



# NEWS

# Bulletin

## Rural Employment Opportunities for Public Assets (REOPA)



February 2008

Volume 2, Issue 2

### Implementation of Road Maintenance Component Started

The implementation of the Road Maintenance Component of REOPA Project began on 15 February 2008 in the Project's six participating districts. Thirty disadvantaged women, ten from each greater ward are employed in each Union Parishad to maintain the important rural earthen roads.

Most of the disadvantaged employed women are those who are without any other support to sustain themselves (widows, abandoned women, etc) and are aged between 18 and 45 years. The Project Management Committee (PMC) of REOPA conducted the selection process. In total 11,640 women are employed in the 388 Unions located in Sirajganj, Habiganj, Feni, Satkhira, Barguna and Narsingdi.

Surprise visits were paid to the inspect the road maintenance work being undertaken by the Union Parishads by representatives of REOPA-PTF and REOPA-CST staff members during 27 and 29 February 2008. During the visit to Fulchari Union Parishad, the women's crew groups (WCG) found working on the site around 8:30 a.m. Although the WCG members had been given the necessary road maintenance equipment, they asked for more equipment – Dao (cutter), spades, etc. to do undertake more work. The crew members inquired about their weekly holiday and daily wage rate which were explained by the visiting staff representatives. The crew women expressed happiness for working in the road maintenance job as their previous jobs were for shorter duration and at a lower wage rate. However, the crew members requested for reconsideration of the daily wage rate based in view of the prevailing market price. It was also observed that the PMC's selection of the earthen roads was judicious - the important rural earthen roads which link village market, high school, post office etc have been selected after consulting concerning ward members.



The district teams of REOPA-CST in close collaboration with their respective district administration officials organized the launching workshops in the 5 of the 6 participating districts i.e. Feni, Sirajgonj, Habiganj, Barguna, and Satkhira during the month of February 2008. The purpose of

these workshops was to introduce the project to implementing stakeholders of the Project at the District, Upazila and Union levels as well as to the civil society organizations to solicit their support for the successful implementation of the Project.

The workshop was divided into two parts i.e. inaugural session and presentation of the Project Brief and other relevant technical details. During the latter session, the objectives, results, implementation process, roles and responsibilities of different stakeholder were presented. The project presentation was followed by an open discussion where the participants were given the opportunity to ask questions and sharing their views on the Project's activities.

The participants of the workshop comprised District level government officers, journalist, UNO, Upazila level government officers, Union Parishad Chairman, Female Members of Union Parishad, representatives of different development organization and NGOs working in the respective district. In total 630 participants participated in these workshops. Of the 630 participants there were 83 district level government officers, 25 UNO, 89 Upazila level government officers, 241 Union Parishad Chairmen, 28 female members of UP, 51 journalist, 113 representatives of development agencies and NGOs.



During the question and answer sessions, the inquiries were on the beneficiaries of the project, wage rate for road maintenance work, modality of block grants component's implementation, etc. The issue of wage rate for road maintenance was a common concern in all the workshops. Most of the participants expressed that the wage fixed for road maintenance work is lower than the market price. They suggested for increasing the wage rate for road maintenance work based on the present market price.

#### Concern of Female Women UP Member of Dhalua Union, Barguna

During the launching workshop of Barguna District on 26 February 2008 the following pertinent issues were raised by Mrs. Afraz Sultana Akhi, UP member:

- Additional responsibilities of female UP members (Three wards) are not commensurate with remuneration and treated like other male UP members who represent only one ward;
- Marginalization of female UP members from mainstream Union Parishad activities;
- Female UP members can only voice the concern against child marriage but can not file any case against this act as only the UP Chairman is eligible to do this.

Mrs. Akhi expressed that if the above issues are addressed through REOPA Project, then it will result in the real empowerment of female UP members in Bangladesh.

"This document has been produced with the financial assistance of European Union. The views expressed herein can in no way be taken to reflect the official opinion of the European Union"

## Interview with Crew Members

A group interview was done with the Road Maintenance Crew Members at the Surulia Union of Satkhira district when they were working at the site. Crew Members are Ms. Halima Begum, Ms. Sarasathi Dasi, Ms. Pachi Dasi, Ms. Anjumara, Ms. Sanda Rani, Ms. Anna Begum, Ms. Rashida and Ms. Omra Begum. The interview was conducted by Mayen Uddin Tazim, Advisor-



Capacity Strengthening.

What is your impression on the involvement in the Road Maintenance Program (RMP) from the point of view of your financial support and food security?

We are happy to be involved in the road maintenance work. We did not have any regular incomes to meet our food consumption as we are living in a distress situation. This is a good opportunity for us to get regular income through road maintenance work that can ensure the food security of our family. We hope that it will bring financial solvency of our family.

What is the impression of the other people of this community about the RMP activities? Are there any negative attitudes towards road maintenance activity being undertaken by women? Do you face any constraints in getting involved Road Maintenance work?

Attitude of the community is absolutely positive. We do not face any trouble in working at the site since socially it is accepted to get involved in these activities.

What is your opinion on the compulsory savings that would be deducted from your daily wages?

We are happy with the compulsory savings. This would be an asset to help us in maintaining family expenditure when we are jobless from the Road Maintenance Program.

Do you have any plan to use this savings money for any income generating activities or Livelihoods program?

We have roughly calculated that we will be able to saving about Tk. 12,000 in two years. We can only use this money for rearing cattle and chickens in which we have experienced.

Do you have any idea about any micro enterprise development program for your livelihoods other than cattle and chickens rearing?

We do not have any other alternatives except cattle and chickens rearing in this regard although we know that poultry has high risks at this moment. Nevertheless, we do not have any experience of starting micro enterprise by using our little amount of savings.

Do you have any opinions on the present road maintenance activities in the community perspective?

We have already started our activities. We think that community will be benefited through this continuous work since the roads will kept well-maintained.

Do you have anything to say about your own?

First of all, we want to get our wage regularly. Secondly, all of us know that the commodities are increasing daily we would like to appeal to the authorities concerned to increase our existing wage rate from Tk. 70 to 90 considering the market inflation, if it is possible.

## Establishment of Strategic Alliances with Development Partners

Chevron Corporation-Bangladesh, a large US based oil & gas Exploration Company, working in Nobigonj Upazila of the Habiganj district, REOPA Project area, has expressed a willingness to enter into a partnership with REOPA-CST in the implementation of sustainable livelihoods programme in this district. Particularly in setting up an irrigation project comprising 1500 acres which is adjacent to the River Khushiara where water is available throughout the year but the full agricultural potential of the area is not being utilized at present due to the lack of irrigation facilities. This scheme once implemented will also generate employment opportunities for the local communities. Necessary action to obtain a feasibility report is being taken to assess the viability of the project.

In continuation of the process for establishing strategic alliances with development partners, second round table discussion was held on 05 February 2008 between the officials of BARD and REOPA-CST on the scope of joint collaboration between the two organizations. After a long discussion three working groups were formed including BARD and REOPA-CST representatives for the three identified issues i.e. i) imparting training to LGIs Officials for enhancing the capacity of the Local Government Institution's (LGI's), ii) A pilot study on Local Level Poverty Monitoring System in Feni District, iii) Introducing Eco-toilets in participating districts of REOPA on pilot basis and introducing environmental technologies such as Rural Solid Waste Management, Community Composting etc.



It was decided at the meeting that, they will be further discussions between the two groups to develop the implementation strategy on the three topics.