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## MEDIA RELEASE

# More than 10,000 Destitute Women Step Out of Extreme Poverty

**DHAKA** - 11,640 women of ultra poor female-headed households have successfully managed to step out of extreme poverty and are equipped to start up micro-enterprises through the support from the Rural Employment Opportunities for Public Assets (REOPA) project, one of the Government's social safety nets funded by the European Union.

These women were engaged in the maintenance and post-flood repairs of almost 12,000 km vital earthen roads since 15 February 2008. Out of the daily wage of BDT 100, BDT 30 was reserved for mandatory saving, serving as a buffer against future shocks. Over the past two years, each woman has earned BDT 48,430 paid in cash and has accumulated savings of BDT 20,560 - plus interest - deposited in a local savings bank account.

The savings that they can now withdraw will be invested in micro-enterprises and will provide a cushion to ensure basic needs security after they have benefited from REOPA. The women will continue to receive assistance from REOPA's partner NGOs on how to best invest their cumulative savings in micro-enterprises. To further secure these livelihood activities, linkages between the women beneficiaries and local service providers (such as between a cow owner and a local animal health worker) are being established.

"Today I would like to take the opportunity to congratulate 11,640 women who successfully completed two –years programme with REOPA and enter a new phase of life to graduate from poverty. Their hard work and commitment to overcome adversity have made it possible to earn capital, knowledge and skill to start micro-enterprises. The government of Bangladesh will stand beside them in their journey towards successful micro-entrepreneurship and self-reliance", said by Mr. Manzor Hossain, Secretary, Local Government Division, Ministry of LGRD&C.

Head of Delegation of European Union Dr. Stefan Frowein expressed: "I am happy to note that these women have already started income generating activities and have become self-reliant individuals capable of managing their families in a better way. It is indeed a great satisfaction for me to know that with funding by the European Union, a real change could be achieved as these women and their families will now live in much better conditions".

"Through their own resilience and sheer hard work these women have overcome tremendous adversity and lifted themselves – and those who depend on them – out of extreme poverty. It is a great pleasure for me to honour this achievement as well as note the great contribution that they have made to the lives of their communities across Bangladesh," UNDP Country Director Mr. Stefan Priesner said.



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The first batch of 11,640 women has been working as road maintenance crew groups in 388 Union Parishads throughout six districts, repairing almost 12,000 km of earthen roads. A second batch of 12,804 women joined in May 2009 and will continue working up to 30 April 2011. All women were selected following a rigorous selection process that involved community participation. The women that were selected were asset-less, and are either widowed, abandoned by their husbands, divorced or separated. They all represent female-headed households well below the poverty line.

The overall objective of REOPA is to contribute to the long-term sustainable socio-economic development of rural Bangladesh. As such REOPA will contribute to poverty alleviation in rural areas and mainstreaming women into development programmes, as indicated in the Government of Bangladesh's Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (PRSP) and Bangladesh commitment to the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs).

The programme's approach aims on the one hand to improve the financial conditions of REOPA's primary beneficiaries (destitute women) and casual labourers (poor women and men of landless households who depend on manual labour) through provision of regular incomes, and on the other hand seeks to strengthen beneficiaries' human capacities through training and life skill development.

REOPA is implemented by the Local Government Division, Ministry of Local Government, Rural Development and Cooperatives. The European Union is the principal donor, with a grant of 27.3 million Euros which is equivalent to 273 crore Taka. The Government of Bangladesh and UNDP have contributed respectively 0.5 million and 1 million Euros to REOPA. The REOPA Capacity Strengthening Component (REOPA-CSC) is a UNDP-executed intervention [under an Agreement between EU and UNDP](#) providing technical, financial and managerial support to the main REOPA project.

## ENDS

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