-economic advancement (Azlin Alisa Ahmad & Wasito, 2023). Raynor (2007) found that progress in educational access for children in Bangladesh is significantly inhibited by poverty, domestic labour, and limited institutional structures, creating a disparity between formal access to education and its delivery in the experiences of marginalised children.

The Policy-Implementation Gap Framework describes the imbalance between a policy's well-planned objectives and the real outcomes of its implementation (Hudson et al., 2019). Azad (2024) explained why well-intentioned educational efforts frequently fail to impact slum populations. Despite national commitment to education for all and child rights, implementation is constrained by insufficient resources, ineffective supervision, and limited local adaptation. Corruption, overcrowded schools, and insufficient support for vulnerable families widen the gap between government objectives and the harsh realities of slums (World Bank, 2019).

Together, these approaches show that slum children's exclusion from school stems not only from poverty but also from systemic policy deficiencies. The Capability Approach shows why families prioritise survival over education, while the Policy-Implementation Gap

Framework reveals weak state mechanisms that leave slum children facing a dilemma between "school or survival."

METHODOLOGY

This study used a qualitative research design to explore how the slum dwellers in Rajshahi City interpret education policies and calculate whether to choose between schooling and child labour. A qualitative approach allows us to deeply understand factors such as realities, values, and coping mechanisms amid the shackles of poverty from the participants' point of view.

Sampling and Field Context

The research was carried out in three slum areas within the Rajshahi City Corporation, including Vodra Lake Slum, Fultola Slums, and one additional nearby settlement. The researchers used a random sampling approach to select 25 households from the three slum areas. One parent and one child from each household took part in the interview, for a total of 50 participants. Participants represented a mix of ages, genders, and income levels, reflecting the diversity of slum families.

Data Collection Methods

Data collection was done in two layers: semi-structured interviews and one focus group discussion (FDG). Two sets of open-ended questionnaires—one for parents and one for children—were prepared to guide the interview. The interview questions covered topics ranging from family routines and the perceived value of education to obstacles towards schooling, experience with child labour, and knowledge regarding the availability of government- or NGO-supported programs. The team strictly maintained ethical standards by clearly informing participants about the research purpose during interviews. All responses were recorded anonymously, prioritising participants' comfort and privacy. To better understand the families' daily realities, observations of the surrounding environments were also carefully noted.

Analytical Approach and Reflexivity

The gathered data were analysed through thematic analysis to identify the recurring patterns and their meanings. Interview transcripts were carefully reviewed and coded to group similar statements under broader themes. This process helped align individual stories with the larger

research questions. It was also acknowledged that individual perspectives and positionality might affect understanding. Notes jotted down during the field visit were used to maintain the authenticity of participants' voices.

FINDINGS

Perceptions of Education Policy

The Constitution of Bangladesh, under Article 17, guarantees not only free and mandatory education for all Bangladeshi children but also calls for uniform, mass-oriented universal education. Based on this constitutional vision, the Bangladesh government has adopted policies such as the Compulsory Primary Education Act (1990), the Education Policy (2010), and several other stipend programs, focusing on improving school enrollment and reducing dropouts. These minor-to-major initiatives reflect the state's commitment to ensuring that every child, regardless of social and economic condition, has access to education as a basic human right.

Data from Rajshahi's slum areas, however, show a stark contrast between the ideas behind the policies and the lived experience of slum dwellers. In most interview cases, parents were only vaguely aware that access to education for their children is supposed to be free and compulsory. For many of them, "free schooling" meant only that tuition fees were covered by the government, but they still bore hidden costs like uniforms, stationery, exam fees, and transportation. These expenses became the main factor in deciding whether to send a child to school. Many parents have also shared that they feel distant from government and even non-government initiatives. Some have heard about stipend programs or school feeding initiatives through neighbours. But only a few have benefited from them. This suggests that, in practice, policy awareness relies heavily on word of mouth.

Economic volatility further constrained access to education for slum families. Even when schools were nearby, parents viewed education as a secondary option. Some children worked in small, informal jobs, such as waste collection, working in local tea stalls, and helping mothers in households. Many spent hours on the streets selling small items like balloons and snacks. The fact that for most of these families the opportunity cost of sending children for schooling was too high reflects how fragile the concept of "universal education" is in the context of poverty. The vivid gap between the State's constitutional commitment towards education and the actual pathetic lived experience of the slum community suggests that the

legal framework and guarantees are simply inadequate if there are no effective implementation schemes and economic support for these marginalised people.

Work, Schooling, and the Policy Gap: Lived Experiences of Slum Children

Child labour and education are like two sides of a scale for many families living in Rajshahi's slums. However, for most of the households, survival is at the top of their priority list, defining the decision regarding whether the children will continue their education or join child labour to contribute to the family. Parents shared multiple times that, even though they wished to send their children to school, the family's vulnerable financial situation and ongoing instability led them to send their children to work. Most of the children interviewed worked in waste and plastic collection, assisted mothers with domestic work, sold small items on the streets, or worked in small stalls or workshops.

While some had to drop out entirely to contribute to the family, others struggled to balance education and labour. This dynamic is not gender-neutral. Girls had to help with household chores extensively; in most cases, parents tended to send sons to work outside the house at an early stage.

Beyond financial obstacles, children face many other barriers to accessing education. Although respondents say schools are nearby, hidden costs like uniforms, notebooks, examination fees, and transportation make education feel like a luxury for most. Parents face the emotional struggle of deciding between buying educational accessories and buying a meal for the day. They barely see education as a guaranteed right. Rather, they describe going to school as a luxurious privilege. Cultural norms also play a crucial role in reinforcing this prioritisation of work over education; as one parent said, *"If my son does not go for work, who will help my family to have food?"*

Alongside the expected barriers, the school environment emerged as a major deterrent to slum children's regular attendance. During interviews, many children shared their dreams of becoming doctors, teachers, or police officers once they grow up. Yet, the pathetic experience they go through at the local government primary school and the subsequent trauma become a direct contrast to their tender aspiration of becoming "something" in the future and making their life better. In particular, the children from the Vodra Lake slum shared their traumatic experience of facing humiliation not only by their classmates from better social conditions but also from the teachers. They emotionally reported being bullied at school for their

clothing and feeling excluded after being labelled as “bosti.” All these experiences generated a feeling of insecurity and shame in them, and eventually, they cut off their names from school. These psychological abuses are rarely addressed in policies, making the concept of “universal education” a myth for these underprivileged children.

A sharp contrast exists between policy promises and the reality of slum residents, even though the National Education Policy (2010) emphasises equity and universal education. But the lived experiences of slum children reflect a widening gap between policy goals and their implementation. Policies never addressed that; instead of being an inclusive, safe place for children from all backgrounds, school can be a source of emotional violence and reproduce inequality. Moreover, these policy frameworks do not consider the family’s struggle to navigate the hidden costs of their children's education.

Together, these findings demonstrate that slum children are stuck at the intersection of schooling, labour, and structural faults in education policies. The existing faulty social structure and its consequences—economic hardship, hostile school environments, and weak policy implementation—pull them away from their aspirations for a better future. Drawing on these lived experiences, this study underscores that to address child labour, reforming the school environment into a place of inclusiveness and neutrality must be compulsory, alongside adequate economic relief.

DISCUSSION

This study investigates the relationship between child labour in the Rajshahi slums and Bangladesh's education policy, demonstrating that the commitment to “Education for All” is fragile and insufficient for the children residing in these slums. The study underscores that child labour arises not solely from poverty, but from a convergence of policy inadequacies, social injustice, and institutional neglect. This finding aligns with Hoque (2023), who explains how structural factors and lived realities in urban slums normalise child labour beyond simple economic explanations.

The study indicates that education is not a fundamental right for the underprivileged population, but rather an unequal opportunity. The Constitution of Bangladesh (Article 17) and the Education Policy 2010 highlight the importance of the right to free education. Nevertheless, these families cannot shoulder the hidden costs of education, including uniforms, exercise books, examination fees, transportation and private tuition fees. As a

result, families must make a difficult choice between two essential rights: food or education. This reality challenges the notion of universal national policies and reflects patterns of exclusion identified in slum contexts by Cameron (2010), who discusses how structural and financial barriers restrict access to primary education in Bangladeshi slums.

Viewed through Amartya Sen's Capability Approach, these results show that slum children are not only deprived of education but also lack the real freedom to choose their education. Despite the proximity of schools, poverty, family pressure, and the need for labour limit their capabilities. That is, despite the formal opportunities, the lack of effective capabilities blocks their path to education. From this perspective, education is not just an institution, but a realistically achievable capability which is absent in the case of these children.

Another important finding is the Policy–Implementation Gap. While national initiatives include stipends, school feeding programs, and child labour prevention, awareness of these programs among slum households is very limited. Many households receive this information only from neighbours, indicating weak state information flow and accountability. As a result, policy benefits do not reach the intended target population. This situation reflects what Hudson et al. (2019) describe as the policy–implementation gap, where public policy objectives fail to translate effectively into grassroots outcomes.

Children's own experiences reinforce this research. Many children have reported experiencing social stigma at school, being labelled as “slum boys/girls”, and being neglected by their peers and even teachers. This psychological dimension of exclusion is largely ignored in formal education policy, although it plays a significant role in school dropout. This suggests that the educational institution itself sometimes reproduces inequality, which contradicts the concept of inclusive education.

Gender segregation is also an important aspect of the research. While boys are relatively involved in outdoor labour, girls are mostly engaged in domestic work, which silently hinders their education. This reality shows that child labour is deeply rooted not only in economic but also in cultural and social structures.

Overall, this study demonstrates that the child labour and education crisis in the slums of Rajshahi is not an isolated problem; it is the combined result of poverty, social inequality, weak policy implementation and non-inclusive school environments. To meet the goals of the National Education Policy, it is not enough to simply increase school enrolment; it is also

necessary to eliminate all hidden costs associated with education, make schools emotionally safe and inclusive, and prioritise local realities in policy implementation.

The findings of this study indicate that bridging the gap between policy and reality is the most important step in making the education system a central player in the fight to end child labour. Otherwise, “Education for All” will remain on paper, and slum children will continue to sacrifice their dreams of education in the struggle for survival.

Implications for Policy and Practice

This entire research shows a critical misalignment between the reality of the slum families in Rajshahi City and existing formal policies. More specifically, this study highlights that while Bangladesh's national policies embed education as a universal fundamental right, marginalised families do not experience it as a guaranteed path to empowerment. Rather, education is perceived as a fragile opportunity affected by poverty and institutional discrimination.

Viewed through the lens of the Capability Approach, the findings suggest that children in this marginalised community are deprived not only of the resources needed to continue their education, but also of the freedom to choose to continue their studies. Schools are accessible, but the hidden costs of school fees, uniforms, and other materials are the biggest barrier. Therefore, by not accounting for these layered vulnerabilities, education policies fail to serve their intended purpose.

Additionally, the policy implementation gap is clearly evident in the government support mechanisms. Uneven and inconsistent benefit distribution, coupled with parents' limited awareness of stipends and feeding programs, shows systematic failures in both institutional accountability and information dissemination. If vulnerable families remain uninformed or inadequately informed, policies designed to reduce dropout rates become ineffective.

Together, these findings suggest that the issue of child labour in the urban slum communities cannot be seen as a standalone matter, and it will not be solved on its own. The problem is interwoven with brittle policy execution, an unregulated exclusionary school environment, and the lack of a precise social protection system.

Recommendations for Policymakers

The findings call for urgent policy-level interventions to improve educational access and reduce child labour among urban slum residents.

First, financial assistance for education must be redesigned to reflect the realities of poverty among urban slum populations. Stipend programs urgently need to be expanded, particularly for children in slum families, to ensure their educational costs for uniforms, school fees, and other resources are fully covered. If these hidden costs are not considered, the concept of formal “free education” and all related policies will be in vain.

Secondly, school feeding initiatives should be expanded in slum areas with well-regulated systems, ensuring all children in these areas are covered. This assurance of meals can serve as a strong incentive to reduce dropout rates among urban slum children.

Third, policymakers must prioritise an inclusive, healthy school environment through structural and institutional reforms. In particular, teachers should be trained and made aware of social stigma and the need to prevent it. Teachers should be encouraged to support child protection and address bullying on moral grounds. A mechanism for teacher misconduct should also be established so that teachers are held accountable for their poor behaviour in class. Moreover, establishing a local-level system for data collection and regulation can play a major role in preventing school dropouts.

Finally, it is extremely crucial to integrate child labour monitoring into education governance. In that case, collective effort from education departments, labour inspectors, and social welfare institutions is a must to track children involved in child labour and ensure that protective laws are being applied within urban slum communities.

CONCLUSION

This study highlights a major discrepancy between Bangladesh's educational policy commitments and the reality for slum families in Rajshahi. Despite national commitments to education as a universal and equitable right, children in these areas face interlinked barriers to education, including poverty, the hidden costs of schooling, discriminatory school environments, and a lack of institutional support, which prevent them from attending school. An analysis based on the Capability Approach shows that slum kids face not only important

deprivation points, but also a lack of freedom to value and prioritise education over work. The apparent lack of coordination between policy and implementation also reveals shortcomings in information sharing, benefit targeting, and monitoring mechanisms, contributing to the weak impacts on poor households.

Children's aspirations for education are systematically undermined by social stigma, economic vulnerability, and pressures to earn something for the family. As a result, schooling becomes an unstable, uncertain possibility rather than a guaranteed right. Consequently, tackling child labour in urban slums requires greater financial support, inclusive school environments and better policy implementation that responds to local needs.

REFERENCES

- Aggarwal, Y. P., & Chugh, S. (2003). Learning achievement of slum children in Delhi. *International Journal of Educational Development*, 23(2), 123–134.
- Ahad, M. A., Chowdhury, M., Parry, Y. K., & Willis, E. (2021). Urban child labor in Bangladesh: Determinants and its possible impacts on health and education. *Social Sciences*, 10(3), 107. <https://doi.org/10.3390/socsci10030107>
- Ahsan, K. Z., Arifeen, S. E., Al-Mamun, M. A., Khan, S. H., & Chakraborty, N. (2017). Effects of individual, household and community characteristics on child nutritional status in the slums of urban Bangladesh. *Archives of Public Health*, 75(1), 9. <https://doi.org/10.1186/s13690-017-0176-x>
- Ahmad, A. A., & Wasito, A. (2023). Exploring Amartya Sen's capability approach: Insights from climate change adaptation in Indonesia. *Peradaban Journal of Economic and Business*, 2(2), 115–136. <https://doi.org/10.59001/pjeb.v2i2.109>
- Azad, M. A. K. (2024). Exploring the barriers to basic education of Bangladeshi urban slum children. *American International Journal of Business Management*, 7(7), 110–126.
- Bagheri, M. (2013). The challenge of slums: Socio-economic disparities. *International Journal of Social Science and Humanity*, 3(4), 410–414. <https://doi.org/10.7763/IJSSH.2012.V2.136>
- Bangladesh Labour Act, 2006 (Bangladesh).
- Biscaye, P. E., Egger, D., & Pape, U. J. (2025). Adolescent schooling and adult labor supply: Evidence from COVID-19 school closures and reopenings in Kenya. *World Development*.
- Cameron, S. (2010). *Access to and exclusion from primary education in slums of Dhaka, Bangladesh*. Consortium for Research on Educational Access, Transitions and Equity (CREATE).
- Choudhury, P. K., Joshi, R., & Kumar, A. (2023). Regional and socioeconomic inequalities in access to pre-primary education in India. *International Journal of Child Care and Education Policy*, 17(1), 13. <https://doi.org/10.1186/s40723-023-00117-4>
- Chudgar, A., Grover, V., Hatakeyama, S., & Bizhanova, A. (2022). Child labor as a barrier to foundational skills: Evidence from Bangladesh and Pakistan. *Prospects*, 52(1–2), 137–156. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11125-022-09614-9>
- Farhana, K. M., & Mannan, K. A. (2019). Socioeconomic impact of rural–urban migration: A revisit of slum dwellers in the northern region of Bangladesh. *International Journal of Migration and Development*, 5(3), 41–57.
- Hoque, M. M. (2023). Understanding the role of structural factors and realities in normalizing child labour in urban slums of Bangladesh. *Cogent Social Sciences*, 9(2), 2272319. <https://doi.org/10.1080/23311886.2023.2272319>

- Hossain, M. A. (2012). Socio-economic problems of child labour in Rajshahi City Corporation of Bangladesh: A reality and challenges. *Research on Humanities and Social Sciences*, 2(4), 35–42.
- Hudson, B., Hunter, D., & Peckham, S. (2019). Policy failure and the policy-implementation gap: Can policy support programs help? *Policy Design and Practice*, 2(1), 1–14. <https://doi.org/10.1080/25741292.2018.1540378>
- Kabir, A., & Maitrot, M. R. L. (2017). Factors influencing feeding practices of extreme poor infants and young children in families of working mothers in Dhaka slums: A qualitative study. *PLOS ONE*, 12(2), e0172119. <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0172119>
- Miller, M. E. (2013). Child labour and protecting young workers around the world. *International Journal of Child Health and Human Development*, 6(2), 145–156.
- Nasrin, O. (2012). Factors affecting early marriage and early conception of women: A case of slum areas in Rajshahi City, Bangladesh. *International Journal of Sociology and Anthropology*, 4(2), 54–62. <https://doi.org/10.5897/IJSA11.145>
- National Child Labour Elimination Policy. (2010). Government of Bangladesh.
- National Education Policy. (2010). Government of Bangladesh.
- National Plan of Action to Eliminate Child Labour. (2021). Government of Bangladesh.
- Nussbaum, M. C. (2000). *Women and human development: The capabilities approach*. Cambridge University Press.
- Nussbaum, M. C. (2002). Women's capabilities and social justice. In E. Molyneux & S. Razavi (Eds.), *Gender, justice, development, and rights* (pp. 45–75). Oxford University Press.
- Rahman, M. M., Khanam, R., & Absar, N. U. (1999). Child labor in Bangladesh: A critical appraisal of Harkin's Bill and the MOU-type schooling program. *Journal of Economic Issues*, 33(4), 985–1003. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00213624.1999.11506225>
- Raynor, J. (2007). Education and capabilities in Bangladesh. In M. Walker & E. Unterhalter (Eds.), *Amartya Sen's capability approach and social justice in education* (pp. 157–176). Palgrave Macmillan. https://doi.org/10.1057/9780230604810_8
- Reza, M. H., & Bromfield, N. F. (2019). Human rights violations against street children working in the informal economy in Bangladesh. *Journal of Human Rights and Social Work*, 4(3), 201–212. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s41134-019-00098-w>
- Sen, A. (1987). *The standard of living*. Cambridge University Press.
- Shafiq, M. N. (2007). *Household schooling and child labour decisions in rural Bangladesh* (Doctoral dissertation). Indiana University.

- Shohel, M. M. C. (2014). Impact of childhood poverty on education for disadvantaged children in Bangladesh. *Child Studies in Asia-Pacific Contexts*, 4(2), 77–94. <https://doi.org/10.5723/csac.2014.4.2.077>
- Thi, A. M., Zimmerman, C., & Ranganathan, M. (2023). Hazardous child labour, psychosocial functioning, and school dropouts among children in Bangladesh. *Children*, 10(6), 1021. <https://doi.org/10.3390/children10061021>
- Wahba, J. (2017). *Child labor and poverty transmission: No room for dreams*. IZA World of Labor.
- World Bank. (2019). *Bangladesh education sector review: Seeding fertile ground—Education that works for Bangladesh's future*. World Bank Group.
- Zaman, S., Matin, S., & Kibria, A. M. B. G. (2014). A study on present scenario of child labour in Bangladesh. *IOSR Journal of Business and Management*, 16(6), 25–36. <https://doi.org/10.9790/487X-16632536>
- Zohir, S., Dutta, S., Rahman, S., & Khan, W. A. A. (2024). *Child labour and schooling in Bangladesh*.