
Short-term (private) gains at the cost of long-term (public) benefits: child labour in bidi factories of Bangladesh

Syed Mahbubur Rahman*

Department of Operations and Supply Chain Management,
Faculty of Business Administration,
American International University-Bangladesh (AIUB),
408/1, Kuratoli, Khilkhet, Dhaka 1229, Bangladesh
Fax: +88-02-8412255

and

PROGGA Knowledge for Progress,
House 6, 3rd Floor, East Side, Main Road 3,
Block A, Section 11, Mirpur, Dhaka-1216, Bangladesh
Fax: +88-02-8060751

Email: rahman_s_m@yahoo.com

Email: syed.mahbub@aiub.edu

*Corresponding author

Monowar Hossein, Md. Shahedul Alam,
Md. Hasan Shahriar, Intiaj Rasul and
A.B.M. Zubair

PROGGA Knowledge for Progress,
House 6, 3rd Floor, East Side, Main Road 3,
Block A, Section 11, Mirpur, Dhaka-1216, Bangladesh
Fax: +88-02-8060751

Email: mukte.mandal@gmail.com

Email: shahed_anthro@yahoo.com

Email: shahriar79@ymail.com

Email: imtirasul@yahoo.com

Email: basharzubair@hotmail.com

Abstract: International conventions strictly restrict children from working in hazardous occupations like bidi production. This research aimed at investigating child labour situation in bidi factories operating in the northern part of Bangladesh. The study followed qualitative techniques in an interpretive approach to deduce the phenomenon. Observation was the tool to explore working condition inside the factory, along with group discussion, key informant interview and in-depth interview. Four cases were also studied. The study found that around 50–70% of the labours were children, while the actual number was inconclusive. The family, due to poverty, and tobacco industry, for financial benefit, let adolescents work in bidi factories. Implementation of laws, measures to reduce demand and supply of bidi, and awareness among families are suggested to reduce the number of child labour. Child impact analysis and longitudinal research may be initiated further to analyse the changes in the career of children when grown up.

Keywords: child labour; bidi industry; Bangladesh; case study; tobacco industry; qualitative research.

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Biographical notes: Syed Mahbubur Rahman is an Assistant Professor at American International University-Bangladesh (AIUB). He also leads the research division of PROGGA Knowledge for Progress. He has worked and studied in various universities and institutions in Europe, East Asia, South Asia, South-East Asia and the Middle-East. His research interest includes energy and environmental policy, climate change, tobacco control and sustainable development. His research works have been published in various journals including *Energy Policy*, *Renewable and Sustainable Energy Reviews*, *Development in Practice* and *International Journal of Green Economics*.

Monowar Hossein has been working as a Qualitative Research Expert at PROGGA Knowledge for Progress since 2008. Previously he worked for IDE Bangladesh, Unnayan Shamannay, Bangladesh Institute of Development Studies (BIDS) and PROSHIKA. He has been overseeing methodical review of tobacco industry conduct in Bangladesh using various tools for instance, web-research, review of government publications, and analysis of media reports. He has earned Master's and Bachelor degree in Sociology from the Dhaka University. His research interest includes char livelihood and poverty, fisheries, energy and environment, health education, social protection, tobacco control and sustainable development.

Md. Shahedul Alam has been working as a Research Coordinator at PROGGA Knowledge for Progress since 2008. Previously he worked for Unnayan Shamannay and Bangladesh Institute of Development Studies (BIDS). He is responsible for developing research materials, coordinating field works, and for providing technical supports in developing advocacy materials. One of his remarkable works includes contribution to Island Chars Resource Mobilization Project, named Nodi o Jibon during 2006–2010, in which he visited 35 chars around the country for carrying out a number research on different socio-economic issues and char livelihoods. He has earned Master's and Bachelor degree in Anthropology from the Dhaka University. His research interest includes among others child labour, char livelihood, tobacco control and sustainable development.

Md. Hasan Shahriar has been working as a Project Coordinator at PROGGA Knowledge for Progress since 2008. Previously he worked for Unnayan Shamannay, ECOTA Fair Trade Forum and Manabik Shahajya Sangstha (MSS). He supervises various programs and projects, prepares training materials, and various reports for donors and government. Besides, he has been assisting the member secretary to run the journalists' network, Anti-Tobacco Media Alliance (ATMA). He has earned Master of Urban and Regional Planning (MURP), and Bachelor of Urban and Rural Planning (BURP) from the Bangladesh University of Engineering and Technology (BUET) and Khulna University, Bangladesh, respectively. His research interest includes among others human rights, fair trade, tobacco control and sustainable development.

Imtiaj Rasul has been working as a Coordinator of tobacco industry accountability (TIA) project at PROGGA Knowledge for Progress since 2014. He is responsible for overall guidance, technical and management supports to the Industry Watch Team at PROGGA. He is involved in research, advocacy, and intervention programs related to public health, poverty, human development, water and sanitation, environment, marginalised community, social policy and development strategy. He has graduated in Political Science (Option-International Studies) and a minor of Sociology from Winona State University, USA. Currently, he is the Secretary of American Alumni Association (AAA) Bangladesh chapter. He has experience in designing training programs for advocacy and campaign for journalists and public health experts.

A.B.M. Zubair is a development practitioner for more than 20 years. Currently, he is the Executive Director at PROGGA Knowledge for Progress. Previously he worked for Unnayan Shamannay, Bangladesh Institute of Development Studies (BIDS) and National University of Singapore. He is the facilitator of the Anti-Tobacco Media Alliance (ATMA), a nation-wide network of more than 400 journalists. Besides, he is an editorial contributor to Tamaker Khabar (Tobacco News), a dedicated periodical addressing tobacco control. He has earned Master's and Bachelor degree in Economics from the Rajshahi University, Bangladesh. His research interest includes among others, fisheries and shrimp culture, char poverty and livelihood, tobacco control and sustainable development.

1 Introduction

According to Article 1 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, a child is any human being below the age of 18 years unless under the law applicable to the child, majority is attained earlier (OHCHR, 1990). Article 4 of the Children Act, 2013 (officially known as *Shishu Ain*, 2013) of Bangladesh classifies anyone up to the age of 18 as child; however, according to the Labour Law, 2006, minimum legal age for employment is 14 (GOB, 2006). The term 'child labour' is defined as work that deprives children from their childhood, their potential and their dignity, and that is harmful to physical and mental development (Hilowitz et al., 2004). The definition given by the International Labour Organization (ILO) is more comprehensive. ILO defines child labour to any work that:

- 1 is mentally, physically, socially or morally dangerous and harmful to children
- 2 interferes with their schooling
- 3 deprives them from the opportunity to attend school
- 4 obliges them to leave school prematurely
- 5 requires them to attempt to combine school attendance with excessively long and heavy work (ILO-IPU, 2002).

Edmonds and Pavcnik (2005) have argued that estimation of working children globally is a difficult task, since low-income countries, where most of the working children live, lack reliable data. By the end of the last decade, around 115 million children aged 5–17 years were engaged in hazardous work while 215 million were involved in any form of child

labour majority of which were residing in developing countries (Salmon, 2005; ILO-IPEC, 2008; Amon et al., 2012). The most recent estimate indicates that 152 million children, 64 million girls and 88 million boys, work globally, among which around half is involved in hazardous work (ILO, 2017).

While the global number of child labour has been reducing, the largest number still remains in Africa and Asia (Das, 2012; ILO, 2017). In Asia and the Pacific, out of around 62 million children at work 28 million is involved in hazardous activities (ILO, 2017). There are some disputes about the actual volume of child labours in Bangladesh as well. Based on the Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics (BBS) survey of 1995–1996, Rahman et al. (1999) found that around 12% of 6.58 million labour force was children. International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC, 2012) found that about seven million children were involved in any form of work including 1.3 million in the worst forms of child labour in Bangladesh. Later, Khan (2016), based on updated child labour report produced by BBS, has argued that around 3.45 million children are active labour in Bangladesh (GOB, 2015). In 2013, a Statutory Regulatory Order of the Government of Bangladesh identified 38 occupations, including bidi and cigarette production, hazardous for children aged from 14–18. The number of child labour in hazardous job has reduced in 2015 compared to the number in 2013 (Khan, 2016). Yet in the poorest countries, around one in four children are engaged in work harmful for their health (UNICEF, 2017). A decline in the number of child labour may have resulted from initiation and implementation of such policies, although there are rooms for substantial improvement.

In other countries as well, where the number of bidi smokers is higher, child labour is an issue. Dube and Mohandoss (2013) found that, although not shown in the records, children in India used to work in bidi factories for labelling and packing, and also in home for bidi rolling. Factors affecting child labour in Indian bidi industry includes, among others, labour intensive nature of bidi production, cost saving attitude of the producers, and illiteracy as well as ignorance of parents along with poverty (Dube and Mohandoss, 2013). In Pakistan, form of child labour in bidi industry is little different. Female child labour is mostly engaged in packing and grinding of chewing tobacco (ILO, 2013).

Since child labour is predominantly rural in the Indian sub-continent, agriculture is the dominant sector to employ the highest number followed by service sector and industry (Rahman et al., 1999; Amin et al., 2004; Beegle et al., 2006; Khanam, 2008; Mazhar, 2008; USDOL, 2015). Edmonds and Pavcnik (2005) have found that most of the working children in the developing world are employed by their parents. One reason for such phenomenon is parents' low income. Since nutrition intake is not sufficient as well due to low income condition, working children suffer from significant growth deficit, chronic occupational diseases, and above all are deprived from education (Rahman et al., 1999). Working in bidi processing makes the situation even worse for children.

The bidi factory owners have been taking the opportunity since long (Avachat, 1978) not only to control farmers, but also to deploy children at a very low cost in different stages of hazardous tobacco processing and bidi production. Besides, despite the terrible health costs of the employees, bidi producers claim themselves 'benevolent' since they provide 'safe (!)' jobs to a vast unskilled and illiterate community (Ghatak, 2017).

The actual numbers of bidi factories in Bangladesh and the workers involve therein are not clearly known. According to the National Revenue Board of Bangladesh, there were a total of 195 bidi factories that employed around 75,000 workers; another study of Campaign for Tobacco-Free Kids (CTFK) in 2012 argued that Bangladesh had a total of

117 bidi factories with around 65,000 workers (Mala, 2014). Mala (2014) has argued that the factory owners have long been publicising fabricated information with their deployed lobbyists, researchers and front groups that there are around 2.5 million workers currently working in bidi factories without providing any evidence of such a huge number. The logic behind showing-up such a massive number of employees in the industry may include the intention to enjoy the sympathetic attitude of the government by showing-up its potential gigantic contributions to national economy.

There are three arguments in favour of social investment in children:

- 1 to ensure equity and justice since social investment is an ethical imperative
- 2 there is a link between social and economic policy, and economic development in productivity
- 3 there exists a close interrelation between social and political spheres (UNICEF, 2005).

Children are the future of any nations. Government of Bangladesh has encouraged families with different types of incentives to regularise schooling of their children. Formation of human capital in any extent is closely related to the existence and volume of child labour since early entry to labour market results in refutation of usual childhood with proper schooling (Das, 2012). Many children are not going to school; instead, going to bidi factories, for instance in the northern part of Bangladesh, to earn money to support family expenditures (Cain, 1977; Khuda, 1991). Hence, this study attempts to explore the child labour situation in bidi factories situated in the northern part of Bangladesh. Specific research questions to achieve the goal of the research include:

- 1 What is the proportion of child labour in the factories?
- 2 How are the children engaged in production process of bidi?
- 3 How are education and health of the children being affected by their involvement in bidi factories?

This research has six sections. Section 2 describes the research methods along with selection of cases, data collection and the interview process. Section 3 discusses the child labour situation in bidi factories, children involvement in different processes of bidi production, their wages, education, and health conditions. Section 4 explains four cases. Section 5 critically discusses the issues followed by conclusion and recommendation in Section 6.

2 Methodology

2.1 Research design

The study followed qualitative research design to answer the research questions in an interpretive approach to deduce the phenomena (Denzin and Lincoln, 2005; Rahman and Ahmad, 2016). The procedure and techniques used in the research originated from both ethnography (Hoey, 2014) and phenomenological approach (Oiler, 1982). Physical observation was the tool to explore working condition inside the factory and physical condition of the children working therein (Bernard, 2012). Since, precise, accurate, and

appropriate observation and its recording were required (Baker, 1988), a research team of six members were involve in the entire research process. Group discussion, key informant interview and in-depth interview techniques have successfully been used in social research methods, particularly for analysis of bidi industry (Mazhar, 2008; Roy et al., 2012; Ghatak, 2017). Accordingly, this study has implemented similar tools. Since “case study approach is particularly useful to employ when there is a need to obtain an in-depth appreciation of an issue, event or phenomenon of interest, in its natural real-life context” (Crowe et al., 2011), four cases were selected to conduct in-depth interview.

2.2 Selection of location, respondents and cases

The study took place in two districts of the northern part of Bangladesh: Rangpur and Lalmonirhat. Rangpur is one of the three key tobacco cultivation regions in Bangladesh (PRI, n.d.) and hence among the top in annual bidi production. Five leaders from the labourers were purposefully selected considering their power and the level of involvement in bidi industry in the region. Four journalists were also selected based on their professional interest about tobacco-related issues. Preference was given to journalist who had developed a history of tobacco related journalism in various newspapers and electronic media. Besides, randomly four small groups of employees working in different bidi factories were requested for a group discussion. These groups were developed while the workers were returning back from the factories after the usual work hour. Each group consisted 5–8 workers. The group discussion ran for around 30–50 minutes each. During the group discussions, one child or adolescent (that seemed fit by observation of the research team) from each group was chosen for further in-depth interview. The selected children were *Dollar*, *Mukta*, *Rokhsana*, and *Shuki*.

2.3 The interview process

Interviews with the labour leaders took place in the factory premises, while interviews with the journalist took place in random multiple stages and in different places. All other interviews took place in the respondents’ premises with presence of their parents. Each interview started with a request of some basic demographic information, like age and schooling years. The standard protocol for interview was maintained. The questions were open-ended in nature and the respondents were asked to share information as much as possible about their work condition, working hour, wage, daily-life including schooling and sickness, and their overall experiences in bidi factories. Each interview continued for 50–70 minutes. Each respondent of the cases was identified by his/her names based on their consent to mention their identity in the research.

2.4 Data analysis

The team of researchers observed the study area to acquire knowledge about socio-economic conditions of the community. The notes taken during group discussions, key informant interviews and in-depth interviews were documented, and later transcribed. Observations from each of the research team member were summarised. After compilation of all information from group discussions, key informant interviews and in-depth interviews of children, similar statements, quote, ideas and themes were grouped and weighted for finding the answers to research questions.

2.5 Limitations of the research

Basu (1999) observed that there were substantial empirical writings on child labour, but very few among them were founded on any theory. The study as well is empirical and qualitative in nature. Nonetheless, it provides in-depth rich data about child labour in bidi industries in Bangladesh. This is an indicative study and the results are likely to comply with any bidi factory in Bangladesh; however, presumably will not be reflective for cigarette and other smoke-less tobacco production system. Beside, this study may not be comparable to bidi industries operating in other countries. During the in-depth interviews of children, it was observed that presence of both parents was hindering the respondents to share freely their feelings about working in bidi factory. Although longitudinal interviews are better in sharing life experiences (Kirby and McKenna, 1989), due to time and resource constraints, this study has not undergone repeated interviews with the respondents.

3 Bidi industry and child labour in Bangladesh

3.1 Bidi industry at a glance

Labour leaders informed that there were 35 bidi factories in Rangpur district that counted around one third of the total in Bangladesh. The local factory leaders also provided an estimation of around 40,000 labours involved in bidi factories in Rangpur. Grossly half of the labour forces were children, and among the adult labours one third were female. It was also revealed that there were nine factories in Lalmonirhat district that employed around 21,000 labours including around 15,000 children aged 4–14 years; i.e., around 70% of the labour force. PROGGA (2014), based on publicly available media reports, has found that the age of the children working in bidi industry in Bangladesh ranges from 4 to 12 years, which was somehow reflected during observation.

3.2 Inside the factory

Hundreds of tender hands on the floor inside a bidi factory did not have time to look around. Air inside the factory was heavily polluted and filled with tobacco powder and dusts. In such a condition, a two to five member team sat in a circle with bidi making materials. Many toddlers were found sleeping on the floor while their mothers were making bidi. Those children were bound to stay inside the factory for long hours until their mothers completed the tasks. It was a serious health threat to the children. Although in the entrance of factory it was explicitly mentioned that children under 14 were not allowed to enter, mothers, especially breast-feeding mothers could not go to factory without their child.

The temperature remained around 39 degree Celsius, which was apparently similar to heat wave. In many factories there were no ceilings under the tinned rooftop, thus raised the temperature inside. Most of the labour worked wearing undershirts while some of them were on bare body. The children inside the factories remained covered with tobacco dusts after hours of work.

3.3 *Operations and children involvement*

It was the rule of the bidi industry in the region that the workers who did not possess cards would prepare bidi shells in their own residence under a sub-contract arrangement given by the cardholders. Cardholders received order to prepare 10,000–18,000 bidi a day. But since it was huge within a tight timeline, they employed non-cardholders to make bidi shells on their behalf. The cardholders supplied shell preparing materials and a deadline, and later collected the finished shells when made. Children were not officially provided with a card; hence they worked at home as non-cardholder or in support of a non-cardholder father, mother or both. Children were found to involve in various stages of production processes of bidi. There were four stages of production process, where children were engaged:

- 1 preparation of empty bidi shells
- 2 insertion of chopped tobacco into the shells
- 3 seal the shell tops
- 4 accumulation of bidi in packets.

It is to note that children who prepared shells were usually the younger ones aged from five to nine years.

3.4 *Wages of child labours*

Earning from work in bidi factories were found very low. Most of the labours had no land and hence, multiple members from a family were found working in different factories. For some households, majority of the family members were found engaged, anyhow and to any extent, in bidi production. The households where at least one child worked in bidi factories earned around BDT 3,000 on average a month (USD40 approximately). During the recent years, wages of all types of day labour, except for those working in bidi factories, have increased significantly. Survey of BBS titled ‘Wage Rate of Working Poor in Bangladesh, 2009–2010’ showed that the wages of bidi and *zarda* industry workers were the lowest compared with wages from any other sector of the economy, i.e., BDT 35 and BDT 48 a day, respectively.

3.5 *Education of child labours*

Among the children working in factories in Rangpur, around 15,000 regularly or irregularly attended schools and the rest did not at all. Majority of the children who worked in the bidi factories could not graduate primary education. It is alarming for any country where the rate of school dropout is high.

3.6 *Health status of child labours*

The children were found unaware of the health hazards while working in bidi factories. Children had suffered from malnutrition due to unhealthy work environment, use of tobacco and lack of balanced meals. Discussions with the child workers unveiled that frequent fevers and coughs were common. Besides, child labours had suffered from

headaches, abdominal pains and problems, diarrhea and muscle pain. Chronic bronchitis and asthma among the children were the worst forms of sufferings due to work inside bidi factories. A medical officer of Haragaach Government Hospital, Rangpur acknowledged that around 80% of the asthma patients had worked in bidi factories, which made them more vulnerable. Although the proportion of asthma patients among children working in bidi factories was less, i.e., 10%, this is distressing since risk of health hazard for the children is high because of possible continuation of work in bidi factory.

4 Cases

4.1 Case one: Dollar caught in deathtrap

A malnourished 14-year-old boy, Dollar lived with other five family members in a small room beside Gafur bidi factory in Haragaach. After entering first grade he discontinued like other child labours in bidi factory. Initially, to support his family, he has started working at Aziz bidi factory at the age of seven, where he was responsible for inserting tobacco inside bidi shells, closing the shell tops and packaging bidi. The usual work hour is from 8.00 AM to 4.00 PM. Besides, he helped his mother and other family members who were also involved in bidi manufacturing to prepare empty bidi shells. In the beginning, as *Dollar* shared his experiences, he worked as an associate of his father in the bidi factory and gradually he had turned into a mainstream bidi worker. Later his father quit the job. Majority of the children in Haragaach start helping their parents or other family members in bidi processing. He worked thrice a week and used to prepare 6,000 bidi shells a day. He earned BDT 143 for preparing 6,000 sticks of bidi. His share was around BDT 105 and the rest was taken by his family members (i.e., sister, mother and brother) who helped him in making bidi shells. His monthly income remained around BDT 1250 (USD 16 approximately).

Dollar possessed a rough face and skinny limbs. His complexion turned fade with no mildness. He remained sick more frequently, suffered from fever, muscle pain and diarrhea. Coughs and colds were his regular companion. Nonetheless, he did not go to doctor; instead he took suggestions to buy medicine from the seller of a local drug store. The family members were not worried about his continuous sickness. Although he was one of the sources for family maintenance, the head of the family, i.e., his father, was not able to afford the expenses to treat *Dollar*. *Dollar* had a plan to leave bidi factory, if he was offered a job elsewhere. He dreamt to start working at another place to earn enough money to improve his family condition.

Dollar opined that there were around 14,000–15,000 workers at Aziz bidi factory and around 7,000–8,000 of them were children where the number of females worker were dominating. However, local people estimated that 60–65% of the workers of the factory were children.

4.2 Case two: bidi making chain of Mukta

Mukta was then a nine-year-old girl living at Sahebpara, Haragaach. Her father, an assistant of a truck driver, earned BDT 2,500–3,000 a month. The earning was not sufficient to maintain the five-member family expenditures. Hence, *Mukta* had to make

bidi with her elder sister and mother. She started bidi making while she was seven; she used to go to factory every Saturday and Monday with her mother to help as an assistant. She worked from 8.00 AM to 11.00 AM and locked around 5,000 bidi shell-tops. She earned BDT seven per thousand of bidi. Her mother received an order of preparing 18,000 bidi a week and she produced 9,000 bidi each Wednesday and Saturday. Her mother and sister made 18,000 bidi shells in four days and filled tobacco in the shells, locked the tops, and finally packed the finished bidi. Her mother received BDT 330 a week for 18,000 bidi altogether and *Mukta* shared BDT 70 a week that gave her a total of BDT 280 a month on average. Although *Mukta* was in her second grade, she was irregular to school. Her physical condition was getting worse day by day; she was becoming thin gradually, and frequently suffering from fever and cough. Sometimes she could not attend school or go to work due to her sickness. When she was asked about how she felt in this job, she remained quiet.

4.3 Case three: family shouldered on *Rokhsana*

Eight-year-old *Rokhsana* was a child labour lived at Kalmatirpara in Lalmonirhat district. She was engaged in bidi shell preparation with her mother since the age of five. She worked five or six days a week. Her mother received order to prepare 10,000 bidi shells a week. *Rokhsana* prepared 4,000 and her mother used to do the rest. Together they earned BDT eight for one thousand of bidi shells. *Rokhsana* shared BDT 32 a week on average, and hence earned BDT 128 a month. Her mother was a non-cardholder of bidi factory. She worked on sub-contract from the card-holding workers.

Rokhsana learned bidi shell making from her mother. Later, to enhance household income she was utilising the skills (!). Although a student of class two, she could not attend school due to preference towards earning. She did not have enough time to spend for sports, a fundamental right to a child. She had been passing her childhood in the same way for the last three years.

Rokhsana's father was a landless day labourer. He did not own any cropland. His scanty income was inadequate to bear all the household expenses. Hence, he wanted to engage other family members in bidi making. *Rokhsana's* mother said that most of the locals who did not own cropland were engaged with bidi production.

4.4 Case four: *Shuki* deprived of education

Eleven-year-old *Shuki* attended school until her second grade. Later became a regular worker in a bidi factory. She lived with her family at Beribandh (embankment) of Baniapara under Lalmonirhat district. *Shuki* used to wake up at 5.00 AM to start factory work with her father and returned back at 5.00 PM, five days a week. This factory paid BDT 240 a day for preparation of 10,000 bidi. She could lock around 1,000 bidi shells a day. Since she worked on sub-contract, she earned BDT 40 a day, totalling BDT 800 a month. It is to be noted that her income was more than any other child as she was privileged with five-day working opportunity due to her superior skill.

Her parents were unconcerned about the unhealthy work environment inside bidi factory and her absence at school. Instead, they seemed very satisfied with the additional income of their daughter. They did not have any land or livestock. It was difficult for her father to maintain the five-member family expenses alone. So, her father let her engage in bidi factory. She had to stop schooling, and her health was also weakening day by day.

Besides fever and coughs, she had developed eyesight problem. Being poor, she could not consult a doctor. Her father shared that all of the earnings from *Shuki* was being saved for her marriage in future. In response to the question about her satisfaction in bidi factory work, *Shuki* remained silent. Many of the children of the region were spending their childhood in the hazardous environment of bidi factories. Childhoods that were supposed to be invested in sports and education, was being spent for maintaining families.

5 Discussion

Child labour in tobacco related industry is of great concern. The actual number of child labour is inconclusive. In other neighbouring countries, for instance in India, as well authentic official estimation of child labour is non-existent (Ghatak, 2017). Besides, although a combined effort both in global and local scale is visible to address child labour, the condition has not changed remarkably, especially in Bangladesh. ITUC (2012) has argued that child labour in Bangladesh is not regulated in compliance with international standards, and enforcement of laws is ineffective. Physical investigation in selected bidi factories in the northern part of Bangladesh found the argument factual. Hence, formation and implementation of rules and regulations along with awareness among the parents and children need to be ensured to improve child labour situation.

Article 32 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child explicitly mentions, “States Parties recognize the right of the child to be protected from economic exploitation and from performing any work that is likely to be hazardous or to interfere with the child’s education, or to be harmful to the child’s health or physical, mental, spiritual, moral or social development.” Based on the Charter, the Government of Bangladesh, besides identifying a list of 38 hazardous jobs, has banned children engagement with those tasks (GOB, 2013). Working in bidi and cigarette factory is the fourth in the list. Bangladesh has also ratified the ILO Convention no. 182 in 2001 that deals with the hazardous child labour. Meanwhile, a project about prevention and systematic elimination of the worst forms of child labour in Bangladesh (ILO/IPEC/USA) was implemented from 2000 to 2004 in prioritised areas including bidi industry (ILO-IPEC, 2003). However, research findings suggest that the rules and policies regarding child rights are not being properly enforced in most of the cases in bidi industry.

Contribution of child education and health to long-term sustainable growth of a nation is uncontested. Working in tobacco factories are hindering children from attending school or hindering their regular attendance and also hampering their health. Edmonds and Pavcnik (2005) have argued that improvement in the quality of education in a way that raises return to school and reduction in the quantity of child labour are positively associated. Besides, attractive education is likely to reduce child labour or to mitigate dropout from the school for a paid or unpaid work (Edmonds and Pavcnik, 2005). The argument of Edmond and Pavcnik (2005) basically echoed the observation of Rahman et al. (1999) that critically analysed the Harkin’s Bill, which assumed that if children were allowed to work would attend school. Incentive in the form of a stipend with a value even less than the mean child wage is found to be enough to ensure almost full or greater school attendance (Ravallion and Wodon, 2000; Basu and Tzannatos, 2003; Shafiq, 2007). Since, economic condition of families impose the parents to allow their child(ren)

to work in bidi factories, improvement in economic condition is likely to reduce the number of child bidi worker. However, reducing child labour by improving only the standard of living will take time (Edmonds and Pavcnik, 2005). The government of Bangladesh initiated different policies to encourage education. One such policy is 'food for education' which is somehow an economic incentive to the school-going children and their parents (Bourguignon et al., 2003), and likely to contribute substantially to eradicate child labour. In contrast, Amin et al. (2004) have argued that schooling does not necessarily limit child's work. Current practice in the selected study area shows that investment in children by the government is not able to attract student in the school, and social investment in children by the family is nil, while children are moneymaking machines. With this trend, equity and justice in the long run is impossible; the link between social and economic policy and economic development may not be established and the interrelation between social and political spheres may fade.

The household income and expenditure survey (BBS, 2010) showed that a landless household earned BDT 11,479 a year in 2010. The earnings were BDT 7,203, 5,842 and 4,366 in the year 2005, 2000 and 1995/96, respectively. It is evident that earning of a landless household around one and a half decades ago was higher than what the bidi labourer was earning then. Although very few of the labours earn a little more than the national average, most of the bidi labours are earning substantially lower than the national average of Bangladesh, which compels them to ensure engagement of additional member from the family or in some cases the whole family in bidi production.

Northern part of Bangladesh is a blessing to the tobacco industry due to its economic conditions and favourable land quality for tobacco agriculture. It is argued that tobacco companies are exploiting the poor and marginalised section of the society (Karnani, 2011), which seems justified. Child labour is prohibited in bidi factories. Since there is hardly any evidence of application of policies and punishments, a significant portion of the future cohort of the country is being destroyed by the death selling traps of the tobacco companies. Lack of education and also lack of willingness to access education would have enormous negative impacts in the long run.

There are two categories of private beneficiaries from child labour: parents and the bidi industry. Although there are evidences that poverty and child labour are not positively related (Basu and Tzannatos, 2003), improvement in economic conditions may reduce the number of child labours. Bidi industry, and tobacco industry as a whole, employs child labour for the financial benefits of their business. Since the volume of child labour is a way to benefit financially, producers are unlikely to take initiative for mitigating child labour. Instead, for instance, so called corporate social responsibility programs for raising company public image would be interesting to the producers since it helps business gain access to more markets (Hasting, 2008; Fooks et al., 2011). Child labour in bidi factories is ultimately contributing to corporate benefits. But children are the assets of a nation, not merely an asset of a family or corporate alone. Unless the children are nurtured in a productive way, long-term benefits remain imperceptible.

Child labour in bidi factories can be reduced for instance, by affecting the demand for and supply of bidi negatively. If bidi consumers reduce or quit smoking, bidi producers would have no other options than decreasing production or divestment. Such effect would require less number of labours in factory. However, reducing demand for tobacco is not easy. Awareness among bidi consumers should be the primary activity to reduce demand. Besides, wider campaign for mass people, excessively high tax on tobacco products in

order to raise the price substantially may reduce demand for bidi. If demand falls, producer may need to adjust production and cost accordingly.

6 Conclusions

A group of global leaders, politicians, researchers and development practitioners are united to reduce child labour. Their combined efforts have resulted in launching and implementing a set of rules and regulations along with the conventions. But little has improved in developing country like Bangladesh, especially in bidi industry. Condition of child labour inside bidi factories is horrible and shocking. In this study, a qualitative research has been conducted to analyse child labour situation in bidi factories in two northern districts of Bangladesh.

Although signboard displays that children are not allowed inside the factories, actual scenario is different. The research has found that around 50–70% of the labour force in bidi industry is child. Standard criteria of operational health and safety are not maintained inside the bidi factory. Younger children are more involve in preparing bidi shells. The study has also found that the wages for child labour is very low; even less than the national average. Children involved in bidi factory works are not regular at school and suffering from malnutrition. Hence, identifying their actual age is also difficult.

Both parents and broadly the tobacco industry have been taking the opportunity of the vulnerable children. While the children are supposed to enjoy their childhood through attractive education system and sports, they are actually ruining their future, both by direct and indirect influence of family and bidi producers. Hence, proper implementation of child labour related acts, measures to lessen bidi demand and supply, and awareness among family members are badly needed to eradicate child labour in bidi factories. Longitudinal research may also be carried to see the future of child labours. Child impact analysis, as suggested by Dube and Mohandoss (2013), may also be initiated. Since, eliminating child labour requires launching and implementing legislation and intervention, strong monitoring by the government is a prerequisite, at least for the existing laws. Research may also be carried out about how reduced child labour contributes to long-term resource mobilisation in developing countries (Rena, 2009). Child labour is a national problem and hence, requires a holistic approach.

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