

## 10<sup>th</sup> RDRS Partners' Consultation held

The 10<sup>th</sup> RDRS Partners' Consultation was held on 21-22 November, 2006. The meeting discussed the progress of RDRS' development programme and other important issues including funding and finance. The consultation was attended by 10 representatives of donor/partner agencies, four members from RDRS Trustee Board, three advisors, and senior RDRS staff.



At the opening session of the consultation, Dr Hossain Zillur Rahman, an external resource person, made a presentation on development issues and the current situation of Bangladesh. After that RDRS presented its programme development report followed by questions and answers. On the second day, RDRS strategic advisor Dr aldo Benini presented the salient features of RDRS Federations (apex organisation of groups of the poor) while Deepak Tamang, an independent consultant, presented the major findings of the evaluation

of the EU-funded Federation Capacity Building Project. The presentations were followed by questions and answers. A Core Group of Donor/partners was formed to provide strategic dissection to RDRS in-between consultations. Church of Sweden agreed to coordinate the first meeting of the Core Groups in Sweden sometime in March/April 2007. The date for the 11<sup>th</sup> RDRS Partners' Consultation was fixed for 12-13 October 2008.

## European Micro-Finance Award 2006 for RDRS



RDRS was the runner-up at the recent European Micro-Finance Award 2006 held at Luxembourg. A Moroccan micro-credit organisation came first.

A total of 46 programmes from all around the world participated in this award ceremony organised by the European Micro-Finance Platform. Finance Director Tapan Kumar Karmakar accepted this prestigious award on behalf of RDRS.

## RDRS wins City Group Small Entrepreneurs Award

RDRS won the micro entrepreneurs award from the US-based City Group in September 2006. The award was presented at an official ceremony held in Dhaka.

Over 565 micro entrepreneurs and micro-credit organisations applied for awards in five categories of micro-credit programme. After primary selection, the advisory committee nominated five awardees, one from each category. RDRS was awarded for the Best Programme for the Ultra Poor.

With assistance of the Palli Karma Sahayak Foundation (PKSF), RDRS began its micro-finance programme for the ultra poor in the country's northwest region. So far under this programme 26,930 members have received loans and repayment rate has been 98 percent.

The award winners in the other five categories were Zahida Begum, best woman micro entrepreneur; Zakir Hossain, best micro-entrepreneur; ESDO, best micro-credit organisation; and Nilofar Yasmin, most creative initiative.



Each winner received a Certificate and a sum of USD 4000. PKSF provided the award money for the best programme for the ultra poor, while City Group Foundation provided the prize money for the other four categories.

Former Education Minister Dr. Osman faruque gave away the awards while former advisor to the caretaker government Rokia A Rahman, Dr. Wahiduddin Mahmud, representative of the international private sector Stacy Mores, Resident Representative of the City Group Mamun Rashid, and cricketer Habibul Bashar Sumon were present on the occasion.

## RDRS Women's Convention 2006

The day-long RDRS Women's Convention 2006 was held on 23 December 2006 at Shireen Park in Rangpur. About 600 women including staff and programme participants of RDRS from 57 upazilas of eleven districts of its work area joined the convention. Starting at 9:50 in the morning. The convention was presided over by RDRS Community Health Director Dr. Salima Rahman while the Chief Guest was Prof. Fatema Lutfunnahar of Government Begum Rokeya College. Among the invited guests were social worker and women's leader Fazilatunnessa Bulu and educationist Rizia Kuddus. RDRS Directors also attended the Convention.



RDRS Women's Rights Coordinator Manjusree Saha highlighted the RDRS programme for women's development,

including its gender policy. The women staff gave their suggestions concerning the advocacy policy. Bangladesh's prevailing laws in respect of women were also discussed. Senior women staff spoke at length about their varied experiences. The convention also discussed RDRS plans for networking with other GOs and NGOs dealing with women's development.

From 11:30 in the morning, three seminars began in three rooms of Shireen Park Community Centre. The topics of the seminars were HIV/AIDS and Gender; Uniform Family Code; and Laws for women's position and rights in the Bangladesh society.



*The following decisions and recommendations were made at the convention:*

- ? One must enhance one's efficiency and qualifications in one's field of work;
- ? One must be conscious of one's responsibilities and strive to implement these;
- ? One must be aware of one's rights and endeavour to uphold these;
- ? One must have control over the resources one has duly earned;
- ? One must shun any form of oppression of women and children and prevent others from such activities.



*What is to be done for the organisation and the community*

- ? One must actively apply the gender policy at a personal level and at one's workplace;
- ? One must be aware of HIV/AIDS and help in raising public awareness in this regard;
- ? One must help in raising awareness
- ? about women's constitutional rights and the prevailing laws;

### *Topics of advocacy in the organisation's field of women's development*

- ? Providing assistance in raising awareness of women's and children's rights and application of the prevailing laws;
- ? Creating public awareness regarding rights of the indigenous people;
- ? Providing help in ensuring fair wages for women, particular indigenous women;
- ? Mobilising public opinion in favour women's direct participation in politics;
- ? Mobilising public opinion regarding a uniform family code;
- ? Creating public opinion in enforcing laws to provide punishment for physical and mental abuse of women at a family level;
- ? Ensuring quality education;
- ? Activating rural tribunals;
- ? Improving reproductive health facilities for women;
- ? Accelerating programmes to prevent trafficking of women and children;
- ? Increasing men's participation in gender and development activities;
- ? Increasing awareness about HIV/AIDS and gender issues.

### *Recommendations for the organisation to increase the efficiency of its women staff*

- ? Training in English language and other technical skills;
- ? Increasing opportunities to visit similar development organisations;
- ? In consideration of the overall security of the women workers, giving them work in their own respective districts;
- ? Having libraries in all offices;
- ? Increasing satisfactory/safe residence for women at the branch offices and various upazila offices;
- ? Increasing importance of men alongside women in gender development;
- ? Increasing facilities for technical training of group members;
- ? Holding such women's conventions on a regular basis

## **Training on Gender awareness and reproductive health**

Training on gender awareness and reproductive health was held on 29–31 October 2006 at the Kurigram Training Centre. A total of 23 young boys and girls attended the programme.

At the outset the aims and objectives of the training were discussed. The topics of discussion included:

- ? What is gender and sex?
- ? The difference between gender and sex and the present position;
- ? Reproductive health, factors of reproductive health, AIDS, etc;



At the end of the training, prizes were awarded to the meritorious ones. Finally, guidelines were drawn up for future work plans, training and follow-up programmes for the participants.

## Chakma Raja Debashish Roy meets indigenous people of the north

A day-long seminar was organised on the occasion of the August 9 International Indigenous People's Day. The topic of the seminar was the 'Respect, Rights and Human Rights of the Indigenous People'. The seminar was held on August 7 at the

- ? Looking into the present circumstances of the indigenous people;
- ? Determining guidelines for the indigenous leaders and people regarding their present condition;



- ? Drawing up a common demand for the indigenous people of the northwest region.

Dinajpur-based Santal Education Centre. It was attended by 60 indigenous people's leaders from 13 upazilas of Dinajpur district who strive to uphold the rights of the indigenous people despite all odds.

Though the August 9 International Indigenous People's Day is observed every year, many still do not have a clear understanding of its significance. This seminar was basically to raise awareness among these indigenous leaders concerning the day so that they, in turn, could imbibe the spirit of the day among the common indigenous people of their respective areas.

### *Aims of the seminar:*

- ? Introducing the International Indigenous People's Day among the rural indigenous people and discussing its significance;

At the end of the day-long seminar, Chakma Raja Debashish Rai exchanged greetings with the people and discussed various issues with the indigenous leaders. He said that the indigenous people of the hills and the plains would have to unite in their struggle for their rights. He said all indigenous people were equally neglected. He said, "We have to highlight our rights at home at abroad, particularly in the United Nations. I have the opportunity to speak at various UN forums and I shall definitely bring up the issue of all of Bangladesh's indigenous people." The Chaka Raja's attendance of the seminar was unscheduled. He had actually come to visit the indigenous people of Dinajpur who had been affected by the coal mining there.

The seminar was organised by the member and partner organisations of network of the development of indigenous people in the north -- Coordination of NGOs for Adivasis (CNA). These organisations included RDRS Bangladesh, Gram Bikash Kendra, Caritas, BNELC-DF, Sustain, SNMB and GKP.

## Training on prevention of women and child trafficking and human rights

A two-day training programme on prevention of women and child trafficking and human rights was held on 28-29 October 2006 at the Thanahat Federation Centre of Chilmari upazila. A total of 25 leaders of Ramna, Thanahat and Raniganj unions took part in this training organised by the Women's Rights Unit.



The topics of discussion included women's trafficking, who are victims of trafficking, where are they trafficked, the reasons of trafficking and laws, human rights and fundamental rights related to trafficking.

The trainees were given an idea about women's oppression (rate, sexual harassment and acid throwing). At the end of the training, the trainees decided that they would share their acquired knowledge with their own groups and federations.

## Certificates for the 7<sup>th</sup> batch of the Development Basic Training Course

The 7<sup>th</sup> batch of Rural Development Basic Training Course organised by RDRS Bangladesh to ensure women's participation in development, completed training in July last year. Certificates were distributed among the graduates of the course at a cultural function organised on August 6, 2006. Director (Social Empowerment) Imrul Kayes Muniruzzaman and Director (Livelihood) Dr. Samsuzzaman were present at the programme which took place at the RDRS Begum Rokeya auditorium. RDRS cultural workers performed the traditional Bengali *jatra* on the occasion. The graduate women of the course



pledged to use the knowledge they had earned through the training for the overall development of the country.

## Prevention of acid violence

The Acid Survivors Foundation from 1999 has been bearing expenses for treatment of acid victims as well as arranging their rehabilitation and legal assistance. They are also carrying out various awareness programmes to prevent acid violence.

It is not possible to eradicate the menace of acid violence without concerted efforts. RDRS Bangladesh has taken initiative to work jointly with the Acid Survivors Foundation to create public awareness against acid violence, to ensure legal assistance for the acid victims as well as their social rehabilitation.

## World AIDS Day observed

The Nilphamari Civil Surgeon's office and RDRS jointly observed World AIDS Day on December 1, 2006, committing to prevent AIDS with the rest of the world. A colourful



rally and discussion meeting was organised on the occasion.

At the beginning of the day, a rally was taken out with banners and placards bearing AIDS-related slogans. The rally was headed by Civil Surgeon Dr. Md. Abdur Rahim. Many government and non-government officers and employees joined the rally. At the end of the rally, a discussion meeting was held at the RDRS office. Liaqat Ali Khan, Coordinator (Social Empowerment), RDRS Bangladesh, was Chief Guest at the meeting.

## Rural Women's Day observed

Rural Women's Day was observed on October 15 2006 in various areas of RDRS including the Char Development Project (CDP) areas of Jhumkar Char, Ashatmir Char and Rajibpur upazila.

Men and women from the union level to the upazila level gathered together to observe the day. There were rallies, discussion meetings and various programmes where the topic of discussions featured "Recognition of the role of women in food production and other multiple tasks".



## RDRS distributes warm clothes

This winter RDRS distributed 11,800 pieces of warm clothes among the poor cold-afflicted people of the north. A total of 980 *kathas* (quilts) and 409 pieces of warm clothes were distributed among the people of Panchagarh, Thakurgaon, Dinajpur, Nilphamari, Rangpur, Lalmonirhat, Kurigram Gaibandha and Jamalpur.

Also, 28 bales (1,120 pieces) of *kathas* were handed over to the Deputy Commissioners (head of district administration) of Panchagarh, Thakurgaon, Dinajpur, Nilphamari, Rangpur, Lalmonirhat and Kurigram districts for distribution.



## Programme for *monga* victims

RDRS has recently taken up a programme to tackle the *monga* (lean period food crisis) which afflicts the northern region of the country during the Bengali months of Ashwin and Kartik. RDRS has taken up this programme under overall management of the Social Development Foundation (SDF) and Palli Karma Sahayak Foundation (PKSF) with financial assistance of the World Bank.

A total of 36,000 needy persons of 18 villages of Jatrapur union of the sadar upazila in Kurigram district have been brought under this programme. The local upazila administration and union parishad chairman held in identifying these people as *monga* victims.

Under this programme, the selected members are being provided with training in various income generating skills. At the end of the training, PKSF provides them each with a maximum loan of 4000 taka. A total of 111 educated unemployed youth were given 10 days training in various skills and then provided with loans of 4000 taka each.

Other than that, 393 old persons, persons unable to work, mentally handicapped persons, five-month pregnant women and mothers with four-month-old infants were each given 600 taka for four months. Where there is lack of employment in the *monga*-afflicted areas, 60 taka daily wages are provided for digging and work on repairing roads, schools, colleges, mosques and madrassas.

The project to address the *monga* continues from October 2006 till February 2007. If it proves a success, RDRS plans to expand the programme to all upazilas of Greater Rangpur and Dinajpur in the future.

### Obituary



We are sad to announce that our former colleague Hemoja Chakravorty, Director (Social Development, Advocacy and Training) breathed his last at 8:30 pm on 9 January 2007 at a clinic in Dhaka. He was 63.

Hemoja Chakravorty joined RDRS Health Project in 1977. He later became a Trainer of the Community Motivation Programme and then served as Director of Social Development, Advocacy and Training till 2000.

We pray to the Almighty for the salvation of the departed soul. We offer our condolences to his bereaved family and pray that the Almighty give them the strength to bear this great loss.