

Full Length Research Paper

Socio-economic correlates of child labour in agricultural sector of rural Rajshahi District, Bangladesh

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Child labour is a sprouting matter across the world and remains widespread problem particularly in developing countries. This study is a comprehensive analysis of child labour in agricultural sector based on findings of interviews conducted with 1764 child labour from 12 Unions of 3 Thanas under Rajshahi district, Bangladesh. The present study aims to delineate this issue across different socio-economic conditions of the child labour. The study also reveals that sex, religion, types of livelihood, father's occupation and distance between the work place and home of the child laboured are most influential factors in determining the likelihood of taking up agricultural work. Findings need to be scientifically utilized in developing suitable programs addressing the case of reducing of child labour particularly in agricultural sector of the developing countries as well as Bangladesh.

Key words: Child labour, agricultural, cross tabulation, logistic regression analysis, Bangladesh.

INTRODUCTION

Child labour has become a burning issue throughout the world in this day especially in developing countries like Bangladesh. Bangladesh is predominantly an agrarian society. The frequent occurrence of natural disasters compounded by political upheavals and mal-governance has contributed to slow economic growth and prevailing poverty. The situation of child labour in Bangladesh has become increasingly complex. International Labour Organization's (2006) definition of child labour refers to work that is mentally, physically, socially or morally dangerous and harmful to children, interferes with their schooling by depriving them of opportunity to attend school; by obliging them to leave school prematurely or by requiring them to attempt to combine school attendance with excessively long and heavy work.

According to UNICEF (2008), an estimated 218 millions children aged 5 - 17 are engaged in child labour, excluding child domestic labour all over the world. About 126 millions of these children are believed to be engaged in hazardous situations or conditions such as working in

mines, working with chemicals and pesticides in agriculture or working with dangerous machinery. They are everywhere but invisible, toiling as domestic servants in homes, laboring behind the wall of workshops, hidden from view of the population. The majority of the world's working children, according to ILO are found in Asia (61%), followed by Africa (32%) and Latin America and the Caribbean (7%) . Of these working children, 95% are found in developing countries live in rural areas and three quarters of them are engaged in agriculture and related activities (ILO, 1997a and 1997b). Bangladesh has also experienced high incidence of child labour. According to the Child Labour Survey of Bangladesh, the child labour force in Bangladesh is 7.9 million out of the 42.39 million children in the age group of 5 - 14 years, that is, 18.64% of total child population is found to be economically active. Thus, child labour constitutes about 12% of the total labour force of Bangladesh. The highest proportion of child labour is found in agriculture (65%), followed by the service sector (10.3%), manufacturing (8.2%) and transport and communication (1.8%) (BBS, 2004).

Generally, the greater the extent of poverty in a country, the greater the amount of child labour. Child labour is deeply rooted in poverty and social customs (Rahman et

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al., 1999). One reason for such high labour force participation is that working children are from impoverished families (Basu and Van, 1998; Basu, 1999). Most of the children are engaged in household work in rural areas whereas agricultural work is performed mainly by the male children and household work is mainly performed by the female children (Levison et al., 2001).

Several studies reveal that there exists a close relationship between child labour and fertility, as a result high fertility in the developing countries may be due to high demand for child labour (Lindert, 1983; Vlassoff, 1979; Aghajanian, 1978; Nag et al., 1978; Cain, 1977; Ajami, 1976). Probably the answer of a crucial question "why farmers employ child labour" lies either on peak season shortage of adult labour (Nadkarni, 1976) or, on subsistence agricultural and economic underdevelopment (Khuda, 1991) or, due to application of labour intensive technology (Shariff, 1991). It can be said that most of the farmers in the developing countries are not capital rich and therefore they are unable to adopt modern technology which have prevented them from more production at smaller cost per unit. Actually the farmers in the developing countries adopt a technology which is neither a fully modern one or nor a traditional one but a mixture of both. Thus, generally they combine various inputs sub optimally. In such a situation, of course, the farmers are not in a position to produce crops at sufficiently low cost for survival in the face of steep and strong competition in the crop markets. That is why they need to reduce cost by employing children, which is the ultimate alternative open to them (Majumdar et al., 2001a), (George, 1990) wrote; Thus the only option opens to them is to employ cheap labour for reducing cost which is often done through employing a child labour which costs more or less one third of the wage of an adult labour.

Child labour remains a widespread problem in the world today. It is also pervasive in poor setting Bangladesh. In many families, child labour makes up about one third of their family income. In addition, poverty and economic deprivation leads to child labour (Alam et al., 2008). Thus, this paper is an attempt to study the existence and influencing factors of child labour in agricultural sector in Bangladesh.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

To identify the child labour of age 5 – 14 years, we first selected three out of four thanas, where more child labours were found using a pilot survey. Then in each thana, four unions were selected and in each union, 150 child labours' data were collected interviewing them. Due to incompleteness, 36 data were removed from the total 1800 data. Thus we got 1764 child labours' information for this study. All the child labour was interviewed during April 6 to May 15, 2008. The data were edited, compiled, processed and analyzed by using SPSS 10.5 program.

We have performed univariate classification analysis that is, percentage distribution in order to observe the socio-economic

conditions of the child labour. Also, Bivariate classification analysis (cross-tabulation) is used to investigate the socio-economic correlates of child labour. Finally, a multivariate technique named as logistic regression analysis is used for determining the impact of socio-economic factors on child labour in agricultural sector.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION Socio-economic conditions of child labour

We begin with a brief overview of the respondents with respect to several key socio-economic conditions (see Table 1). 76.4% respondents come from the age group 11 - 14 years. There are strong cross-gender variations in child labour. Largest percentages of the child labour are male (90.2%). The study shows that most of the respondents are Muslim. Though the highest percentage of the respondent's educational qualification is between class iv - ix, the percentage of the illiterate respondents are also high (30.2%). 62% respondents live in their own house, whereas 24.9% live in rented house. There is strong variation in occupation. 80.3% of the child labour engaged in agricultural work, whereas only 19.7% are in non-agricultural work. This indicates a predominantly agrarian rural Bangladesh. 75.1% children work more than 4 h in a day, specifically 39.3% work more than 5 h in a day. It has also been observed from Table 1 that 57.3% respondents have their daily income in between Tk. 31 - 50 and 38.4% have their daily income in between Tk. 5 - 30. Only 4.3% have their daily income Tk. 50 and above. Poor households badly need the money that children earn. Table 1 showed that 77.0% children are engaged in labour force due to poverty. Though 58.7% children have sufficient food for health but 41.3% have not. 70.7% children work within the distance 1 - 5 km between house and work place but 29.4% work far from the distance.

Socio-economic correlates of child labour

In this section we begin with the association between different age levels of child labour and some selected socio-economic variables (Table 2). It is observed from Table 2 that, child labour was higher in male than the female. Also, male child labour increases and female child labour decreases with the advancing age and the difference was statistically significant ($p < 0.001$). This indicates male headed Bangladeshi society in which female are very much restricted to work outside as their age increase. The female child labour works usually inside the home and they do not get permission from the household head to communicate or to meet others. Totally, 83.7% Muslim child and 16.3% Non-Muslim child are subjected to the child labour and the difference was statistically significant ($p < 0.001$). Table 2 showed that illiteracy was lower in advanced age. Also higher education

Table 1. Selected socio-economic characteristics of the respondents.

Variables	Frequency N=1764	Percentage (100)
Age of the respondents		
5 - 8 years	177	10.0
9 - 10 years	239	13.5
11 - 14 years	1348	76.4
Sex of the respondents		
Male	1592	90.2
Female	172	9.8
Religion of the respondents		
Muslim	1476	83.7
Non-Muslim	288	16.3
Educational level		
Illiterate	532	30.2
Class (i-iii)	539	30.6
Class (iv-ix)	693	39.3
Types of livelihood		
Own house	1093	62.0
Rented house	440	24.9
Others	231	13.1
Occupation of the respondents		
Agricultural labour	1416	80.3
Non-agricultural labour	348	19.7
Work time per day		
1 - 3 hours	440	24.9
4 - 5 hours	631	35.8
5+ hours	693	39.3
Daily income of the respondents (in Tk.)		
5-30	677	38.4
31-50	1011	57.3
50+	76	4.3
Causes behind child labour		
Poverty	1359	77.0
Self will	288	16.3
Parents will	117	6.6
Sufficient food for health		
Yes	1035	58.7
No	729	41.3
Distance between workplace & home (in km.)		
1 - 5	1247	70.7
6-10	359	20.4
10+	158	9.0

Notes: Tk. = Bangladeshi currency (Taka); km = Kilometer (s).

Table 2. Association between different age levels of child labour and some selected socio-economic variables.

Socio-economic variables	Age Levels of Child Labour				Total
	5- 8	9-10	11-12	13-14	
Sex of child labour					
Male	143 (80.8)	200 (83.7)	402(91.6)	847(93.2)	1592 (90.2)
Female	34(19.2)	39(16.3)	37(8.4)	62(6.8)	172 (9.8)
Total	177(100)	239 (100)	439 (100)	909 (100)	1764 (100)
	$\chi^2 = 39.45,$	d.f. = 3,	P<0.001		
<small>Religion</small>					
Muslim	127 (71.8)	180 (75.3)	367(83.6)	802(88.2)	1476 (83.7)
Non-Muslim	50(28.2)	59(24.7)	72 (16.4)	107(11.8)	288(16.3)
Total	177(100)	239 (100)	439 (100)	909 (100)	1764 (100)
	$\chi^2 = 44.45,$	d.f. = 3,	P < 0.001		
Educational status					
Illiterate	104 (58.8)	100 (41.8)	126(28.7)	202(22.2)	532(30.2)
Class (I – III)	37(20.9)	80(33.5)	172(39.2)	250(27.5)	539(30.6)
Class (IV – IX)	36(20.3)	59(24.7)	141(32.1)	457(50.3)	693(39.3)
Total	177(100)	239 (100)	439 (100)	909 (100)	1764 (100)
	$\chi^2 = 160.45,$	d.f. = 6,	P < 0.001		
Types of livelihood					
Own house	116 (65.5)	161 (67.4)	265(60.4)	551(60.6)	1093 (62)
Rented house	41(23.2)	50(20.9)	116(26.4)	233(25.6)	440(24.9)
Others	20(11.3)	28(11.7)	58 (13.2)	125(13.8)	231(13.1)
Total	177(100)	239 (100)	439 (100)	909 (100)	1764 (100)
	$\chi^2 = 5.36,$	d.f. = 6,	P = 0.50		
Occupation of child labour					
Agricultural labour	140 (79.1)	177 (74.1)	348(79.3)	751(82.6)	1416 (80.3)
Non-agricultural labour	37(20.9)	62(25.9)	91 (20.7)	158(17.4)	348(19.7)
Total	177(100)	239 (100)	439 (100)	909 (100)	1764 (100)
	$\chi^2 = 9.42,$	d.f. = 3,	P < 0.05		
Hazardous work for child labour					
Yes	154 (87)	209 (87.4)	399(90.9)	837(92.1)	1599 (90.6)
No	23(13)	30(12.6)	40(9.1)	72(7.9)	165 (9.4)
Total	177(100)	239 (100)	439 (100)	909 (100)	1764 (100)
	$\chi^2 = 7.88,$	d.f. = 3,	P < 0.05		
Drugs uses child labour					
Non-addicted	151 (85.3)	202 (84.5)	370(84.3)	685(75.4)	1408 (79.8)
Smoke	19(10.7)	30(12.6)	55 (12.5)	186(20.5)	290(16.4)
Ganja	3(1.7)	3(1.3)	5 (1.1)	14(1.5)	25(1.4)
Tari	0(0)	1(0.4)	4 (0.9)	17(1.9)	22(1.2)
Vang	4(2.3)	3(1.3)	5 (1.1)	7 (0.8)	19(1.1)
Total	177(100)	239 (100)	439 (100)	909 (100)	1764 (100)
	$\chi^2 = 33.83,$	d.f. = 12,	P < 0.001		
Regularity for work					
Yes	165 (93.2)	210 (87.9)	397(90.4)	830(91.3)	1602 (90.8)
No	12 (6.8)	29(12.1)	42(9.6)	79(8.7)	162 (9.2)
Total	177(100)	239 (100)	439 (100)	909 (100)	1764 (100)
	$\chi^2 = 7.88$	d.f. = 3,	P < 0.05		

increase with the advancing age and the association between educational qualification and child labour was statistically significant ($p < 0.001$). The possible reasons for these are, children at earlier ages are not well-aware of the benefit of education and their rights and there is a lack of proper care provided by their family. These situations start to develop in advanced age, which make more children to take education for the betterment of their lives. The association between the types of livelihood and child labour is not significant ($p = 0.50$). We also observed that 80.3% child labours are agricultural labour and 19.7% are non-agricultural labour. The number of child labour in agricultural sector increase with the advancing age. Also, the number in non-agricultural sector decrease with the advancing age and the difference is statistically significant ($p < 0.05$). This indicates agriculture based Bangladeshi society, where more people as well as more children involved themselves in agricultural work in general. 90.6% child labour significantly think that their work is hazardous work for them ($p < 0.05$). Though a large percentage (79.8%) of child labour was non-addicted but the percentage of child labour who are smoker is quite high (16.4%) and the difference is statistically significant ($p < 0.001$). 90.8% child labour significantly said that they maintain the regularity for work ($p < 0.05$).

Table 3 also shows that 77.5% child labour got regular payment for work whereas 22.5% said that they did not get regular payment for their work and the difference is statistically not significant ($p = 0.12$). It is also observed that very few child labour have their daily income more than 50 Tk. Moreover, as their age increases, their daily income also increase and the age intervals are significantly associated with daily income ($p < 0.001$). In poor setting Bangladeshi society, child labour is always much cheaper than their adult counterpart. In such situation, older child labour naturally has higher income than their younger counterparts. Majority of the child labour have no monthly saving. It is also found that the amount of saving increase with advancing age and the association between monthly saving of the child labour and age intervals of the child labour is statistically significant ($p < 0.001$). One possible reason for that is, generally, child labour in higher age group have higher income. So, they have comparatively more amount of money than the child labour in lower age for saving. The number of child labour having 3 meals in a day was higher than the others but it is not statistically significant ($p = 0.21$). A total of 58.7% child labour said that they have sufficient food for health and 41.3% said that they have not. The difference is statistically not significant ($p = 0.39$).

Table 3 also demonstrates significantly higher percentage of the child labour, who work in the distance of 1 - 5 km between their work place and home ($p < 0.001$). As their age increases, the distance between their work place and home also increase. In the earlier stage of

child labour, children are not mentally and physically so strong to work with more distance between their work place and their home. As their age increase they are mentally and physically more mature, at that time they have not enough hesitations to work with more distance between their work place and their home. Poverty is the most dominant single factor responsible for child labour which amount to 77.0%. It also observed that with advancing age, the effect of these factors influencing child labour is also increased but the difference is not statistically significant ($p = 0.36$). The possible reasons for this is, as the children grow up, they want to enjoy financially independent life and involve themselves in various work, also many parents want their children to work and take some parts for the family maintenance and their expectations start to increase as the age of their children increases.

Logistic regression analysis

Result based on the multivariate logistic regression analysis for identifying those variables, which are truly related to the child labour in agricultural sector is shown in Table 4, considering whether the child labour is agricultural labour as the dependent variable which is dichotomized by assessing 1 if the respondents was agricultural labour and 0 for not. The logistic regression analysis is helpful in observing how a predictor (independent) variable affects a response (dependent) variable in between groups or sub groups of the predictor (independent) variable (Retherford and Choe, 1973).

Table 4 exerts child labour in the age group 9 - 10 years was 1.37 times more likely to involve in agricultural work than the reference category. Also higher age groups have higher likelihood than the reference category. Respondent's sex exerts the significant effect in taking agriculture as occupation. Male child labours are 3.56 times highly significant and more preferable to involve in agricultural work than the reference category (female child labour). Non-Muslim child labour are less and negative but significantly preferable to involve in agricultural work than the reference category. Those child labours whose educational qualification in between class I to III and IV to IX is less likely to involve in agricultural work than the illiterate child labour, the possible reason may be that illiterate children are very much engaged in agricultural work in agricultural based Bangladeshi society. We also observe that child labour in rented house and others house are less likely to involve in agricultural work than the reference category. Child labour taking Ganja and Vang as intoxicating drug are more likely to involve in agricultural work than the reference category which contains 1.05 times and 1.27 times respectively. Child labours who have regular payment for work are negative and less preferable to involve in agricultural work than the reference category.

Table 3. Association between different age levels of child labour and rest of the selected socio-economic variables.

Regular payment for work					
Yes	147 (83.1)	183 (76.6)	326(74.3)	711(78.2)	1367 (77.5)
No	30(16.9)	56 (23.4)	113(25.7)	198(21.8)	397(22.5)
Total	177 (100)	239 (100)	439 (100)	909 (100)	1764 (100)
	$\chi^2 = 6.16,$	d.f. = 3	P = 0.12		
Daily income of child labour (Tk.)					
5–30	135 (76.3)	107 (44.8)	167 (38)	268(29.5)	677(38.4)
31–40	37(20.9)	107 (44.8)	203(46.2)	277(30.5)	625(35.4)
41–50	5(2.8)	23 (9.6)	67 (15.3)	292(32.1)	387(21.9)
50+	0 (0)	2 (0.8)	2 (0.5)	72(7.9)	76(4.3)
Total	177 (100)	239 (100)	439 (100)	909 (100)	1764 (100)
	$\chi^2 = 279.65,$	d.f. = 9,	P < 0.001		
Monthly saving of child labour (Tk.)					
No saving	109 (61.6)	111 (46.4)	216(49.2)	434(47.7)	870(49.3)
50 – 200	56(31.6)	82 (34.3)	160(36.4)	325(35.8)	623(35.3)
201 – 400	8(4.5)	31(13)	37(8.4)	105(11.6)	181(10.3)
401 - 600	3(1.7)	9 (3.8)	8 (1.8)	15(1.7)	35 (2)
600+	1(0.6)	6 (2.5)	18(4.1)	30(3.3)	55 (3)
Total	177 (100)	239 (100)	439 (100)	909 (100)	1764 (100)
	$\chi^2 = 27.42,$	d.f. = 12,	P < 0.001		
No. of meals taken in a day					
1 meal	4(2.3)	2 (0.8)	3 (0.7)	4 (0.4)	13(0.7)
2 meals	64(36.2)	92 (38.5)	183(41.7)	353(38.8)	692(39.2)
3 meals	109 (61.6)	145 (60.7)	253(57.6)	552(60.7)	1059 (60)
Total	177 (100)	239 (100)	439 (100)	909 (100)	1764 (100)
	$\chi^2 = 8.46,$	d.f. = 6,	P = 0.21		
Sufficient food for health					
Yes	109 (61.6)	150 (62.8)	255(58.1)	521(57.3)	1035 (58.7)
No	68(38.4)	89 (37.2)	141(41.9)	388(42.7)	729(41.3)
Total	177 (100)	239 (100)	439 (100)	909 (100)	1764 (100)
	$\chi^2 = 3.02,$	d.f. = 3,	P = 0.39		
Distance between work place and home (km.)					
1 - 5	155 (87.6)	190 (79.5)	279(63.6)	623 (68.5)	1247 (70.7)
6–10	22(12.4)	48 (20.1)	118(26.9)	171 (18.8)	359 (20.4)
10+	0(0)	1(0.4)	42(9.6)	115 (12.7)	158 (9)
Total	177(100)	239 (100)	439 (100)	909 (100)	1764 (100)
	$\chi^2 = 78.58,$	d.f. = 6,	P < 0.001		
Causes behind child labour					
Poverty	141 (79.7)	186 (77.8)	342(77.9)	690 (75.9)	1359 (77)
Self will	28(15.8)	42 (17.6)	72 (16.4)	146 (16.1)	288 (16.3)
Parent's will	8(4.5)	11 (4.6)	25(5.7)	73 (8)	117 (6.6)
Total	177(100)	239 (100)	439 (100)	909 (100)	1764 (100)
	$\chi^2 = 6.61$	d.f. = 6	P = 0.36		

Notes: Figures in parentheses indicate percentage; Tk. = Bangladeshi currency (Taka); km = Kilometer (s).

Table 4. Result of logistic regression analysis of socio-economic variables with agricultural work.

Socio-economic variables	ERC	SE	OR
Age levels of child labour			
5 - 8 (ref.)	-	-	1.00
9-10	0.31	0.25	1.37
11-12	0.11	0.24	1.12
13-14	0.05	0.23	1.05
Sex of child labour			
Male	1.72***	0.20	3.56
Female (ref.)	-	-	1.00
Religion			
Muslim (ref.)	-	-	1.00
Non-Muslin	-0.65**	0.22	0.52
Educational status			
Illiterate (ref.)	-	-	1.00
Class (I – III)	-0.04	0.17	0.96
Class (IV – IX)	-0.15	0.17	0.86
Types of livelihood			
Own house (ref.)	-	-	1.00
Rented house	-0.05	0.15	0.95
Others	-0.38*	0.21	0.69
Drugs uses child labour			
Non-addicted (ref.)	-	-	1.00
Smoke	-0.08	0.19	0.93
Ganja	0.05	0.56	1.05
Tari	-1.24	1.04	0.29
Vang	0.24	0.59	1.27
Regular payment for work			
Yes	-0.15	0.15	0.86
No (ref.)	-	-	1.00
Father's occupation			
Agriculture	-0.33**	0.16	0.72
Non-agriculture (ref.)	-	-	1.00
Mother's occupation			
Agriculture	0.46	0.55	1.58
Non-agriculture (ref.)	-	-	1.00
Sufficient food for health			
Yes (ref.)	-	-	1.00
No	-0.05	0.13	0.95
Causes behind child labour			
Poverty (ref.)	-	-	1.00
Self will	-0.05	0.26	0.95
Parent's will	0.07	0.17	1.07
Distance between work place and home (km.)			
1 – 5	0.48**	0.16	1.61
6–10	-0.32	0.28	1.02
10+ (ref.)	-	-	1.00

Notes: ERC = Estimated Regression Coefficient; S.E. = Standard Error of ERC; OR = Odds Ratio; ref. = Reference Category; km = Kilometre (s); Level of significance: ***p < 0.01; **p < 0.05; *p < 0.10.

Table 4 also showed that child labour whose father's occupation is agriculture are negative and significant but less likely to work in agricultural sector than the reference category. Also, those whose mother's occupation is agriculture are 1.58 times more likely to work in agricultural sector than the reference category. Child labour who have not sufficient food for health are negative and less preferable to involve in agricultural work than those who have. Table 4 also demonstrates that parent's will is a more influential factor responsible for child labour in agricultural sector (1.07 times) than the reference category, whereas self will is less likely responsible in taking agricultural work than the reference category. Distance between work field and home exerts the significant effect on the child labour in taking agricultural work. The distance between 1 - 5 km is 1.61 times positively significant and more likely responsible to involve in agricultural work than the reference category. It can be inferred that those who get agricultural work near their home, do not go long distance for other work/opportunities.

Conclusions and Recommendations

Child labour is a complex and often intractable problem. It is said that a parent is sleeping in the heart of a child. The saying is obvious because children will be the future of a nation. They are the future nation builders of a country. A healthy and sound grown up generation can lead a nation to the way of prosperity and vision. When the child is so important in the life of a nation: he can neither be ignored, nor neglected in the onward march of world civilization.

The present study has identified several socio-economic variables, which influence the child in getting the labour profession especially in agricultural sector in agriculture based Bangladeshi society. It is clear from the result that the child came into this hazardous profession due to poverty and low level of education. The study also reveals that out of all the selected variables that are included in the analysis: sex, religion, types of livelihood, father's occupation and distance between work field and home of the child labour are the most influential factors in determining the likelihood of taking the occupation of the child labour especially in agricultural sector. Usually, child agricultural workers frequently works for long hours in scorching heat, haul heavy loads of produce, are exposed to toxic pesticides and suffer high rates of injury from sharp knives and others dangerous tools. Their work is grueling and harsh, and violates their right to health, education and protection from work that is hazardous or exploitative.

A world that does not love and respect its generations, it is a world without a future. Starting from this simple truth, we must cooperate to build a new world in which children can feel safe. As a significant part of prevention of child labour, there is a serious need to generalize the

community with the issue. So, it needs to monitor properly addressing the issue of child labour which will be reflected by proper supervision at national level. Some ambiguities are still remaining in different ways because of unwillingness and improper initiatives of government and other duty bearers in a sustainable platform, where it needs proper evaluation revealing the gaps of implementation of National Plan of Action. Economically viable farm size, adequate financial support to acquire sufficiently large volume of farm asset for adopting modern technology and controlling of fluctuation of crop prices may work in positive direction for removing the problem of child labour in agriculture in developing countries like Bangladesh. Though there is mandatory primary in Bangladesh, it should be implemented in all areas of Bangladesh at any cost.

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