



CD Launches the REOPA-CST Project Office Operation at Gulshan

On a clear Wednesday morning, 22 August 2007, Mr. Manoj Basnyat, Country Director made a crisp, forceful and objective-driven address to the entire staff members of REOPA-CST. He officially declared open the CST project's office operation at Gulshan and urged the team to proceed swiftly and efficiently towards the Projects identified goals. He also reminded the team members about the significance of the REOPA-Project for the national economic development of Bangladesh and wished them their luck to achieve the highest standard in making the Project a large success.

REOPA Events Coverage in National and Local News Paper

The news of REOPA is well covered by local and national dailies. The Daily Star published a report on 'New Scheme for employment of destitute women' on 20 May 2007. The most popular national daily the Prothom Alo also published news on REOPA under the title of 'UNDP Project for Poverty Alleviation in Six District' on 09 September 2007.

The REOPA-CST launching events at district levels were covered by local and national news papers in Barguna, Sirajgonj and Hobigonj district. In Sirajgonj district the news published in 'the Weekly Plabon' on 20 August 2007. In Barguna District it was covered by 'The Daily Saikat Sangbad', 'The Daily Sesh Katha' and 'The Dially Dipanchal' on 03 September 2007. A national daily 'the Daily Jai Jai Din' also published the news on 03 September 2007. The news of commencement of UNDP's REOPA-CST Project was published in 'The Daily Khowai', 'The Dially Habiganj Express', 'The Daily Ajker Habigonj' and 'The Daily Probhakar' on 13 September 2007 in Habigonj.

REOPA Kick-Off Meetings at District Level

The REOPA-CST Project launched its first district level intervention with round of introductory meetings with the Deputy Commissioners to brief them about the goal and objectives of the Project. The other objectives of the meetings were introducing the members of REOPA-CST team to the local administrative officials to solicit their support for smooth implementation of REOPA Project, discussing about the forthcoming organization of the Project's launching workshops which will be done at the district level and explore the opportunities of rural employment creation and understand socio-economic condition of the district. Six meetings were held from 13 August through 10 September 2007 in six REOPA Districts i.e. Feni, Sirajgonj, Barguna, Satkhira, Narsingdi and Hobigonj.

In Sirajgonj and Feni District meetings Ms. Majeda Haq, Programme Officer, UNDP, Ms. Sharmistha Das Barwa, Team Leader, Rural Employment Opportunity for Public Assets-Capacity Strengthening Team (REOPA-CST) and respective District Officers, REOPA-CST discussed at length with the respective Deputy Commissioners about the goal, objectives and expected outcomes of the REOPA project and in particular, the role of REOPA-CST.



Consultation Meeting with Local NGOs Representatives

The nature of participation at the inception workshop was especially underpinned during these discussions as it was felt that appropriate representation of the grassroots level institutions including the Local Government Institutions (LGI) are vital for the Project's success and the Project's effective implementation from a long-term perspective. A rapid assessment on the Flood Situation was also conducted during the Sirajgonj district visit and based on the assessment a short proposal was prepared on 'Creating Short Term New Employment Opportunity for Crisis Situations in flood and *Monga* prone areas. Similar discussions were also held during the visit in Barguna, Satkhira, Narsingdi and Hobigonj districts. During these visits consultation meeting were also held with different local NGOs representatives and other grass root level local organizations engaged in rural development. In these meetings a number of pertinent and district-specific issues which provided the REOPA-CST officials with a clear perception about the situation on ground. In Narsingdi district two Union Parishads i.e. Narsingdi Sadar and Amirgonj were also visited.

During this visit some interesting information came to be known on the functioning of the UPs. In particular, the presentation of an '*open budget*' by the Chairman of Amirgonj which is an exclusively self-driven initiative was observed. This is a unique phenomenon that proves that transparency, accountability and efficiency can be achieved at the grassroots level through the initiative of the REOPA Project.

During these discussion meetings, the REOPA-CST Official also exchanged views on the issues of employment opportunities for the rural poor especially rural women. The UNDP and REOPA-CST representatives enquired about the different employment opportunities which are available and enquired after the different potential small-scale and micro enterprises which could be promoted based on local resources to address the basic demands of the rural poor communities. In Satkhira district there are potential employment generation opportunities lies in Kaora Plantation and Processing, Honey Processing and Marketing, and Orchid Culture engaging the poor people. In Barguna District there are also employment generation opportunities through 'Pro-poor/Eco Tourism', especially along the coastal places of scenic beauty.

PD-REOPA and EC Delegation Visit to REOPA-CST Project Office



A surprise but very welcome visit was paid to the Project Office on 27 August 2007 by two important key players of the REOPA Project – Project Director, Mr. Akmal Hussain and Mr. Manjurul Alam, Food Security Advisor, Delegation of the European Commission to Bangladesh who has been handling the

REOPA Project since its inception, last year. Mr. Hussain assured the Project Task Force (PTF) and the REOPA-CST would work in close collaboration as “one family” to make it a success and ensured all support from the Government especially at the district, Upazila and Union Parishad levels for all the different activities of the Project. Mr. Alam indicated and this was reiterated by Mr. Hussain that there may be a change in the mode of implementation of the Project. In the new scenario, UNDP will be assigned additional financial as well as technical responsibilities for implementing the Project but overall the Project’s primary goals, components and outcomes would continue to be the same. The two visiting officials thanked the CST members for their commitment to the Project and wished them a successful future with the Project’s implementation.

REOPA-CST Staff Participated in ‘Community Empowerment Training’



The three Advisors and six District Officers of REOPA-CST participated in ‘Community Empowerment Training’ held on 16 through 19 August 2007 at Rangamati CHTDF Office. Mr. Jaysingh Sah, International Project Manager of UNDP Ukraine facilitated the training. He shared his experience of Municipal Governance and Sustainable Development Programme with the participants of training. Seniors staff members of CHTDF have also participated in the training. As the participants of the training came from different projects and background; sharing of their experience in community mobilization and empowerment contributed to enrich the knowledge of training participants. The main focus of the training was on the community empowerment process which included social mobilization and organizational development. The facilitator of the training shared his practical experience of different parts of the world with the participants in this regard. The training discussed the intricacies of employment generation, youth participation, holistic programme approach, participation and empowerment of women, the issue of sustainability and about the prospect of micro insurance in rural areas.

Current Development Policy Issues

Expand safety net to help ultra poor cross poverty line- Experts tell int'l workshop

Noted economists and development experts at an international workshop on 11 September 2007 suggested the need for expansion of social safety-net programmes and creation of short-term employment opportunities to help ultra-poor people cross poverty line. They also expressed concern over the second round of flooding in various parts of the country, saying that it might have adverse impacts on the food production and therefore both the Government and the donors should come up with more food assistance followed by cash incentives and employment opportunities for the affected population.

The workshop on 'Dynamics of Food and Cash Transfers: Policy Discussion on the Results of Food and Cash Efficacy Study' was organized by Economic Relations Division (ERD) and World Food Programme (WFP) in cooperation with UK's Department for International Development (DFID) at a city hotel.

The workshop was attended by Prof. Wahiduddin Mahmood, WFP Representative Douglas Broderick, DFID Extreme Poverty Coordinator Penny Davies, Dr. Hossain Zillur Rahman, Planning Division Secretary Jafar Ahmed Chowdhury and WFP Senior Adviser Usha Mishra Joshi.

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