



NEWS Bulletin

Rural Employment Opportunities for Public Assets (REOPA)

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UP-to-date Profile of Crew Women of REOPA

The REOPA Crew Women were recruited in December 2007 and they started road maintenance work on 15 February 2007. The detailed information of crew women has been collected centrally. REOPA sought to serve the most distressed rural women who are the bread earners of the family and do not have any working husband. The records of Women Crew Groups (WCGs) show more than 90% women as abandoned, widowed, divorced or separated. About 8% of the crew women have husbands who cannot work.

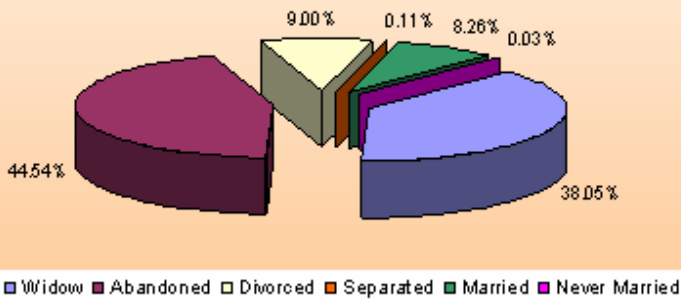
most of the women with elderly husbands came from the Hindu community where poor young girls are often married with aged husbands to reduce the burden of dowry of their parents. An equal number of disabled husbands with physical handicap was also observed.

In Feni, the highest number of disabled husbands, 109 (35.9%), were found suffering from chronic diseases like heart problem, asthma, arthritis etc. The remaining disabled husbands of Feni are mentally handicapped or blind.

Many of the poor and vulnerable women in Feni married migrated labour from other districts and they were left abandoned with children when their husbands returned to their home districts. As a result the number of abandoned women was found high in Feni.

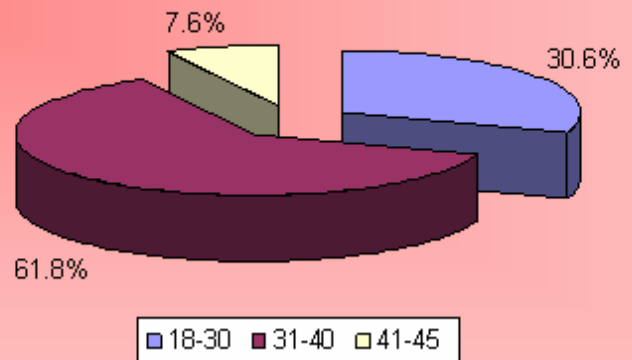
In Sirajganj, there were 262 married women with disabled husband. Of them 107 (40.84%) husbands are disabled due to old age.

Marital Status of Crew Women



A sizable number of married women with disabled husband has been reported in Feni, Narsingdi and Sirajgonj district, the percentage of married women in these districts being 304 (23.57%), 322 (15.33%) and 262 (10.65%) respectively.

Age Groups of Crew Women



A detailed fact-finding follow-up investigation to unearth reasons behind high occurrence of married women with disabled husband was conducted in above mentioned three districts where numbers of married women with disabled husband were comparatively high. It was found during fact-finding in Feni and Sirajganj that by and large one-third of the WCG members' husbands are disabled due to over-age.

The age of the recruited women is ranged between 18 years and 45 years, which fully complies with the rules of REOPA. Out of the 11,640 crew women more than 90% women are aged between 18 and 40 years. About 7.6% crew women are more than 40 years old.

In Feni, where the highest frequency of married women with disabled husbands - 304 (23.57 %) - was observed, 79 (26%) husbands were disabled due to old age and

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Direct Beneficiary of REOPA

Shireen is forty years old and has been a widow for eighteen years. Her husband passed away when Shireen's two daughters were very young and she was forced to raise them as a single parent from that time onwards. Shireen relocated to her father's home in Akduaria Union of Narsingdi district, where the young family was provided with a small space in which to live.



To make ends meet Shireen worked as a house servant in various homes; this work provided the meager salary of just Tk.150 to Tk.200 per month; in addition Shireen was also provided with a meal and 1kg of rice each working day. In these circumstances it was difficult for Shireen to feed her family properly; saving money was out of the question.

Shireen explains that when the day came to find out if she had been selected as a Women Crew Group member as part of the REOPA Project she was very nervous. This nervousness and fear of not being selected quickly turned into happiness when her name appeared in the random selection process. Since that time Shireen has been able to save Tk.3840 through the compulsory savings program (Tk.20 per working day

goes directly to a savings account) and she has plans for the future which include the purchase of a cow which she will rear, utilizing the milk to help feed herself.

Shireen feels fortunate to be a Women Crew Group member and believes the work is a good opportunity for her. Unfortunately she has encountered some negative feedback from members of her community concerning her work; some people are jealous while others think the work is inappropriate for a woman.

Shireen believes strongly in her work and explains that without it she simply could not survive. Nonetheless, with food prices continuing to increase Shireen is finding it difficult to live on Tk.50 per day; she has reduced the amount of rice she purchases to ensure she can also afford some vegetables, fish and other basic items.

(Both these case stories contributed by Jeremy Andrews, UNDP-Bangladesh)

PERCEPTION OF LOCAL COMMUNITY ABOUT REOPA



Mr. Bulbul is a member of the community surrounding the Nawardiya Road in Akduaria Union. When asked for his thoughts on the work of the Women Crew Group he described it as a "good project" and emphasized the importance of this road for the local community. The road is of importance to the local community because it acts as a connection between two roads of local importance; the local Grameen Bank and school are also located alongside the road.

Mr. Md. Kamal, who owns a property beside the road, agreed with Mr. Bulbul's sentiments and confirmed that he had no issues with the women utilizing soil from his land as part of their work. Mr. Md. Kamal added that the community sometimes provides constructive feedback to the women regarding the road and that the Women Crew Group members are always responsive to this. In addition, Mr. Md. Kamal mentioned that he allows the women to utilize the toilet facilities and drinking water in his home.

As a suggestion, Mr. Md. Kamal explained that trees should be planted alongside the road as a way of limiting the amount of soil runoff that occurs during the monsoon season.