Project: Women’s Empowerment through Employment and Health in Bangladesh (WEEH)

Donors: United States Department of Labor

Project Description:
Bangladesh has 123.1 million people (2001) and a per capita GDP US$ 361 (2004) (Source: Statistical Pocketbook of Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics 2002 published in April 2004). Poverty is widespread, with an estimated 50 per cent of the population living below the poverty line (Source: World Bank). Being the disadvantaged section of the society, the burden of poverty falls disproportionately on women and female-headed households are the worst off. In the face of prevailing poverty, opportunities for decent employment are limited for both women and men, but the situation of women is aggravated by direct and indirect discrimination.

Since 2001, the ILO has been implementing this integrated project funded by the United States Department of Labor (USDOL), in close collaboration with the ILO constituents. The project aims at promoting women’s fundamental rights to employment and gender equality, as well as to improving health of rural women and their families through expanding their access to micro-health insurance schemes. It focuses on socio-economic empowerment of women by addressing the causes and consequences of gender inequality in Bangladesh and through a life-cycle and rights-based approach. To achieve its desired impact, the project adopts an integrated strategy that entails the following:

- Provision of decent employment for poor women thus reducing poverty and preventing other social ills;
- Promotion of fundamental rights at work to eliminate direct and indirect discrimination against women;
- Provision of social protection to reduce the risks faced by households entirely or mainly dependent on women earners; and
- Mobilization, organization and representation in decision-making bodies at all levels.

The project has two sub-projects: Women’s empowerment through Decent Employment (WEDE) and Micro Health Insurance for poor women in Rural Bangladesh (MHIB).

Under its first component (WEDE), the project has economically and socially empowered 44,000 (40,000 tea garden workers and 4,000 poor women entrepreneurs working in both the informal and the formal economy in the country). Women entrepreneurs from small- and medium-scale enterprises (numbering 4,000) and their employees have participated in training/awareness raising in business management, marketing, equal rights, gender issues, and most importantly on Decent Work. Forty thousand tea plantation workers in 39 tea plantations have benefited from health care services, otherwise not accessible and have been trained as health workers and volunteers. Capacity building has been undertaken for the ILO tripartite partners in the tea sector, and collaborating NGOs, on ‘Decent Work’, occupational safety and health (OSH), women leadership development, social dialogue/collective bargaining, and labour standards, etc.

Under the second project component, Micro Health Insurance for Poor in Bangladesh (MHIB) is implemented, particularly addressing health care needs of poor women and their families in rural areas. Several NGOs have been supported by the project in providing affordable quality health care, the largest being BRAC and Grameen Kalyan (part of the Grameen Bank family of organizations), together expanding the micro health insurance. With other NGOs under the project, more than seventy thousand women have been directly benefited. Work already done by
the ILO has increased knowledge about the innovative social protection measures implemented at community level in the country, benefiting the income-poor population and has contributed to the ILO “Global Campaign on Social Security and Coverage for All,” launched in 2003.

**Gender and Ethnic Components:**
As seen above, the project targets poor and disadvantaged women including minority, indigenous and tribal women as direct beneficiaries.

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**Project Website:**
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STEP:

DECLARATION: