

UNICEF to work with parliamentary caucus to protect child rights

United News of Bangladesh
 Dhaka

UNICEF on Tuesday formally joined forces with the parliamentary caucus on child rights to better protect and promote the rights of all Bangladesh children, especially the most vulnerable ones.

Children constitute 40 per cent of the country's population, but hardly have any say in articulating the laws that are supposed to protect and uphold their interest.

The parliamentary caucus on child rights, formed on October 13, 2014 is a non-partisan, cross-party, cross-ministerial grouping of current members of parliament who work to advocate for better implementation of constitutional and legislative protection for children.

The caucus believes that even though Bangladesh has strong policy and legislation to protect and promote children's rights, oversight and monitoring of services to children to help them realise those rights, particularly

in slum and remote areas, are still weak.

This is where the experience and expertise of UNICEF will come in handy and equity-based child rights can be ensured.

'Every country that has made the breakthrough to middle-income status has made significant investments in children,' said UNICEF Bangladesh representative Edouard Beigbeder.

The UNICEF representative also said the measure of a nation is often in how it defends and protects those who are most vulnerable. 'Investment in the most excluded and marginalised groups are also essential not only as a commitment to human rights for all, but also because it is often central to the development of any country.'

Seeking the help of the country's top lawmakers in galvanising the caucus, he reminded that parliamentarians play a pivotal role in developing legislation and policies, in allocating the budgets needed to make those laws and policies work, and in

monitoring implementation on behalf of the people they represent.

Beigbeder said these and other leaders are also highly influential at district, constituency and community level where they can inspire and mobilise resources and commitment that can save lives, improve nutrition, raise the quality of education and protect the most vulnerable children.

Bangladesh's performance in the global Human Development Index shows a 46 per cent improvement between 1990 and 2013, but even so, it remains near the bottom of the 'medium human development' category, said a UNICEF press release on Tuesday mentioning that there is still dire need for improvement in many areas.

UNICEF will provide the necessary support to build capacity of the members of the parliamentary caucus on child rights. This includes organising meetings/workshops, information and analysis of issues related to children and women.

At the first meeting, UNICEF will discuss the draft Education Act that has been in circulation since 2011. The organisation would like members of the parliamentary caucus on child rights to proactively seek the final draft of the Education Act to be discussed and placed in parliament in its next regular session with support from the speaker.

Programme sections of UNICEF will provide the necessary technical support, especially in the following issues: Child Budgeting - 'A Budget for Children' report followed by field level consultation with relevant MPs; Education Act; Bylaws of the Breastmilk Substitute Act; USI (Salt Law); Implementation of the Children Act 2013; Minimum Age of Criminal Responsibility; Online Safety for Children; and recommendations from the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

UNICEF may also hold exceptional meetings if there is an issue that needs to be urgently raised in parliament.