

Gearing up to protect our children

The crucial role of upazila-level Child Welfare Boards in safeguarding and supporting children's rights in Bangladesh



Rabiul Alam

The Bangladesh Child Act 2013 stands as a testament to the nation's commitment to the well-being of its children. This landmark legislation reflects the country's dedication to upholding children's rights as enshrined in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child.

It acknowledges the necessity of establishing child welfare boards at various levels, including the upazila level, to effectively address and respond to the needs of children in local communities. These boards, as mandated by the act, aim to protect and promote the rights of children, especially those from underprivileged backgrounds.

The establishment of these boards a couple of years ago -- many years after the enactment of the Child Act 2013 -- stands as a significant milestone in safeguarding and promoting the rights of children throughout the country. It signifies a collaborative effort between the government, civil society organizations, and local communities to prioritize the well-being of children at the grassroots level.

With the national child welfare board leading the way, it is crucial to highlight the vital role that upazila-level child welfare boards play in furthering the mission of protecting vulnerable children, preventing child labour, and ensuring a holistic development.

The upazila-level Child Welfare Board has a mandated requirement to convene once every three months. Its duties include overseeing, coordinating, reviewing, and evaluating the activities carried out by the Certified Institutes within the respective upazila.

The board is responsible for determining appropriate alternative care methods for disadvantaged children and those in contact with the law, facilitating their placement in alternative care when applicable, and assessing the data and information pertaining to children under such care.

However, it is disheartening to note that many of these boards are currently inactive and fail to hold the three-monthly meeting stipulated in the act, let alone engage in other child-friendly activities. This unfortunate situation arises due to a lack of awareness among the board members regarding the operational areas and activities of the boards.

It is important to emphasize the significance of gearing up the activities of these boards and outline the reasons why they are essential in safeguarding

and promoting the rights of children in the country.

Protecting vulnerable children

Upazila-level child welfare boards hold immense potential in safeguarding vulnerable children from various forms of exploitation and discrimination. By addressing the specific needs of children from underprivileged backgrounds, these boards can design targeted interventions that provide them with the necessary support and opportunities for a brighter future. Ensuring access to education, healthcare, and other basic rights becomes a shared responsibility, promoting equal opportunities for all children.

Government bodies, civil society organizations, and local communities working together can create sustainable models of child protection, ensuring the well-being of children in every upazila

Preventing child labour

Child labour remains a significant concern in Bangladesh, denying children their right to education and subjecting them to hazardous conditions. Upazila-level child welfare boards can actively collaborate with government agencies, civil society organizations, and local communities to combat this issue. Through raising awareness, enforcing existing laws, and implementing programs that provide alternative options for children at risk, these boards can contribute to eradicating child labour and creating a safe environment for every child.

Holistic development of children

By prioritizing the well-being of children, upazila-level child welfare boards can foster their holistic development. Collaboration with relevant stakeholders can lead to the establishment of child-friendly schools, implementation of comprehensive health programs, and promotion of initiatives that address the

psychological, emotional, and social needs of children. By ensuring access to quality education, healthcare, and nutrition, these boards contribute to creating a nurturing environment that allows children to thrive.

Promoting child participation

The voice of every child should be heard and valued. Upazila-level child welfare boards can provide a platform for children to express their concerns, ideas, and aspirations. Actively involving children in decision-making processes empowers them to become active contributors to their own development. By encouraging child participation, these boards foster a sense of ownership and responsibility, nurturing future leaders who can advocate for their rights and contribute to their communities.

Collaboration for effective solutions

The formation of upazila-level child welfare boards promotes collaboration among various stakeholders. By pooling resources, expertise, and perspectives, these boards can develop more effective solutions to address the challenges faced by children. Government bodies, civil society organizations, and local communities working together can create sustainable models of child protection, ensuring the well-being of children in every upazila.

Setting a positive example

The establishment of child welfare boards at the upazila level sets a positive example for other regions, inspiring them to follow suit. Creating child-friendly upazilas demonstrates the tangible benefits of prioritizing child rights and well-being. This ripple effect can ignite a nationwide movement where every upazila becomes committed to providing a safe, nurturing, and inclusive environment for children.

The establishment of upazila-level child welfare boards marks a significant milestone in the protection and promotion of child rights in Bangladesh. Highlighting the works of these boards, emphasizes the importance of collaborative efforts in safeguarding vulnerable children, preventing child labour, and facilitating their holistic development.

Let us unite as stakeholders, ensuring that the urgent need to protect and promote the rights of children in every upazila of Bangladesh is met. Together, we can create a brighter future for our children. •

Rabiul Alam is an independent writer and a graduate of Asian College of Journalism, India.