

## Corporate Engagement to Address Child Labour: A Focus on Dhaka periphery

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### Abstract

*Child labour is a number one issue hindering the growth and development of children in Bangladesh. This is one of the crucial issues that deprives the children of schooling, enjoying childhood and drives them to hazardous jobs regardless of their kinds and nature. Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) describes the general responsibility of a company for sustainable management in an economical, ecological and social respect. The paper emphasized to explore an innovative approach of eradicating child labour through corporate engagement. It also tries to demonstrate successful engagement of private sector in marketable skill development and decent employment of adolescents and youth in peripheral Dhaka. Both qualitative and quantitative approaches have been blended in this study; primary and secondary sources were used to produce this paper.*

### Background

CSR can be defined as achieving organizational excellence in ways that honor ethical values and respect people, communities and the natural environment (CSR Centre, 2011). CSR denotes the responsibility of the corporate beyond its business compliance. One of the principles of UN Global Compact, the apex international convention on business and human rights, is the stakeholder engagement. This is also a principle of some aristocratic international compliance standard. According to the principle, children and adolescents are the significant stakeholders of

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business and their issues should be included in the business principles, organizational mission and vision in line with Triple Bottom Line (TBL) the people, profit and planet.

The main goal of maximizing profit is the same and could be manifold if the works could be done in a coordinated way with commitment. CSR could also be included in the main business principles and a part of companies' policy framework. Informal sector, which is working basically in the supply chain of the formal companies could have guidance in adopting Code of Conduct (CoC), Occupational Safety and Health (OHS), work place improvement plan (WPIP) and its execution. These are CSR operations for this sector since it operates in small scale, mostly through individual enterprise that are often beyond the coverage of formal sector labour inspection.

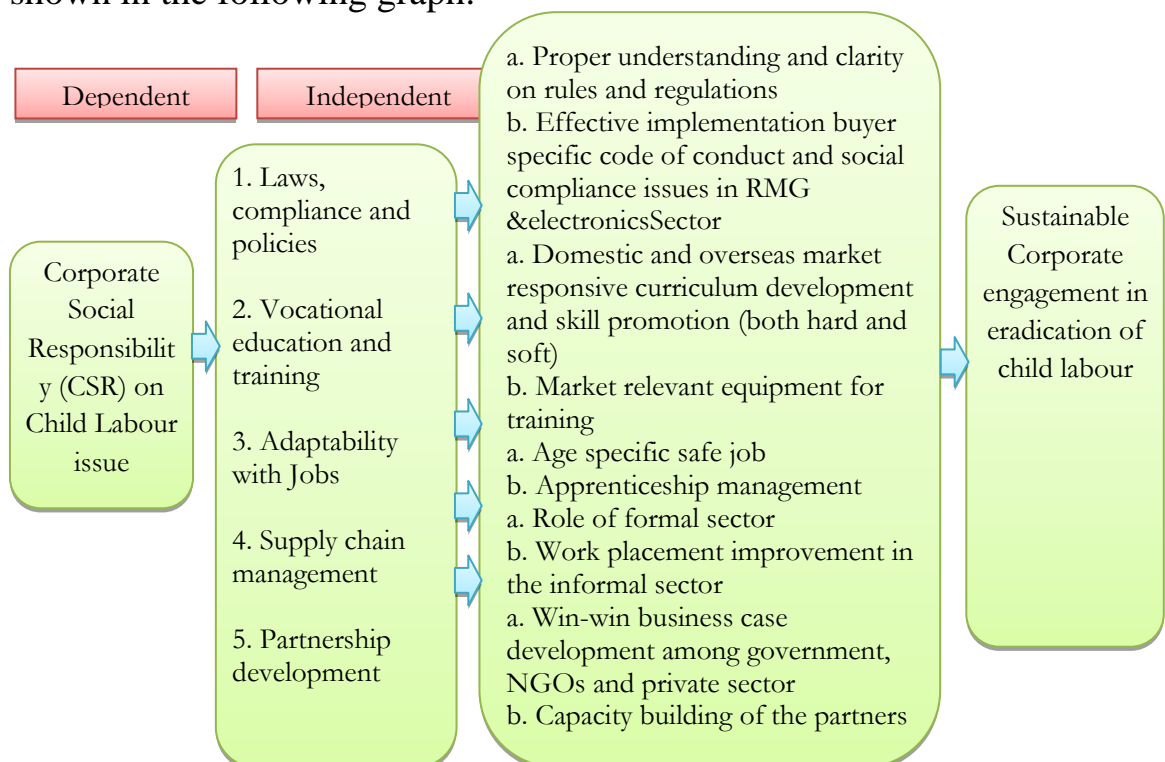
### Objectives

To explore an innovative approach of eradicating child labour through corporate engagement.

To demonstrate successful engagement of private sector in marketable skill development and decent employment of adolescents and youth in peripheral Dhaka.

### Conceptual Framework

The paper has a conceptual framework identifying dependent and some independent variables. The inter-relationships among the variables are shown in the following graph:



## Study Area and Methodology

Both qualitative and quantitative approaches have been blended; primary and secondary sources were used to conduct the study. Literature review, observation, focused group discussion, informal and formal interview were the methods. The primary source was visit and interview of 5 RMG factories, 5 electronics companies and 20 informal factories working basically in the supply chain of these two sectors located in Dhaka and Gazipur.

Location	RMG Factories	Electronic Companies	Informal Factories
Dhaka	Shinest Group Epyllion Group	Singer Bangladesh Ltd. Nippon Bangladesh Ltd. Grameen Power Royal Power Co. Ltd. Walton Group	Unique printing AR Embroidery Julie Net Bag Topu Mobile Rafieu Embroidery Jafrin Jory House Jisan Automobile Komolapur Automobile Arambagh Fashion Supply Muslim Jori House Hassan ShareeGhor SojolBenarosee House Kalam garment accessories Sujon Automobile Rita Sewing Mall Farzana Tailoring Subarna ladies wear Akhi Electronics Tahmina Mobile Repairing Mahfuza TV
Gazipur	2. Oeko-Tex Ltd 4. GMS Knit Composite 5. Utha Fashions Ltd.	-	
Total	5 RMG factories	5 electronics companies	20 informal factories

In addition to these, informal interview was held with many other formal and informal companies and their international buyers like s. Oliver, Dressmann and Bestseller. Discussion was held with employers and employees, parents, adolescents and youths. Secondary sources used monitoring reports of Save the Children, relevant journals, articles, books, newspapers and the Internet. A total of 225 respondents were selected through purposive sampling. However, methodology at a glance depicted hereunder:

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<b>Respondents</b>	<b>Technique/method</b>	<b>Sample size</b>
Relevant ministries (MoLE, MoI, MoE&MoYS)	FGD and formal interview	15
Garment factory owners	Formal and formal interview	10
Garment buyers (s.Oliver, Dressmann and Bestseller)	FGD and formal interview	20
Management staff of RMG and electronics companies	Observation, FGD and formal interview	30
Adult RMG and Electronic companies' workers	Observation, Case study, FGD and interview	40
Adolescents and youths (worker and non-worker)	Observation, Case study, FGD and interview	50
Informal sector employers	Observation, Case study, FGD and interview	30
Parents	Observation, FGD and interview	30
<b>Total</b>		<b>225</b>

### **Key Findings**

Child Labour generally refers to work that is mentally, physically, socially or morally dangerous and harmful to children; and interferes with their schooling by; depriving them of the opportunity to attend school; obliging them to leave school prematurely; or requiring them to attempt to combine school attendance with excessively long and heavy work.

There are different forms of child labour like agricultural labour, work in mining (usually not available in Bangladesh), manufacturing, domestic service, types of construction, scavenging and begging on the streets. Child labour is also a taboo issue in the corporate sector and therefore relevant companies usually try to avoid it rather engaging to address the issue. Moreover, superficial understanding of legal framework, lack of guidelines for corporate engagement in addressing child labour in conformity with relevant compliance standards are the main obstacles of addressing child labour.

However, this paper focuses on following issues keeping the study objectives in consideration-

How the corporate sector can be engaged in eradication of Child Labour? A child focused Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) is the pre-condition. A National Policy or guideline on CSR

Technical support of the private sector in development of vocational curriculum. Apprenticeship development and management. The way corporate can be benefitted from apprenticeship. Though Bangladesh has achieved the enrolment target in the universal primary education set by the Millennium Development Goal but the retention rate is equally disappointing. The most important thing is, private sector is the key

stakeholder of skill formation of the country and job placement. So, the sector must be engaged especially for the issues of labour and employment. To achieve the goal necessary policy formulation, change or amendment if needed as soon could be done as possible. When children's earning constitutes 20-25% family income in Bangladesh and corporate sector still lacks 25% skilled worker, programmes with developing win-win partnership involving concerned government agencies, corporations and civil society can give forth a sustainable solution to this grave concern.

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