



NEWS Bulletin

Rural Employment Opportunities for Public Assets (REOPA)

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Tripartite Memorandum Signed for Repairing of 'Sidr' Affected Roads



Mr. Manoj Basnyat, Country Director, UNDP (left), Md. Shahidul Hassan, Chief Engineer, LGED (Centre) and Mr. Martin Bo Brander, Counsellor, Embassy of Denmark (right) are seen shaking hands after signing the MoU at LGED Bhaban on 25 March 2008.

This month marked a new development in the implementation of REOPA's activities. A tripartite Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) was signed between the Local Government Engineering Department (LGED), the Embassy of Denmark and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) on 25 March 2008 at LGED Headquarters for the improvement of the rural infrastructure in Barguna district which have been affected by the cyclone of November 2007.

The objective of this Agreement was to restore the livelihoods of the rural communities of the cyclone-affected areas in Barguna district which had been disrupted due to the widespread destruction of rural infrastructure, especially rural roads.

The MoU is an effort to restore the damaged roads that would enable the vulnerable poor communities resume their liveli-

hoods. This initiative would also enhance the capacity of Local Government (LGI) and their representatives to undertake interventions for promoting the infrastructure of their local areas.

The joint initiative of LGED, Embassy of Denmark and the UNDP, the first of its kind in Bangladesh is a unique effort to reconstruct and repair three vital roads in three Upazilas of Barguna district – Amtoli, Patharghata and Barguna Sadar. The impact of this effort would bring about a qualitative change in the lives of the cyclone-hit rural communities of Barguna district.

In this way this intervention would promote the objectives of the three partner organizations in improving the quality of life of more than 10 thousand people who are presently living under very difficult conditions. In addition, the stretch of road in Patharghata would provide a vital link for encouraging ecotourism that would have an instant spin-off in generating rural employment opportunities. Taking these factors into consideration, the initiative of the three parties is a valuable input in addressing poverty alleviation and empowering the local communities as well as

District Launching Workshops



The last District Launching Workshop of the REOPA Project was organized in Narsingdi District at Shilpo Kala Academy on 04 March 2008 in collaboration with the district administration. This workshop successfully rounded off the series of similar events which were held in the six participating districts of REOPA Project from February to March 2008. The workshop was presided over by Mr. Akmal Hussain, Project Director, REOPA and Mr. Md. Zillar Rahman, Deputy Commissioner, Narsingdi district was also presented as the Chief Guest. In addition, the workshop was very well attended by the Chairmen as well as women Union Parishad members of the district. The question and answer session after the presentation of the key speakers was indicative of the keen interest of the LGI representatives in the implementation of REOPA Project. As with the other Launching Workshops, this was also well covered by the local and national print and electronic media and provided an adequate platform for the dissemination of information relevant to REOPA Project. All the Launching Workshops at the district level created a unique opportunity for the participants to express their views and suggestions for improving the impact of the Project on the identified target groups. At the same time, it created a positive support for the officials of the local administration to ensure a successful implementation of the Project.

Inspection of Road Maintenance Component of REOPA Project by delegation of

A delegation comprising Mr. Manjurul Alam, Food Security Advisor, European Commission and Mr. Akmal Hussain, Project Director, REOPA Project visited in a number of Unions of Narsingdi and Feni districts from 18 to 20 March, 2008 for assessing the road works being undertaken as part of the Road Maintenance Component of the Project. The respective District Officers of REOPA-CST accompanied the team during their visit. The mission visited some selected schemes, reviewed Union's file management system being followed with respect to REOPA Project and also held discussions with Chairmen of the concerning Union Parishads and Women Crew Groups (WCG). The mission highlighted the need for introducing the Operational Manual of REOPA Project among the concerning stakeholders as well as having the presence of partner NGOs (PNGO) on the worksites at the earliest. This visit indicated the importance being attached to the successful implementation of this Component right from the very beginning of the Project.

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Upazila REOPA Committee Visited Road Maintenance Activities at Union

After the launching of the Road Maintenance Component of REOPA Project, the Upazila REOPA Committee lead by UNOs frequently visited the Unions where women crew members are working.



During the month of March, members of Upazila REOPA Committee of Sirajganj districts visited Gala, Sonatala, Kaijuri, Uallah para sadar, Jamtail, Raidoulapur, Chongacha, Damainagar, Bagutia, Khaskhlia, Tarash Sadar, Belkuchi Sadar, Sonamuhki and Takani Unions under Shahajadpur, Uallah para, Kamarkhand, Sirajganj Sadar, Rai-

ganj, Chowhali, Tarash, Belkuchi, Kazipur Upazilas respectively.

During these visits, the REOPA Committee members exchanged their views with Project Monitoring Committee (PMC) on the selection process and criteria of the roads, selection process of the crew members and quality of the works, documentation of the UP etc. They also inspected the work-sites of the above mentioned Unions with a view to evaluate the quality of the road works being implemented under REOPA Project.



Surprise Visit at Puthi Union Parishad in Narsingdi District for Assessing the Progress of RM Work

A surprise field-visit was undertaken by the staff members of REOPA-CST Project on 23 March 2008 to the Puthi Union Parishad under Shibpur



Upazila, Narsingdi District for assessing the status of activities related to the Road Maintenance component being undertaken by the recently recruited women crew members. During the field visit, discussions were held with the Union Parishad's Chairman on different aspects of the implementation process of the Road Maintenance component. While discussing the operational issues, the Chairman highlighted some of the practical difficulties which are being encountered such as absence of technical training for women crew members, non-distribution of a summarized version of the Operational Manual for following the procedures identified for an effective implementation of the specific activities, and other related issues. The Chairman drew the attention of the visiting REOPA-CST team to the difficulties that the PMC members are facing regarding the monitoring of the road maintenance activities at Union level due to the long distances involved between the different places where the implementation of the Road Maintenance activities are currently going on, especially in the absence of transportation facilities and financial support. At the same time he admitted the provision of financial support for inspection of project-related activities is rarely provided.

Working Group Meeting between BARD & REOPA-CST for Future Joint

A working group meeting between Bangladesh Academy for Rural Development's (BARD) faculty members and REOPA-CST members for collaboration in the three identified issues was held on 09 March 2008 at REOPA-CST Project Office. These included : i) the development of training modules and the organization of training programmes for enhancing the capacity of the officials of Local Government Institutions (LGI); ii) a pilot study on Local Level Poverty Monitoring System in Feni District; iii) introducing Eco-toilets and composting from solid waste management on a pilot-basis in Narsingdi district. The meeting was a positive step in the direction of the three joint ventures that would be supported by the rich knowledge and long experience of BARD and assist on deepening the impact of REOPA Project upon the identified beneficiaries. Following the individual group discussions of the three identified areas, Terms of References (TOR) were prepared and to start with, Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) for the training programme and introduction of ecological sanitation and solid waste management have been prepared for implementing these initiatives in the near future.



Project Coordination Meeting at District Level

Since REOPA Project's implementation has begun at the field level, it was decided to convene the monthly District Officer's co-ordination meeting in one of the participating district to enable the REOPA-CST Project staff have a first-hand information of the implementation of the different activities at the district level. The first of such meeting was held in Narsingdi and this included the visit to the road maintenance worksite at Puthi Union and a good discussion on the development of monitoring tools for collecting information on the different activities of the Project, as stated above. The meeting provided the visiting District Officers an opportunity to see the developments being undertaken at Narsingdi district and the challenges being faced by the District Office. At the end of the meeting, it was decided to organize the next monthly co-ordination meeting of District Officers in Barguna for which the dates would be finalized later.

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Who are the women working in road maintenance work of REOPA Project?

Prepared by Mayen Uddin Tazim, CS-Advisor

Ms. Abola Sankar, 40, is a widow who joined REOPA Project as a women

crew member in the Debpara Union of Nabigonj Upazila in Habi-



ganj district. Her husband who was a day laborer was landless and had died a few years ago. Ms. Abola has been struggling for survival with her four daughters and one son. Before joining as a crew member to work in REOPA Project she had worked in her neighbour's house as a maidservant and received small amounts in kind which were not enough to meet the basic needs of her family. She does not have any homestead of her own; she has to survive in her relative's land temporarily where she has a small shed.

Ms. Abola mentioned that she had joined the road maintenance work of REOPA Project 06 weeks ago (February 15, 2008) as a women crew member for a cycle of two years. She is aware that she would receive Tk. 70 as daily wage from which Tk. 20 has to be deposited as mandatory savings. She is happy for saving money though she does not know how to sur-

vive with this money after phasing out from this job. When asked what she would like to do with the saved money, she mentioned that she would use it for "Rearing Poultry". However, she does not have any practical knowledge about "Poultry Rearing."

When asked as to why she has joined REOPA, her instant response was for earning an income and getting social dignity.

The case of Ms. Abola underpinned the need for REOPA Project to create sustainable livelihoods mechanism to enable the beneficiaries to sustain their livelihoods in the long-term.

Ms. Payra Begum is also a widow working with the Crew Members Group (WCG) of REOPA Project in the Debpara Union of Nabigonj Upazila in Habi-ganj district. She has two daughters who are born blind because of nutritional deficiencies. Her husband was a small fish trader who has since died. The family had to sell their homestead lands for the treatment of her husband.

Since then Payra Begum has been living under difficult conditions. Before joining the road maintenance work of REOPA Project, she had worked in a neighbour's house as maidservant. In reply to the question as to why she has joined this Project, she told that she wants to survive along with her daughters and provide the basic necessities of life for her daughters. She is not sure whether her daughters would one day gain their sight.

Information Briefs prepared by REOPA-CST

For a wider circulation of relevant issues pertaining to rural employment and income-generation, a series of Information Briefs have been planned for preparation and circulation in Bengali among the stakeholders operating at the grass-roots level. In this connection, during March, an information brief on "Micro and Small Entrepreneurship Development for Rural Women and Youth" has been made in line with the Project's objectives. The emphasis of this Brief is on encouraging rural women and young people to develop their skills for self-employment and income-generation that would promote rural employment while at the same time this would facilitate the development of a mass of committed entrepreneurs who would be making a distinctive contribution to the rural economy. This would also be a key feature for ensuring the sustainability of the Project, particularly for the women beneficiaries who would have no difficulty in identifying a regular source of income after their stint with the road maintenance component is over and they have some savings of their own to invest.

Another information brief on "Gender Mainstreaming" has also been prepared for integrating gender concern among the different categories of the Project's beneficiaries. In particular, this Brief addresses the major constraints faced by the rural women of Bangladesh such as: lack of mobility, lack of access to and control over resources, etc. and formulates an Action Plan to overcome these obstacles by stakeholders at the different operational levels of the Project.

Discussion on Project Monitoring Tools and Strategy at District Coordination Meeting

The implementation of the Road Maintenance Component of REOPA Project began on 15 February 2008 in the Project's six participating districts. For ensuring the smooth flow of information pertaining to the different aspects of project implementation, a number of formats i.e. Selected Women List, Road List, Quarterly Road Work Plan, Road Work Register, Attendance Register for WCG and Monitoring Format for Project Activities were discussed with the District Officers as a means of collecting the relevant data. The meeting decided that as the NGOs who are supposed to monitor the project activity at grass-root level are yet to onboard, the district officers of REOPA-CST will conduct monitoring of the different project-related activities on a sample basis to ensure proper implementation of the Project. It was also decided in the meeting that monitoring formats should include indicators of other two components of the Project i.e. Block Grants for Casual Labor and Basic Service Delivery.