



# NEWS

# Bulletin

## Rural Employment Opportunities for Public Assets (REOPA)

Bangladesh

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*Greetings for the New Year to readers from all the staff members of REOPA-CST*

### Approval of Annual Work Plan & Budget (AWP&B) 2008 of REOPA-CST

The beginning of the New Year was marked by the approval of the AWP&B by the Country Director, UNDP which places the project on a firm footing to proceed expeditiously with the implementation of the three major components: *road maintenance, block grants and basic services delivery.*

The AWP&B for 2008 has been prepared on the basis of the revised agreement signed between UNDP and the Delegation of European Commission to Bangladesh on 26<sup>th</sup> December 2007. According to the revised agreement, REOPA-CST of UNDP has been entrusted with additional responsibilities regarding the Project implementation in close collaboration with the Project Task Force (PTF) in the Local Government Division (LGD) of the Ministry of Local Government, Rural Development & Cooperatives (MLGRD&C). The activities selected in AWP & B 2008 of REOPA-CST are classified under three categories i.e. 1) Institutional Capacity Development of LGIs on Employment and Pro Poor Investment, 2) Rural Employment Generation through Pro-Poor Investments and 3) Provision of Technical Assistance and Support.

### NGOs Selection for facilitating the implementation of the 3 Project components

The Technical Evaluation Committee (TEC) constituted to screen the applications of the NGOs by the UNDP for facilitating the implementation of the three Project components, finalized the short-list of applicants and the process is nearing completion for the selected NGOs to commence their activities very shortly.

### Establishment of strategic alliances with development partners

Efforts to cement strategic alliances with other partner organizations engaged in similar activities geared towards rural development were continued during January 2008. Consultations were held with representatives of Chevron to identify possible scope of collaboration in their on-going project in Habiganj focusing on sustainable livelihoods of the rural communities with special emphasis on improving the irrigation facilities to improve food crop production for enhancing the food security of these target population. Further discussions have been planned to carry this proposal to a concrete implementation in the immediate future with the support of technical assistance from REOPA-CST in the preparation of a feasibility report on the project.

A meeting was also organized with the Director General (Current Charge) of Bangladesh Academy for Rural Development (BARD) a renowned institution for rural development which has been working over the last four decades in the field of rural development and training. The meeting focused on the key areas of technical collaboration between BARD and



REOPA-CST such as training of Local Government Institutions (LGIs) officials, local poverty data collection, eco-toilet and rural solid waste management. A follow-up meeting has been arranged to carry the discussions further towards institutionalizing this alliance.

Another meeting with the officials of HSBC Bank, Dhaka for seeking possible financial collaboration to support an income-generating proposal in Feni district was held and received a positive response. The proposal is being processed for presentation to the competent authorities for approval and the final result is awaited.

### CASE STUDY: Sufia Begum & Her Journey to Success Based on Self-help

*Case Study information collected and prepared by Mr. Mayen Uddin Tazim, CS-Adviser, REOPA-CST*

#### Introduction:

Ms. Sufia Begum, who lives in Chanishpur village of Narsingid Sadar, got married to Mr. Dulu Khan who was a day wage laborer. Her husband did not receive any agriculture land from his father, as his father was also landless. Dulu Khan's grandfather had some land but that was gradually sold off over the years to meet household consumption needs.

Sufia Begum was married off at the age of 13 and started living with her husband including father-in-law, mother-in-law, and sisters and brothers-in-law. Her husband was only the earning member as the elderly son of the family. But as a daily wage laborer he had no regular job and remained off work when considerable periods of having this resulted in considerable financial hardships for the family. Meanwhile, Sufia had become a mother of one daughter which incurred her financial burden.

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## **Involvement with NGO and started new avenue**

Fortunately, Sufia was motivated by a local NGO about 8 years ago to become a member of its Micro Credit Program and was trained on different social issues like health, education, family planning, sanitation, nutrition etc. She also received orientation on IGA like poultry and cow rearing and vegetables gardening etc.



To start with Sufia Begum had received Tk. 1000 from them (NGO) under their Micro Credit Program and started poultry rearing. She had to pay the loan in 52 installments (weekly) and simultaneously started saving in the Group Fund. As, she started earning from poultry rearing, she was able to payback the loan on time. With her satisfactory repayment record, the NGO provided her with Tk. 2000 against a mortgage 33 decimals of land for cultivating vegetables. She made a profit of Tk. 13000 from cultivating potato and vegetables in the same year.

Being encouraged by these profits, she received additional loans from the NGO for starting new enterprises. She took on mortgage 16 decimals of land and started cultivating banana on this land. She got a good harvest and made substantial profit from the cultivation of banana. Meanwhile, she established a tea-cum-grocery shop for her husband and engaged him in this instead of remaining a daily wageer.

As a result of these entrepreneurial initiatives, Sufia Begum is now a well established small scale entrepreneur owning a house, tube-well and sanitation facilities and has been able to educate her children properly. She has acquired a good bargaining capacity with her buyers and no one is able to cheat her as she has acquired considerable business and negotiating skills to establish herself as a good business woman.

## **Views of DC, Habiganj on REOPA Project**

*Interviewed by Mayen Uddin Tazim, CS Adviser, REOPA-CST*

During the interview with Mr. Ataur Rahman, Deputy Commissioner, Habiganj, on 30 December 2007, a number of key questions relating to operational issues of REOPA Project were discussed. Some of them are as follows:

*Do you think REOPA Project will contribute to poverty reduction and empower the rural women? If yes, how will do it?*

The REOPA Project should consider the two issues for increasing the sustainability of the programme such as crew members should be involved in the alternative income generating activities using their savings money immediately after phasing out from the REOPA Project in which they could not return back to the previous distress situations: and the women should get

training on different income generating programs from reputed organizations like Youth Department and get contributory financial support in connection with their savings money. PNGOs could be linked with them in this connection. He also mentioned that women will be empowered if they can build their capacity in terms of skills and knowledge and promote them economically.

*How can the capacity of the LGIs (UP & UZ) be strengthened through REOPA Project so that they can be able to implement such projects independently in the future?*

UP members including Chairmen do not have skills in project planning, implementation and monitoring at present. They should receive proper training on the above areas. Apart from UP, other officials of LGIs at district and Upazila level should get training and orientation and exposure visits to other countries for sharing their knowledge and skills on the planning and monitoring of the rural development programs as well as other human development programmes.

*What should be the main role of partner NGOs in implementing the REOPA?*

PNGOs should be involved in the monitoring process along with the Upazila Monitoring Committee. PNGOs and Project Monitoring Committee should work collectively with a view to obtaining the same direction and feedback. PNGOs can take an active role in providing support to the Project's beneficiaries especially the women crew members for creating different income-generating activities after phasing out from the Project.

*What are the main challenges of REOPA Project? How it can be overcome?*

Monitoring is the main challenge of REOPA Project during its implementation stage. Upazila Monitoring Committee should be very active and efficient. Members of the project monitoring committee at Upazila level should get logistic support to monitor the REOPA Project's activities. Additional incentives for visiting the sites will encourage them to expedite the program that can be initiated for the Project authorities.

At the end, the Deputy Commissioner, Habiganj thanked the REOPA-CST officials for sharing his views on the REOPA Project.

