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ATTENTION: NEWS EDITOR

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Largest ever development project in the CHT approved

UNDP to fund 50 Million US Dollar for the next five years in CHT

Dhaka: Long-term steps towards mainstreaming development in the Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT) was set in motion when the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) signed its largest ever project with the Economic Relations Division (ERD) of the Ministry of Finance.

The Joint programme of the Government of Bangladesh and UNDP in cooperation with Donor Partners in Bangladesh entitled “*Promotion of Development and Confidence Building in the Chittagong Hill Tracts*” will invest 50 Million US Dollars (approximately Tk. 300 Crore) till 2009 for the resumption of a significant scale of international development assistance to the CHT and to build confidence among the people and institutions of the CHT to promote long-term peace. Funds for this purpose have been made available to UNDP primarily by the European Commission as well as by Australia, Japan, Norway and USAID.

“Through a partnership between the Government, NGOs and the donor community, UNDP will facilitate self-reliant approaches to development that the people and institutions of the CHT have defined for themselves,” UNDP Resident Representative, Jorgen Lissner, said.

The operational strategy of the project aims at reducing poverty, especially among the very poor and to consolidate harmony and stability by helping local institutions to function more effectively and spearhead economic progress.

“UNDP will strengthen the capacity of the people and institutions in CHT and the common goal of this project is to build confidence and to turn the peace initiatives into development realities that will reduce poverty and benefit the people,” Jørgen Lissner added.

In addition, 2,500 communities – some of which are located many days hike from urban areas in the deep jungle -- will be supported to undertake small-scale health, infrastructure, and employment projects that are conceived and managed locally.

“I strongly believe that the presence of UNDP in Chittagong Hill Tracts will bring in positive changes – like lots of employment opportunities will be created, which in turn will lead to overall



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development of this region,” Haradhan Chakma, a villager living in remote area of Rangamati said.

The recent programme follows the success of the UNDP-supported *Preparatory Assistance* project in the Chittagong Hill Tracts that was initiated in 2003. The project has made remarkable progress in the CHT during the last two years including creation by the participating villages of their own development bodies called “Para development Committee’s” and implementation of a small-grant scheme in nearly 1,000 villages through a ‘Quick Impact Fund’ from which local institutions and communities were able to access an average of tk. 400,000 each to finance their development initiatives.

“Communities know best about their problems, development needs and solutions, and once empowered in terms of organizational, technical and financial capabilities, they will provide the most effective means for realizing both peace-building and development opportunities.” said Michael Heyn, Chittagong Hill Tracts Development Facility Director.

UNDP has played a coordinating and facilitating role within the donor community and in interaction with the Government and CHT institutions, to promote development in the CHT and now it has taken up the daunting challenge of **BUILDING TRUST** – between the Government and the ex-combatants, between indigenous and settler communities, and even within a donor community traumatized by the kidnap-for-ransom incident four years ago.

Today, more than 40 percent of the population is unemployed, while only 30 percent live above the national poverty line, and 50 percent of children drop out of school sometime during their primary education. Infrastructure, such as roads and health facilities, has deteriorated almost beyond use, while other such facilities have already been abandoned.

“I know it from the core of my heart that the situation will not remain like this forever and in this regard UNDP is going to be one of a very valuable partner,” Chairman of the CHT Regional Council, Mr. Jyotindra Bodhipriya Larma said.

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