

# National SDG Report (VNR) 2025 Addressing the Concerns of LNOB Communities

## Children and the SDGs

*A Citizen's Assessment of Progress and Challenges, and the Way Forward*

*Md. Zafar Sadique*

Advisor – Investment in Children  
Save the Children in Bangladesh

**Dhaka: 20 March 2025**



Citizen's Platform for SDGs, Bangladesh

এসডিজি বাস্তবায়নে নাগরিক প্ল্যাটফর্ম, বাংলাদেশ



# Acknowledgement

## Anchor Organisations

Save the Children in Bangladesh

## Associate Organisations

Bandhu Social Welfare Society

Bangladesh Youth Leadership Center (BYLC)

BRAC

Campaign for Popular Education (CAMPE)

Caritas Bangladesh

Educo Bangladesh

Jaago Foundation

Light House Bangladesh

Plan International Bangladesh

The Fred Hollows Foundation

SOS Children's Villages in Bangladesh

World Vision Bangladesh (WVB)

Youth for Change Bangladesh Foundation

# Acknowledgement

## Collaboration and Field Consultation

- The tools development, and literature review teams
- All field staff from WVB, Educo Bangladesh and SCiBD including colleagues *Strala Rupa Mollick* (WVB), *Halima Akter & Md. Shahidul Islam* (Educo Bangladesh), and *SK. Rahamat Ullah Rumi & Md. Mostafizur Rahman Soykat* (SCiBD)
- All the consultation participants including members from National Children's Taskforce (NCTF) and National Child Forum

## Drafting, Review and Guidance

- Drafting support from *Munia Islam*, SCiBD
- Guidance from *Reefat Bin Sattar & Abdulla Al Mamun*, SCiBD
- All reviewers, both external and internal

## The Secretariat

- Platform Secretariat for coordination, and support including *Towfiqul Islam Khan, Tarannum Jinan, Shourza Talukder, Rifat Bin Aowlad* under the leadership of *Dr Debapriya Bhattacharya*, Convenor of the Citizen's Platform for SDGs, Bangladesh
- Editorial support from the Secretariat

# Table of contents

1. Context and Methods
2. Progress Trends
3. Key Gaps and Challenges
4. Way Forward

# 1. Context and Methods

## Context

### *Multiple vulnerabilities*

- Complex - socioeconomic, geographic, and policy factors
- Risks of exclusion, perpetuating inequality, slowing progress

### *Systemic barriers and marginalisation*

- Access to rights i.e., identity, education, healthcare, and protection
- Access to services

### *Strategic considerations*

- Children as an important stakeholders
- COVID-19, inflation, supply chain disruption
- Post-LDC graduation inclusive growth

## Mixed-method approach

*Desk review*

**14** consultations with Children

**1** consultation with mothers

**16** districts covered

*Consulted:* Children engaged in economic activities, urban children, Bede children, Horizon children, Santal (Munda), Adivasi children, child activists, young mothers

*Expert opinion*

*Public discussion*

## Objectives

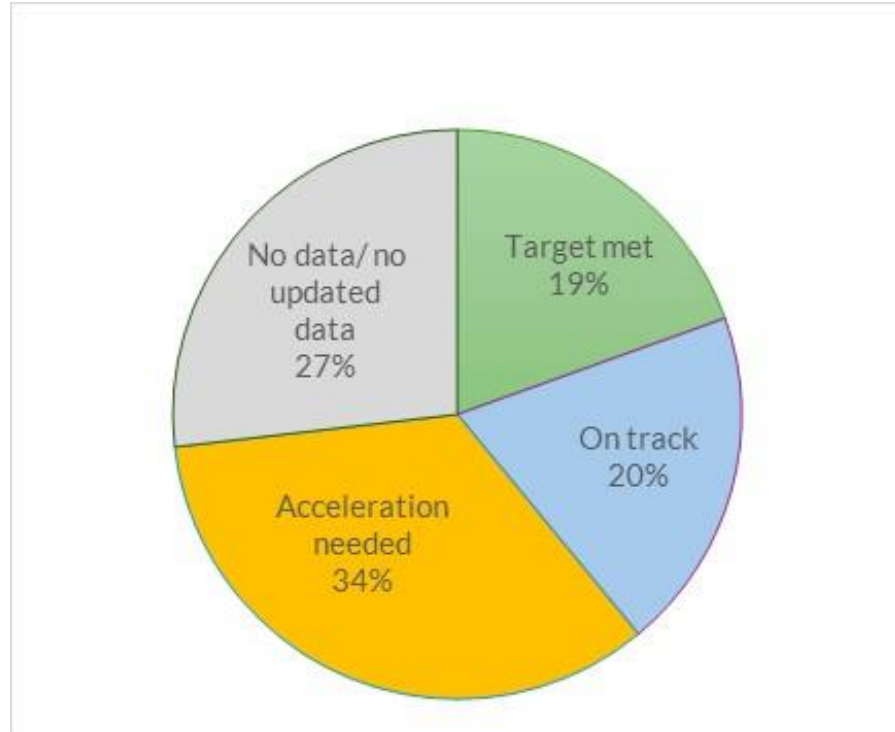
- Review progress,
- Identify policy gaps,
- Recommend next steps

The **2030 Agenda Declaration** emphasises who are **vulnerable must be empowered**. Those whose needs are reflected in the **Agenda include all children, youth, persons with disabilities, people living with HIV/AIDS, older persons, indigenous peoples, refugees and internally displaced persons and migrants (Para 23)**.

# 2. Progress Review

## Data for Child-focused SDGs

### Bangladesh's child-related SDG indicators



Source: Author's elaboration from UNICEF, 2023.



### Key issues

- limited and unequitable access to quality healthcare services;
- malnutrition;
- high adolescent birth rates;
- communicable diseases and NCDs;
- injuries and fatalities (traffic accident, suicide and drowning);
- MHPSS; and
- high out-of-pocket expenditures

**On track:** Stunting, skilled birth attendance, ODA to health research

**Off-track:** Wasting, maternal mortality, health worker density, health spending, UHC

**Reversed trends:** neo-natal mortality, U5 mortality, adolescent birth rate, breast feeding, minimum diet score, minimum meal frequency, suicide mortality

**Lack of updated data:** Anemia, mental health

**Lack of child data:** traffic injury death, suicide mortality

## 2. Progress Review



### **Gender parity – way to go**

- Gender Gap Index: 99<sup>th</sup> of 146
  - *Political empowerment: 7<sup>th</sup>*
  - *Economic participation: 146<sup>th</sup>*
  - *Education: 125<sup>th</sup>*
  - *Health: 129<sup>th</sup>*
- Underrepresented in STEM occupations, **online skills**, such as AI, big data, programming, and networks and cybersecurity

### **Slow decline in child marriage**

- 51.4% of girls get married before 18 (Target 10% by 2030)
- Rajshahi and Khulna – **hotspots!**
- **62.3%** early marriage at **informal settlements** (SCI, 2025)
- **Santal** communities – **almost every girl married before 18!**

### **Gender-based violence (GBV) on rise**

- 70% increase in VAWG following COVID-19 (BRAC, 2020)
  - Girls and women, experienced physical, mental, and emotional harassment at families, educational institutions, workplaces, society, and social media (PIB 2021)
- Children shared, they **feel safer at home and in schools** compared to before, situation **worsened on way to schools and community spaces**
- Rise of teen gangs – children used as drug careers
- Digital violence - vulnerable to cyber threats, harassment and exploitation
- VAWC affects **vulnerable children disproportionately** – those engaged in labour, domestic work, and street life
  - face deprivation, extreme poverty, malnutrition, disease, illiteracy and violence and highly exposed to trafficking, exploitation, and police harassment

*“My elder brother is a youth with disabilities, my mother always encourages me in my education. She continually inspiring me to continue my studies, as girls and boys have equal rights to grow. She believes I can achieve great things in future just like other boys”*

**Ratri, 15, Fulbaria, Jamalpur**

## 2. Progress Review

8 DECENT WORK AND  
ECONOMIC GROWTH



### *Children's economic engagement - a renewed concern*

- **8.9% children engaged** in economic work (3.54 million) – **4.5% rise**
- Children disproportionately represented in the **SSNP (7%)**
  - Programme for **street children** has **discontinued**
- Engaged in **unregulated works** like agriculture, domestic work, informal industries
  - Many **Santal** children, both girls and boys, used to **involve in agriculture at an early age of 7-8 years**
- Policy updates (ILO 138 (minimum age), hazardous work list, domestic work?)
- SDG target to **eliminate child labour by 2025** remains far off – no new child labour elimination policy/ strategy!

### *Biru's Story*

Biru (pseudonym), a 16-year-old from the Santal community, is engaged in economic activities while striving for education. He completed **fifth grade** at a flexible NGO school near his home while working.

However, he is **now unable to enrol in the mainstream sixth grade** due to national education policies that is not allowing admission to children over 13 years of age. With no other government provisions for working children at Natore and limited non-formal alternatives, hundreds face uncertain access to their future education.



## 2. Progress Review



*“We heard about the blue economy—it plays an important role in our national economy, we can get natural resources from sea, can get food and create more job opportunities. We also get some fish for our aquarium/museum to help other children learn about life under sea.”*

**Rinku, 16, Tanore, Rajshahi**



### ***Mandatory birth registration***

- Only **40% children** aged 0-5 years – 32.5% in urban areas
- **75% in informal settlements** are not registered (SCI, 2025)

### ***Key issues***

- Coastal regions children are particularly vulnerable
- Government declared 8.8% of Exclusive Economic Zone as Marine Protected Areas
  - Enforcement remains weak
- Children are **unfamiliar with Blue economy** concept
- Children’s engagement is low apart from coastal clean up programme

### ***Association and participation***

- No **institutional mechanism** in place for building children’s associations
- Limited space and opportunity for children’s participation – adverse affect for children facing discrimination and inequality
- Some children have avenues to express their needs, however, often go unheard

### ***Data and financing for children***

- **Inadequate child related data** for tracking progress
- Roughly 15% allocated in budget for children against a target to raise to 20% - **low direct investment**

# 3. Key Gaps and Challenges

## Policy gaps

Absence of [Rules of Children Act](#)  
Some plans/ policies requiring their [renewals](#)  
[Inadequate coverage](#) of existing laws, policies and programmes  
[Amendment](#) of critical legal provisions  
Passage of drafted laws and policies, and formulation of [new laws](#)

---

## Implementation gaps

[Weak enforcement](#) and governance  
[Low impact](#) in the absence of credible database, poor targeting and leakages  
[Bureaucratic inefficiencies](#) and absence of skilled personnel  
[Limited community engagement and participation](#)

---

## Monitoring and coordination gaps

Absence of [disaggregated child-specific data](#)  
Absence of [data collaboration](#), and [technology-driven progress tracking](#)  
Lack of [coordination](#) between ministries and with non-governmental stakeholders  
Absence of [community monitoring](#)

---

## Investment gaps

Absence of [costed-plan](#) for child-focused SDG implementation  
Lack of adequate [financial resources](#)  
Lack of [strategic allocation](#) of resources and leveraging [international development assistance](#)

---

## 4. Way Forward

*Strengthen the policy frameworks to tackle new challenges*

*Prioritise investments in children*

*Strengthen data system for evidence-based decision-making*

*Strengthen national oversight mechanisms*

*Promote behaviour change efforts for gender equality and child protection*

# Thank You



[www.bdplatform4sdgs.net](http://www.bdplatform4sdgs.net)



BDPlatform4SDGs



bdplatform4sdgs



[coordinator@bdplatform4sdgs.net](mailto:coordinator@bdplatform4sdgs.net)