

A citywide approach in urban Bangladesh

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World Vision applied a citywide approach to reducing the prevalence of child labour and to protecting working children's rights in four cities in Bangladesh. This approach offers lessons for others involved in urban programming.

It is estimated that some 3.2 million internally displaced children are involved in child labour in Bangladesh. In most cases, internally displaced families are forced to take their children out of school and put them to work because they cannot afford their children's education or because they need the money to enable the family to survive. Children in Bangladesh can be legally employed from the age of 14; the 2010 National Child Labour Elimination Policy prohibits both under-age employment and the employment of children in hazardous work but implementation of this policy remains limited. Consequently, children are frequently engaged in hazardous work including in the clothing industry, transport, shipbreaking, fishing, domestic work, construction, street vending and garbage scavenging.

Against this backdrop, World Vision Bangladesh targeted 88,853 internally displaced children (57% girls, 43% boys) in four cities (Dhaka, Chittagong, Sylhet and Khulna) from 2016 to 2018. The aim was to take children away from hazardous work and to try to ensure that they can enjoy their basic rights by applying World Vision's standard approach for all urban programming: a 'citywide' approach which is rolled out at different levels of city administration to ensure a sustainable impact. Based on partnerships and collaboration, this approach promotes local community support mechanisms and then draws on the knowledge and feedback gained from these neighbourhood activities in order to undertake advocacy at district and national policy levels.

Neighbourhood level

At this level, children, parents and employers were targeted. Children aged 5–14 were given access to free non-formal education and competency-based basic education,

and to sports and other forms of recreation. Children with disabilities were included in the non-formal education programme with care provided according to their needs. Meanwhile, young people aged between 15 and 18 received vocational skills trainings to enable them to find decent – non-hazardous – employment. To help children connect with job providers, potential employers were involved, who were at the same time sensitised on the Convention on the Rights of the Child and on laws pertaining to child labour. A database was created to help ensure delivery of appropriate services to children according to their specific needs.

Furthermore, capacity building – relating to income generation, savings and entrepreneurship – was provided for 12,000 families (whose children were engaged in hazardous labour and whose household income was below US\$35 per month). Cash support provided to some particularly vulnerable families was reduced gradually when families became engaged in income-generating activities. Meanwhile, awareness-raising programmes aimed to build parents' awareness of the harmful effects of child labour. To ensure community engagement, World Vision Bangladesh supported the formation of community-based organisations (CBOs) that ran savings schemes and provided loans to their members. Working with the CBOs also helped ensure community participation in monitoring and reporting of child labour abuses.

District level

At this level, World Vision Bangladesh developed partnerships and collaborations with different stakeholders including the private sector, civil society organisations and other district-level institutions in order to discuss issues relating to displaced

children and to undertake advocacy with authorities such as the city's education department. Thanks to a collaborative effort, child labour protection committees (CLPCs) were formed in the four cities. In Bangladesh, most of the local ward-level committees (the lowest tier of local government) are not functional as they lack resources and autonomy for decision making but the CLPCs strengthened their capacity by providing secretarial support and help with facilitating meetings. Child-friendly enquiry/reporting desks and a helpline were established at local police stations to ensure children's rights are not violated and to enable reporting of abuses.

National level

World Vision Bangladesh and other non-governmental organisations formed an alliance to conduct policy advocacy at the national level, holding a number of discussions with the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Women and Children Affairs. The purpose of these discussions was to ensure more effective implementation of the National Child Labour Elimination Policy 2010 and the National Education Policy 2010, and to encourage policymakers to introduce policy changes in order to address the needs of displaced children. From these discussions emerged an action plan relating to these points, plus agreement on the potential roles of the different stakeholders.

Challenges and mitigation

As a result of this citywide approach, approximately 70,000 children either returned to school (if aged below 14) or continued to work but in better jobs (those aged 14 or above). Meanwhile, their families benefited from vocational training and income-generating activities. On average, their household income increased by 15%. However, although these initiatives showed significant results, several challenges were faced throughout implementation; some of these challenges, and how they were addressed, might be relevant to those working in other urban programming cases.

One prominent challenge was the mobile and dynamic nature of urban life. The provision of services to those in need depends largely on the ability to reach them but displaced people may not remain for long in one place. Connecting displaced families with the CBOs and encouraging them to join saving schemes provided a certain level of security so they did not need to move on as much.

Another notable challenge was the preference among the most vulnerable internally displaced persons (IDPs) for direct cash support rather than capacity building and skills training. Local government representatives and local religious leaders and influential people were consequently engaged to motivate IDPs on the long-term benefits of capacity building and skills training.

Efforts by the CLPCs to address abuse (both of child employment law, and physical and sexual abuse of children) were not very effective in cases where the abuser was an influential person. The committees were consequently re-formed to include members of law-enforcing agencies, the media and prominent persons of local society to bring more pressure to bear.

We recommend the following to improve application of this approach:

Allocating time at the neighbourhood level:

According to the citywide approach, the assistance agency (in this case, World Vision Bangladesh) should first focus on gathering grassroots insights at the neighbourhood level, and then provide technical expertise. Insights from the neighbourhood level should be cascaded at district and national levels through partnerships and advocacy initiatives in order to generate broader impact. However, initiating interventions at three levels (neighbourhood, district and national) simultaneously was somewhat problematic and limited our effectiveness. We conclude that more time should be allocated at the neighbourhood level before carrying forward activities at district and national levels.

Sensitisation around social and institutional development: Collaboration with city authorities and/or government

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representatives is one of the key aspects of the citywide approach. However, the government representatives of Bangladesh are, in general, more willing to collaborate on direct development (cash support/ infrastructure development and so on) than to collaborate on social development (for example, capacity building and awareness raising in the community) or institutional development (such as building local government capacity). There is thus an urgent need to build awareness among government representatives and service-providing agencies of the importance of social and institutional development.

Advocacy and follow up: Some local government representatives felt that

addressing the needs of slum-dwellers would discourage them from returning to their villages; as a consequence, they had limited interest in addressing slum-dwellers' needs. Hence, an advocacy framework and plan should have been developed to generate the interest of the more influential and less interested stakeholders – and government representatives should have been engaged from the very beginning of the project design process. Furthermore, to ensure sustainability of the approach, a framework for joint monitoring by the assistance agency and government bodies should be established.

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