NATIONAL CHILDREN POLICY

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MINISTRY OF WOMEN & CHILDREN AFFAIRS
GOVERNMENT OF THE PEOPLE'S REPUBLIC OF BANGLADESH
DHAKA
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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

A proper child development programme is indispensable towards overall progress of the nation. Everyone should participate in the efforts to bring up the children as worthy citizens of the country. Children are the future leaders of the nation. To lead the nation towards prosperity comprehensive child development programme is needed on a priority basis.

Thoughts on child development have received attention in the country’s early national policy. According to article 28 (4) of the Constitution, the state can make special provision for the progress of children. Aiming at child development, in 1974 the Children Act was enacted and in 1976 the Bangladesh Children Academy was established. Bangladesh is among the first few countries to sign the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) and has already taken steps to implement its provisions. In pursuance of the fundamental principles of the Constitution and the UNCRC the Government has decided to formulate and implement a National Policy on Children to ensure the security, welfare and development of children.
CHAPTER II

DEFINITION OF A CHILD

The age limit for defining a child in various statutes of Bangladesh differs. Boys and girls under 14 years of age will be considered as children under the National Children Policy.
CHAPTER III

SITUATION OF CHILDREN IN BANGLADESH

According to 1991 census of Bangladesh, the under 18 population of the country was 50.64 million (50.63% of the total population). Due to resource constraints, under-development and lack of adequate employment opportunities in the country many of these children are deprived of basic needs like education, health, nutrition and shelter.

Health and Nutrition:

The Government is committed to ensure health for all by the year 2000. However, still now, many of the children are vulnerable to various diseases and malnutrition. Almost half of the deaths in 1991 occurred to children under the age of 5. Only 100 out of every 1000 babies born, are born under the care of trained birth attendants and more than 300 are born underweight. Twelve babies die within a few hours after their birth. Out of these, 8 die of injury during birth, 3 die due to prematurity and 1 die of other causes. Another 23 babies die within a week of their birth; 16 due to premature birth and 5 due to post-natal tetanus. Between the age of one week and one year another 75 babies die, 11 due to tetanus, 24 from pneumonia and other respiratory tract complications and 13 die of diarrhoea. Between one and five years 74 more babies die. Thus every year about 0.8 million under 5 children die of various preventable diseases. According to a recent UNICEF published report "The Progress of Nations 1993" the present child (under 5) mortality rate in the country is 133.

More than 90% of children in this country become malnourished by the age of 12—18 months. This is not only due to poverty and the lack of proper food intake but also because of frequent bouts of illness and the lack of knowledge on proper nutrition. Ten percent of the poorest families in Bangladesh spend from 75 to 80 percent of their total family income on food. Everyday about 100 children become blind due to vitamin-A deficiency and half of these children die within one week. About 1 million children in the
country between the age of 6 to 72 months suffer from some level of Vitamin A deficiency.

At present 38% of the population of the country are at the risk of Iodine Deficiency Disorders (IDD). Ten percent have goitre and three percent have other manifestations of IDD. In some northern districts, the prevalence of goitre is as high as 50—70 percent.

Although 96 percent of the population in Bangladesh have access to pure drinking water, only 16 percent use pure tubewell water for all household purposes. Human waste disposal is also a big problem. Only 33 percent of the families in the rural areas and 55 percent of the families in urban areas have sanitary latrine facilities. The lack of adequate water sealed latrines force the general public to defecate in the open. This increases the risk of the spread of disease carrying germs and making the under age children of the families more vulnerable.

**Education:**

The Government has taken up programmes to ensure education for all by the year 2000, yet inadequacy of the educational infrastructure of the country as well as the low levels of family income deny many children the access to education. Even though 79 percent of the children enroll into schools, half of them drop out before completing the primary level and the majority leave within one or two years of entering schools. The enrolment for girls is less than that of boys (53% : 47%). The drop out rate for girls is higher than boys. The main objective of the country's educational policy is to try to stop the drop out rate and to provide non-formal education for those children who never enroll in the school. According to one estimate nearly 2.5 million (14%) of the country's 17.5 million children between the age of 6—10 years never enroll into primary school, and of those who do enroll, 6 million (40%) drop out before completing the primary level. The Government has currently taken up several programmes to expand the primary education in the country on a priority basis.

**Child Labour:**

Quite a number of children are forced due to economic reasons and family needs to take up different kinds of work at an early age. Child labour is employed both in the urban and rural areas. Government Statistics Division puts the figure for child labour at 12% of the total labour force. The estimate is based on the labour employed only in the registered industrial units. The percentage
would increase if the unregistered or non-formal sector is taken into account. The number of under 15 children compelled to work due to extreme poverty and deprivation in the urban areas alone was estimated to be nearly 2.9 million in one of the studies carried out in 1990. Although the law prohibits child labour in the factories, many children are forced to take different kinds of jobs from early childhood for livelihood.

Legal Rights of Children:
Different laws have been enacted in the country at different times to protect children and guarantee their legal rights. These laws deal with the interest and the right of the child in case of marriage, divorce, guardianship, employment, child labour, child trafficking, etc. Besides, the 1974 Bangladesh Children Act incorporates punishment and reform measures for child offenders. It has provisions for the protection, custody and correction of such children.

Children in Difficult Circumstances:
Among the children in difficult circumstances in society, the number of orphans, destitute and street children is increasing. Many people migrate in search of a livelihood to the cities due to natural hazards like floods, cyclones, tidal bores, river erosion, and disease, as well as man-made disasters. The number of children in difficult circumstances is increasing day by day in the urban areas. Children face difficulties due to family and social reasons as well.

Disabled Children:
The number of disabled people in the country is also large (about 10% of the total population). Nearly half of them are children. Every day 100 children become blind due to vitamin A deficiency. Many children are also disabled by congenital problems, natural disasters, accidents, malnutrition and various diseases.

Girl Child:
The situation of the girl child is different from that of the boy child. Consciously or unconsciously the girl child is discriminated against. By comparison girl children have less access to education, health, nutrition, security and all other opportunities. Even the death rate for girls is higher than for boys.
CHAPTER IV

OBJECTIVES OF THE CHILDREN POLICY

In the light of the above, six main goals have been identified to guarantee the rights of the children and to ensure various facilities and opportunities:

a. **Birth and Survival.**— ensure child's right to survival after birth with the provision of health, nutrition and physical security;

b. **Education and psychological development.**— ensure proper facilities for education for achieving appropriate moral, cultural and social values;

c. **Family Environment.**— proper family environment being one of the main preconditions for proper development of a child, steps to be taken to improve the family environment;

d. **Assistance to Children in Difficult Circumstances.**— extend special assistance to children in difficult circumstances, provide necessary facilities for disabled children and establish equal opportunities for them;

e. **Best Interest of the Children.**— adopt the policy of ensuring the best interest of the children in all national, social, family or personal situations;

f. **Legal rights.**— ensure the legal rights of the Children within the national, social or the family context.
CHAPTER V

STEPS FOR IMPLEMENTATION

Birth and Survival:
1. Ensure the rights of safe birth and survival to all children through provision of appropriate and adequate family planning services, prenatal and postnatal health care as well as essential obstetrical services, arrangement for extended maternity leave for working mothers;
2. Encourage all mothers to breastfeed their children and provide facilities for working mothers to continue breast feeding at workplace;
3. Ensure proper food and nutrition for the children. Address the problem of malnutrition at all levels through nutrition education of mothers and care givers. Emphasis on balanced diet and appropriate feeding habits should be placed especially for prevention of nutrition blindness due to vitamin A deficiency;
4. Ensure safety of all children through expanded programme of immunization against the six fatal diseases, prevention of diarrhoeal diseases and acute respiratory diseases (e.g. asthma) through primary health education;
5. Ensure access to integrated health care system for all children and stress on primary health care to raise awareness on personal hygiene. Take necessary measures to educate mothers on early childhood development and on child nutrition and to involve mothers in different child development related programmes so that all family members can be informed about proper child health care needs;

Education:
1. Ensure free and compulsory primary education for all children;
2. Ensure free and compulsory education for girls upto class VIII;
3. Provide appropriate facilities for non-formal education for
children deprived of formal schooling facilities;

4. Use of nonformal education and traditional institutions (Madrasas) to provide educational opportunities for dropouts and nonenrolled, particularly girls;

5. Support strong advocacy programme for overall early childhood development / education and other preparatory programmes for the children;

6. Children should be encouraged to value the dignity of labour and hardwork through incorporating these within the syllabi of institutions;

7. Provision of appropriate vocational training according to individual aptitude and mental makeup of children along with the general education. To encourage apprentice students for vocational work along with the institutional education;

8. Ensure supply of educational children’s literature, rhymes, poems, story books free of cost or at subsidized prices. Publication and distribution of appropriate books for the children under specially difficult circumstances;


Psychological and Cultural development:

1. Undertake regular programmes for all children to develop their cultural and emotional attitudes;

2. Educate all children based on their abilities and individual preferences and bring them up as self-reliant citizens of the country;

3. Provide all facilities to develop the creative talents of children;

4. Take steps to inculcate the values of patriotism, nationalism and religious values for character building;

5. Bring up all children in ways that help them know their own country and the world, so that they learn to love nature and acquire basic knowledge for protecting the environment;

6. Production of full length and short films appropriate for children, establishment of art galleries, museums, dancing and
music schools, art schools and gymnasiu ms;

7. Encourage children early in their life to games and sports, gymnastics, music, acting, recitation and dancing so that they may discover and develop their own potentials and thereby raise the cultural standard of the country.

**Family Environment:**

1. Ensure the responsibility of parents, guardians, society and the state in providing a secure environment, and educational opportunities to children;

2. Bring up children in a way so that they love one another and develop respect for the human race and are imbued with the ideals of world peace, universal culture, solidarity and brotherhood;

3. Establishment of 'daycare centres' for the children of working women.

**Legal Rights:**

1. To give priority to the interest of children when current laws are applied or amended;

2. Ensure that children are not subjected to physical or mental torture for any offence;

3. Ensure humane and respectful treatment to convicted children;

4. The main purpose of existing laws should be to correct the delinquent children.

**Children in difficult circumstances:**

1. Ensure food, shelter, education, training and rehabilitation for all orphaned, abandoned and shelterless children;

2. Ensure preference to children in distribution of relief in natural disasters and other difficult situations;

3. Give importance to the protection of children during disasters;

4. Protect children from all man-made hazards, oppressive and
risky physical labour and from working in a polluted environment;

5. Child labour, child abuse, child oppression and child trafficking must be effectively stopped and the people and organizations responsible for these activities should be given exemplary punishment.

Disabled Children:

1. Provide special facilities for education, treatment, training and rehabilitation of all physically and mentally disabled children;
2. To prevent childhood disability, various programmes, especially poliomyelitis eradication through immunization and Iodine or vitamin A deficiency disorder prevention programmes should be taken.

Girl Child:

Efforts will continue to eradicate discrimination between girls and boys.

Best Interest of the Child:

1. The interest of children should be given priority in all circumstances;
2. To continue to collect information on children from institutions as well as continue research on child related topics;
3. Publication and wide circulation of pictorial reports about the improvement of situation of children every year;
4. The 'Universal Children's Day/National Children Day should be observed on specified days.
CHAPTER VI

STRATEGIES

1. Individual and Collective Management: The environment in which children are born would be improved and made pleasant and progressive for the welfare of children, and special attention be given to the family and management of community-based organizations.

2. Government Management: Institutional arrangements would be developed to ensure participation of the social welfare agencies of the government, other agencies and people at the village level, in meeting the basic needs of children. Facilities in the state-run institutions for maintenance, training, rehabilitation of the shelterless, helpless, neglected, abandoned, inconvenienced and handicapped children would be further improved. New institutions would also be set up if necessary.

3. Non-government Voluntary Organizations: The assistance of non-government voluntary organizations would be encouraged in supplementing government efforts for the welfare of children. The voluntary organizations would also be encouraged to run such services.
CHAPTER VII

NATIONAL CHILDREN COUNCIL

At the national level a National Council for Children would be formed with the Minister in Charge of Women & Children Affairs Minister as the Chairperson. The concerned Ministers, Secretaries and individuals associated with children welfare and representatives of organizations involved with children-related issues would be members of the Council.

Functions of the Council

1. The National Children Council will act as the highest policy making body on children welfare;

2. It will take all necessary steps to protect the interests and rights of all children in the country;

3. It will ensure the effective application of all laws of the country relating to child rights and interests;

4. It will work for enactment of new laws and formulation of appropriate rules if required;

5. For full implementation of the rights of the children, it will decide timely amendments, additions and alterations to existing laws;

6. It will ensure the implementation of United Nations Conventions on Rights of the Child.
CHAPTER VIII

CONCLUSION

This National Children Policy has been adopted as a commitment to the children of the country. It will play an effective role in the overall development of children and in making them worthy citizens. Under the National Children Policy all children of Bangladesh irrespective of cast, creed, colour, sex, language, religion or opinion, social status, wealth or birth shall enjoy equal rights and opportunities.