Annual Report (2022-2023)

Six Research Projects were accomplished during the reporting period. These are 1. Transformation towards ecological and gender justice and sustainability (2023-2024), 2. Advancing Accountability and Transparency through Right to Information (3rd Phase), 3. Building capacities of local communities to mitigate problems created by their discrimination in mainstream societies: ethnic communities,dalits and marginalized women in West Bengal. 4.Recovery, Extension and Evaluation of a Kajoli ECL centres for and setting up of Kajoli Foundation. 5. Promotion of Social Partnership for Empowerment of marginalized communities in 6 districts and at national level in Bangladesh (PROSPECT). 6. Early Warning Initatives of the Asia pacific Partnership for Atrocity Prevention. The development partners are Rosa Luxemburg Stiftung (RLS), National Endowment for Democracy(NED), MISEREOR,PORTICUS, NETZ Bangladesh, The University of Queensland.

RLS : Transformation towards ecological and gender justice and sustainability (2023-2024)

Purpose of the Project : To promote social transformation towards ecological and gender justice, equity and sustainability.

Target Group(s) : Small Farmers, women farmers, youths and students, members of peasant organisations concerned government authorities, GO/NGOs, political actors, and left actors and activists and academics working in the field of agriculture.

Geographical Area : Bogura, Satkhira and Dhaka in Bangladesh

Activity 1: Facilitating participatory action research (PAR) activities and community engagement through at least 72 meetings on regular basis with at least 6 PAR groups (12 meetings per group) to develop the capacity on environmental literacy, ecological ethic, civic democracy and gender justice.

Collective outputs or results generated by the activity: The individual and collective level activities done by the PAR group members through praxis process were linked with two types of justice issues, namely ecological and gender justice. They gradually extending their agroecology and trying to transform their ecological input-based agricultural plot to a self-functional agro-ecosystem. The year 2023 was very crucial for the groups' farmers as they tried to establish sustainable marketing mechanism of the agroecology produce and other ecological products and inputs. Through their creative efforts some new marketing initiatives have established while the earlier initiatives kept rolling. As a result, all the projects' villages got linked with these marketing initiatives of the PAR farmers. These initiatives also collected safe crops from other non-project farmers and insisted them to stop using agro-chemicals. But, the situation in the market were quite challenging everywhere. The endless supply of the growth hormone-based fast-grown chemically produced food crops and non-seasonal foreign crops, fruits and food items were the main challenges for selling safe and sustainable production. However, through continuous advocacy efforts of the PAR farmers a consumer group has been developed. Besides, some farmers from nearby villages started cultivating local rice and mixed cropping by following the principles of agroecology. The PAR groups also incorporated gender issues in this process and a small group of women started providing catering service in limited basis in Bogura while a women member established agroecology outlet in

Satkhira. Moreover, some women group members have emerged as local women activists to address violence against women, child marriage and other gender issues. They raised these issues during informal gatherings in their community. In some cases, the women members got engaged with the victims to protect them. The youths from the PAR groups not only supported these social issues but also started working to explore and conserve local biodiversity. Generally, the youths are not interested in production aspects of agriculture, rather interested or forced to leave their community for better economic opportunities. However, it was found that most of the PAR youths got sensitized to think about the agricultural production challenges, shown interest to help the farmers marketing initiatives through information and communication technology, took initiatives to explore and care local biodiversity and got involved in sustainable agricultural production. They also started addressing gender issues in their family and circles. Overall, the regular PAR group meetings created a space in the project villages to address ongoing agricultural, climatic and social challenges and a platform to explore the aspects of good life.

Activity 2: Engaging with youths and students and other farm and non-farm community on the issues of agro-ecology, climate change and gender justice:

a. **Organising at least two dialogues on youth and ecology to sensitise the local youth.**

The PAR group farmers, women and youths shared their experiences, challenges and demand in front of the authorities and local leaders. They also got appreciated by the guests for their activities on ecological and gender justice. As the authorities got connected with the PAR group members, it would be helpful to implement future activities and push political demands.

b.Conducting an action research with students on farming in 2 project areas to spread awareness on sustainable agriculture and environmental issues.

The students, guardians and teachers practically observed and learned the methods of agroecological farming.

Activity 3: Produce educational materials to generate and disseminate information and knowledge on agro-ecology, climate politics, gender and systemic alternatives in Bangla language:

a. Publish at least one photobook to highlight the experiences of agro-ecology

A Consultant was hired to prepare the photobook and videos. Later the consultant visited the project areas and captured PAR groups' farmers' agroecological and gender justice related activities. The project staffs prepared an outline of the photobook according to the principles and component of agroecology. The PAR, gender, youth and climate crisis related components were also added. Later, the consultant attached relevant photos from RIB's archive and his visit. The project staffs also added short descriptions of every chapter. Finally, the photobook was published and the soft copy was uploaded in RIB's website.

b. Publish and disseminate at least three reports in Bangla language on the impact of ICT on youth and gender from ecological perspectives, class relations and agricultural labour in Bangladesh. An abridged version of the reports will also be prepared in English

B.1- A Booklet on Class Relations

- **Title of the Booklet: Class Relations in Bangladesh: Theory & Reality**

- Brief description of content of this booklet: The video lectures of the Webinar on class relations was published under this activity. Eminent economist and left actor M M Akash –also one of the speakers of the webinar- wrote the foreword of the booklet. The lectures were transcribed by a consultant and the project staffs transcribed the discussion of the open discussion of respective lectures. The booklet was finally edited by Project Coordinator Suraiya Begum and got published in Bangla, December 2023. The soft copy of the booklet will be uploaded in RIB's website. The content of the booklets are as follows:

Sl.	Sub-topic	Name of the speaker
1	Class Relations in Bangladesh: Farmers' perspectives	Dr. Monirul Islam Khan, Professor, Department of Social Science, University of Dhaka
2	Class Relations in Bangladesh: Theory and reality	Dr. M M Akash, Professor, Department of Economics, University of Dhaka and Central Committee Member, Communist Party of Bangladesh
3	Feminism: Movement and Class Relations	Dr. Meghna Guhathakurta, Executive Director, Research Initiatives Bangladesh & Former Professor, Department of International Relations, University of Dhaka
4	Class Relations in Bangladesh: Farmers and labors' perspectives	Dr. Anu Muhammad, Professor, Department of Economics, Jahangirnagar University and Editor, Sarbojonkotha
5	Agricultural labour movement in Bangladesh and class conflict	Shamsuzzaman Selim, Presidium Member, Communist Party of Bangladesh and Former President, Bangladesh Khetmajur Samity.

B.2- A Booklet on the impact of ICT on youth and gender from ecological perspectives

- **Title of the Booklet: Youth, ICT and Environment**

- Brief description of content of this booklet: Field Coordinator Md. Iftekhar Ali and Documentation and Training Officer Syed Navid Anjum Hasan, prepared an outline and collected primary and secondary data on youth, ICT and environment. Later they prepared separate chapters on these issues and described the linkages from historical perspectives. They focused the issues of sustainability and digital discrimination. the book published in Bangla, on December 2023

B.3- A Booklet on Research on agricultural labour in Bangladesh

Title of the Booklet: Agricultural Labour in Bangladesh: Cases from Satkhira and Bogura

In this booklet, an attempt has been made to see the present condition of agricultural laborers in the context of Satkhira and Bogura districts of Bangladesh. Quantitative and qualitative data collection were used as research methodology. Seven focus group discussions (FGD) were conducted including data collection of 120 male and female laborers in two districts. Where agricultural workers have highlighted their various problems and challenges of living. Through which this book provides a basic picture of the socio-economic condition of the agricultural laborers in Bangladesh.

c. Produce and disseminate at least 10 videos on agroecology and sustainability issues in Bangla language at Dhaka, Bogura, Satkhira from June-December 2023

The project team selected some topics and relevant farmers, youth and women to highlight the agroecology, gender and social justice issues from the selected field. A Consultant was hired to deal with the technical issues. He visited project areas and captured the footage required for producing the 10 videos on agroecology and sustainability issues. Later he edited, produced, and submitted the videos will be uploaded on RIB's YouTube.

d.Pot Songs on Agroecology

Bangladesh, with the support from Rosa Luxemburg Stiftung South Asia and presented by Sundarban Theatre, Bagerhat A "pot song" is a form of folk storytelling in Bangladesh. Written by Swadesh Bondhu Das, this folk song brings to life the essence of agroecology and focusing on equity and sustainability issues. In order to select the Consultant to produce this video content, a job circular was posted and through interview and Rahul Prosad Das (President, Sundarban Theatre- a Bagerhat-based cultural organization) was selected. He organized the overall process performance and submitted the video version of the performance to RIB. The contents of songs covered following topics: ecosystem, multiple cropping, seed conservation, role of women farmer, non-crop plants, mulching, ecological inputs, justice and peace.

Activity 4: Research on Agricultural Labour in Bangladesh: Case Satkhira and Bogura

Primary and secondary data for this study had been collected by the project staffs. In total seven focus group discussions (FGD) and several interviews have been conducted with the agricultural labours, indigenous and rural communities at the project villages and other village with Adibasi Munda community. Besides a questionnaire survey was also conducted and the Research Assistants collected household data of the agricultural labours from 6 villages.

Activity 5: Conference on Youth & Gender

Research Initiatives Bangladesh (RIB), with the support of Rosa-Luxemburg-Stiftung South Asia, organized a day-long national conference on Youth, Gender and Environment at SAYANTAN in Sarabo, Gazipur, Bangladesh. Youth participants from local and national level youth organizations from different areas, project farmers from Bogura and Satkhira and the experts on relevant issues attended the conference and exchanged their experiences, successes and challenges. Earlier the invitation was sent to the relevant grassroots, governmental, civil society and political organizations and individuals. The event began by showing the newly-released pot songs on agroecology. Pot song is a folk form of storytelling in Bangladesh. Suraiya Begum, Director & Project Coordinator of RIB, facilitated the morning session and presented the key-note paper on the overarching themes of ecological and social justice. She also shared the activities and outputs of the RIB-RLS project. After that, renowned ornithologist and writer Enam Ul Haque highlighted the importance and linkages of birds, trees, insects and biodiversity for environmental sustainability and harmony. As chief speaker, he described the importance of conserving naturally occurring plants and urged the youth to know the local biodiversity. He also brought bird related books and distributed those books among the youth participants of the conference.

Then, Bipob Ghosh from Shaymnagar, Satkhira and Al Amin from Sarikandi, Bogura, spoke about the challenges faced by youth in their respective areas, particularly regarding the climate crisis and gender discrimination. After that, Arifur Rahman Shuvo, a youth activist from Jhalokathi, presented their activities for saving the rivers and coastal areas from environmental pollution. Later, Nayon Sorkar, Chief Coordinator, Save Future Bangladesh, shared his organizational and personal activities to save the trees and vegetation patches in different areas of the country. Kamrun Nahar Antora, a student from Gamir Uddin High School in Bogura and PAR group member, addressed the conference participants about her involvement in an agroecology plot in her school compound. Her speech revealed the active role young people can play in promoting sustainable agricultural practices. Lipika Munda, a representative of a marginalized community and PAR group member from Satkhira, shared the prevalent issue of gender and communal discrimination in Shyamnagar. The challenges facing her community were access to agricultural land and natural resources, early marriage and social exclusion. A representative from the transgender community and the Founder of Prantoz Foundation, Sheikh Muhammad Mominul Islam (Moon), spoke about transgender-related issues, misconceptions and demands. Moreover, other youth representatives such as Tayeb, Director of Oddomo-19 in Mymensingh, and Nazmun Nahid, Youth Net Sylhet, discussed their roles in addressing gender discrimination.

The theoretical and practical aspect of gender justice was discussed by the guest speaker Sanzida Khan Ripa, Program Manager, Association for Land and Development (ALRD). She also focused on the role of women as the guardian of biodiversity and seeds. Then, A.S.M. Rejaul Karim, Director of BBL, shared insights from the perspective of ICT and youths.

After that, Roni Khan, a youth leader from Netrokona, discussed the initiatives concerning youth action on the climate crisis and environmental conservation in the Haor region of Bangladesh. Additionally, SZ Opu from YouthNet Bangladesh shared about their organizational advocacy and capacity building activities in various districts across the country and at the international level regarding climate justice. Syed Navid Anjum Hasan, RIB's documentation officer, addressed the challenges related to the impact of climate change and health risks specifically in the coastal and other regions in Bangladesh. Youth activist Fuad and MD Shohanur Amin from Brighters also shared their perspectives on the challenges posed by the climate crisis in Bangladesh. Finally, Dr. Dwijen Mallick, Senior Fellow and Director from the Bangladesh Centre for Advanced Studies (BCAS), highlighted the issues and concerns of climate justice at the local, national and international level. Dr. Mallick expressed appreciation for the commendable efforts of all the youths involved in climate movements in the country. Furthermore, he discussed the agendas and findings that were deliberated upon during the ongoing COP-28. Suraiya Begum presented the concluding remarks of the session. However, the youths and farmers from the RIB's PAR groups displayed local seeds, agrobiodiversity and ecological inputs and also brought local popped rice for the participants. The participants also collected RIB's publications on ecological and social justice issues.

The afternoon session was facilitated by RIB's Executive Director Dr. Meghna Guhathakurta, as she organized a theatre-based creative learning session on ecological and gender justice issues. Three youth groups were formed and their tasks were to solve an ecological and gender justice related challenge. Through collective effort they found out the solution and presented their idea through drama. All three teams were announced the winner in the game as they performed well and enjoyed this creative learning process. Finally, the conference came to an end and the youths got committed to strengthen the ecological and gender justice movement

through networking and mutual sharing. The brief description and photographs of the event was shared in RIB's Facebook page for broader dissemination and the post was shared by others including YouthNet Global.

Activity 6: Agroecology Entrepreneur Camp

RIB organized an Agroecology Camp of exemplary farmers and safe food entrepreneurs. The day-long camp was divided in three sessions to exchange experiences and mutual learning of the safe food actors, strengthen the capacity of RIB's project farmers from Bogura and Satkhira and to promote agroecology in academia, political and policy level. The agroecology entrepreneurs were invited to display their produce in the fair organized beside the discussion table. The relevant stakeholders and actors also were invited to participate in the discussion.

The camp was inaugurated by the eminent human rights activist Dr. Hameeda Hossain, Vice-chairperson, RIB. Later the participants visited the stalls of eleven agroecology entrepreneurs and exchanged the ideas and strategies. After that, the *"Krishi Protibesher Gaan"* - music video of Gambhira on Ecological Agriculture, produced by RIB-RLS was showed for basic understanding of the participants on agroecology. The remaining part of the event was divided in two parts: Discussion on Agroecology Marketing and Workshop to identify the way forward.

The discussion session was chaired by Dr. Meghna Guhatkakurta, Executive Director, RIB. A key-note paper titled 'Challenges and Possibilities of Agroecology Marketing in Bangladesh' was presented by Suraiya Begum, Project Coordinator & Director, RIB.

The keynote paper discussed the challenges and possibilities of safe agriculture production and marketing in Bangladesh. Statistics from the National Cancer Research Institute of Bangladesh showed that the number of cancer cases among farmers have been increasing. It is assumed that the possible reason behind this is the use of chemical fertilizers and pesticides in agriculture and hence the product supplied in the market is not safe.

So, the marketing of safe and organic agriculture produce is essential. A growing population means that the pressure on agriculture to produce more food and achieve self-sufficiency in food production has become a political issue, as much in the state policy and also as a part of global food politics. Although the government has some policies on organic agriculture, it lacks of coordination. Not all the policies of agriculture are compatible with one another and implementation becomes difficult and the expected benefits are not achieved.

The market and consumer are two important elements in the production system. The reality is that the farmers knowingly harvest the agricultural produce by heavy use of chemical fertilizers and pesticides to get high yields. As there is a sustained demand of these products from the consumers, so the production chain persists. The farmers are forced by the system to use these means to survive the competitive market and to bear the cost of their living expenses.

Agroecological production is an obligatory prerequisite to safe food supply. But only an increasing customer base will ensure the increase in production. RIB has been working with farmers on production for several years. Now the motivation of farmers regarding marketing is essential so that they can become small entrepreneurs. Hence, the key note paper elaborates on this to inform the farmers about the challenges and opportunities of marketing.

After the presentation, the invited discussants shared their opinion and working experiences on this issue. Representatives from Ministry of Agriculture, Ministry of Fisheries & Livestock,

Palli Karma Sohayak Foundation (PKSF), Bangladesh Agriculture Research Institute, Food And Agriculture Organization (FAO) have participated and shared the governmental perspectives. The civil society organizations and entrepreneurs engaged in promoting agroecology also shared their working experiences and challenges to sensitize the government and political actors. Researchers and academics from agriculture and social science background also had participated and shared their findings. Besides, the politicians and farmer organizers shared their perspectives. The discussion covers the issues of seeds, land, water, environment, industrial and agricultural pollution, farmers' access to education, health and ecological inputs, role of media, neo-liberal economy, colonialism, consumerism, food sovereignty etc. The discussants agreed that, a sustainable coordination was required among the actors, policies and initiatives in regards to safe food production and marketing. This type of event has to be organized in regular basis to change the system. The discussion session was live telecasted via Drik News Facebook page. Here is the link -

https://www.facebook.com/driknewsdrik/videos/1393634371421934/

After lunch break, the farmers and agroecology entrepreneurs have participated in a workshop to identify the ground-level challenges and way forward. The workshop was facilitated by Md. Iftekhar Ali and the findings are as follows.

The main challenges and actions required for the expansion of safe and sustainable agriculture, based on the opinions of entrepreneurs, actors in the safe food marketing sector, are described below:

The main challenges:

Agriculture in the country has been divided into two main sectors, namely, homestead and commercial. The majority of farmers rely on commercial agriculture as their primary source of income. This type of agriculture is heavily dependent on industrialized synthetic farming inputs. However, the proper evaluation of the environmental and human rights implications of the entire production-to-consumption cycle is not adequately considered. Comprehensive support, recognition, incentives, and promotion are provided by various entities, including the government, non-governmental organizations, academic institutions, and the political arena.

In current agriculture practices chemical fertilizers, pesticides, herbicides, as well as hormones, vitamins, antibiotics, and similar substances are used to maximize crop yields as quickly as possible. As a result of this cycle, the cultivation and marketing of safe agricultural products are influenced and ignored by the market dynamics. Alongside the producers, many entrepreneurs have ceased business operations related to safe agricultural products.

As a result of the prevailing linear development and profit-oriented mind-set, consumerism, and the emphasis on greed in present society, there is a growing sense of apathy, negligence, and indifference towards fundamental and essential aspects of life among farmers, consumers, researchers, practitioners, and the general public.

Not only safe agriculture, but the entire agricultural sector is plagued by a certain level of negligence. Compared to agriculture, the industrial sector contributes significantly to water depletion and environmental pollution, yet no measures are taken regarding this matter.

In many cases, due to the comparatively higher prices of safe agricultural products, the producers are compelled to sell nutritious and safe products without consuming them at home. Instead, they purchase comparatively cheaper but unsafe and contaminated food from the market.

For small-scale entrepreneurs, certification becomes a significant challenge. On one hand, there is the issue of availability and affordability of environmentally friendly and sustainable certifications, while on the other hand, there are various approvals and legal complexities associated with obtaining such certifications.

Various types of foreign or invasive species of plants, animals, and other organisms have a significant impact on the country's ecosystem.

Lack of coordination and collective efforts among various government and non-government initiatives often hinder the success of many ventures.

Tasks and possibilities:

Ensuring safe agriculture is the most crucial for the self-sufficiency and nutrition security of the farmer's own family. Even in small spaces, it is important to establish ecological agriculture that ensure the conservation of biodiversity for the sake of the farmer's own food. Starting from limited areas, the discussion and promotion of safe agriculture should gradually expand.

If farmers can engage in food processing, they can obtain higher value and extend the shelf life of their products.

Conservation and promotion of agriculture and environmental protection, as well as the preservation and dissemination of local food culture, are necessary.

Farmers at the grassroots level require the consent, motivation, and other forms of assistance in promoting safe agriculture. Otherwise, it will be challenging to compete with the billions of dollars invested in chemically dependent industrial agriculture.

The problems associated with chemical-dependent industrial agriculture need analysis, discussion, and dissemination at various levels. There is no alternative to continuous promotion and supply of high-quality crops for sustainable marketing.

Establishing relationships based on trust and confidence with consumers is crucial for sustainable marketing and building alternative supply chains.

Farmer organizations or marketing cooperatives can play a significant role in sales promotion, certification, communication, transportation, and price negotiation.

Efforts should be made to promote safe farming at the field level, including farmer organizations.

Established organizations, entrepreneurs, and NGOs need to be more visible and work towards expansion.

Misleading statements regarding safe agriculture should be countered through various means of dissemination.

The true cost of chemical-intensive agriculture, including environmental damage and healthcare expenses, should be considered while calculating the price of agricultural products.

Safe agriculture and food consumption are deeply connected to a simple and healthy lifestyle, which necessitates the promotion and dissemination of this way of life. It is necessary to raise public awareness and establish regulatory frameworks to eliminate unnecessary and unsafe food substances, along with providing an understanding of organic food.

Ensuring safe and sustainable agriculture and biodiversity conservation require the dignified evaluation of women and the creation of enabling environments.

The issue of trust is crucial in the context of safe crop sales. If for any reason chemical-intensive crops reach the consumers, it can quickly erode the hard-earned reputation of the entrepreneur or farmer. Therefore, caution and extra care must be exercised at every stage of production to marketing to maintain trust and confidence.

Crops such as moringa or similar produce that are environmentally friendly and consumed for the well-being of the farmer and their family members require no additional expenses for cultivation.

In the field of agricultural product sales, digital or online platforms can be used to communicate with consumers or safely sell agricultural products. Rural youth can assist farmers in this regard. It is necessary to halt the decline of safe agriculture producers and entrepreneurs, which requires collective planning and action from all stakeholders.

Regular exchange of ideas, sharing, and collective efforts are necessary for the spread of this mindset and movement.

Facilitating the marketization of safe food is absolutely necessary. In this regard, relevant government and non-governmental institutions and policymakers need to play an effective role in ensuring the safety of the environment and public health through coordinated planning.

The implementation of these policies is essential for the sustainable development of society, aligning with national policies. Additionally, effective measures need to be taken for sustainable development, as well as the implementation of other international initiatives related to the environment and human rights.

Finally, the camp came to an end and the agroecology entrepreneurs decided to meet again soon to follow-up the discussion of the camp.

Activity 7: : Online Seminar

Class relations is not a much discussed issue in Bangladesh. Considering its important role to establish equity and justice, it was planned to explore the multidimensional aspects of class relations through this online event. So, the project staffs had selected some sub-topics and identified suitable resource persons for delivering lectures in Bangla. To avoid any technical disturbance during the event, their lectures were pre-recorded using a video camera by the project staff, later those video lectures were edited by the Documentation and Training Officer. These videos will be uploaded in RIB's organizational YouTube channel and other online spaces. Besides, the lectures were transcribed by a hired transcriber. After editing (and simplifying) those lectures will be published under educational materials. However, the five video lectures were played during the five-day long webinar in respective sessions organized in Zoom online platform through RIB's organizational Zoom ID. The resource persons also had attended the online sessions for further discussion and explanation

Invitations were sent to the relevant organizations and target groups through email, phone call and other online messaging apps for attending the five-day long (everyday 3-5 PM) webinar. A poster was also prepared and shared on social media from RIB's organizational and project staffs' profiles. It was very unfortunate that meanwhile Shamsuzzaman Selim passed away. Later Dr. M M Akash

agreed to attend the respective session on behalf of him. The webinar sessions were facilitated by Suraiya Begum, Project Coordinator and Director, RIB.

On 20th August 2023, the event started on due time and the pre-recorded video lecture of Dr. Monirul Islam Khan was played. He discussed the evolution and changing pattern of agrarian structure in Bangladesh from Marxist and functionalist perspectives. He summarized the existing literature and discussed the practical dynamics related to capitalism, consumerism and climate change. Dr. Monirul Islam Khan also attended the session and got engaged in the discussion with the participants. Among others Dr. Abul Barakat focused on the reducing role of the people as a citizen in a democratic state, as the people were getting deprived from their fundamental rights.

On the second day, Professor M M Akash discussed the theoretical and practical aspects of class relations in Bangladesh. From economic perspectives he focused on production relations and economic classes. He briefly described the mode of production debate from Marxist perspective and the production system from classical economic point of view with practical examples. Professor Akash was present during the webinar session and further clarified the role of capital and neo-colonialism during the open discussion. He identified three different classes in the society: 90% people in the bottom, 9% middle and 1% ruling class. The emergence of lumpen bourgeoisie and cruel capitalism characterized Bangladesh as a post-colonial state. Present class contradictions will be resolved according to the reaction of the 90% in bottom. The session was live streamed from RIB's organizational Facebook page.

On 22nd August 2023, the pre-recorded video lecture on Feminism: Movement and Class Relations by Dr. Meghna Guhathakurta was played as the online session began at 03 PM. Feminism emerged through the women's' struggles to break the disparities between men and women due to patriarchy. The socialist-feminist activists added the patriarchal issues in class studies. Dr. Meghna described different schools of thoughts and interrelationships between feminism and grass roots class struggles. She also discussed the actors of feminist movement in Bangladesh and linkages with other movements and class relations. Finally she explained the role of Participatory Action Research (PAR) to get united and raise the voices of marginalized and strengthen the feminist movement as well. Experts and activists also attended the session and shared their thoughts.

On the fourth day, Anu Muhammad described the historical perspectives, factors and characteristics of past and present class structure. In Bangladesh, workers are the majority but deprived from many rights related to wage, trade union, effective monitoring, safe environment etc. Considering the changes in power structure and nature of capital accumulation, the middle class has a major role to play to identify common interests and get united with the workers for a better society.

The pre-recorded video lecture by the then late Shamsuzzaman Selim on Agricultural labour movement in Bangladesh and class conflict was played in the final day of the webinar. The session was started by the address of M M Akash (Board Member, RIB). He paid homage to Shamsuzzaman Selim by remembering his engagement in the agricultural labour movement on Bangladesh. Shamsuzzaman Selim's recorded speech highlighted the historical perspectives, politics and changes in the rural labour market. Rural labours have got their legal recognition as wage labour but they don't have the right to organize trade unions. So the agricultural labor politics are now focused on wage policy, gender gap, social safety net and other contemporary issues. Besides, RIB field staffs shared their experiences of working with agricultural labours and found similarities with the observation of Shamsuzzaman Selim.

Finally, the webinar came to an end by the concluding remarks by Suraiya Begum, Project Coordinator. A detailed report would be prepared and published based on the recorded lectures and comments from the participants.

Success Story

Cultivating Success: The Agroecology Marketing Shop Flourishes in Patrakhola and Bongshipur

Nestled amidst the verdant fields of Patrakhola and Bongshipur, a revolutionary movement sprouted, not from grand machinery or chemical miracles, but from the wisdom of nature and the dedication of a community. The Agroecology Marketing Shop, a beacon of sustainable agriculture opened its doors in Patrakhola and Bongshipur village. Bilkis Akter and Golok Odhikari were the key persons to establish the shops and managed the marketing chain. Another PAR group farmer and rickshaw-van driver Salam Gazi also dedicated himself to exchange unsold products between these outlets. In the early days, these two villages faced the common challenges that many rural communities encountered - dwindling soil fertility, overreliance on conventional farming methods, and limited market access. Fueled by a collective desire for change, a group of farmers came together to establish the Agroecology Marketing Shop, after attending the Agroecology camp in Dhaka in 2023. They were inspired by the activities of other safe food entrepreneurs. Earlier in 2019, a group of farmers from Dhumghat were inspired and established a marketing shop. The Farmers from Patrakhola village also used to supply crops to this shop.

The Agroecology Marketing Shops not only started providing food crops and inputs but also established a direct link between farmers and conscious consumers. A vibrant farmers' market emerged, where fresh, locally grown produce was showcased. Women, empowered by their involvement in the shop's operations, are in the way to achieve economic independence and decision-making power. The shop became a symbol of hope, demonstrating that agroecology is not just a farming method, but a way of life that nurtures not only the land but also the community spirit. This direct-to-consumer approach not only increased the income of farmers
but also educated the community about the importance of supporting local sustainable agriculture. Communal harmony, faith, care and respects were the pillars of these shop. Hopefully, by nurturing these outlets the farmers' initiatives to transform their agriculture will be sustained. Promotional videos are being produced to advertise their activities.



Photo: Agroecology cell centers at Patrakhola and Bonshipur

NED : "**Advancing Accountability and Transparency through the Right to Information**"

(I) Overall objectives of the project:

· To build a culture of requesting information from the government about services and expenditure to encourage good governance.

· To advance accountability and transparency through the application and implementation of right to information mechanisms.

(II) Activities performed under the project:

Activities detail from August 2021 to July 2023

SL	Activities details	Target	Achieved	Pending activity
1.	Project Orientation Meeting	2	2	
2.	Staff & RTI Moderator Coordination Meeting	3	3	
3.	Monthly RTI Activist Meetings	264	240	24
4.	RTI & PAR Training (3 days)	2	2	
5.	District Validation Workshop	3	3	
6.	Exposure Visits	6 Events	6	
7.	National Event	1 Events	1	
8.	RTI Workshops	3 Events	3	
9.	Rally & Information Fair Events	Rally 4 events, RTI Fair 2	6	
10.	RTI Moderator & Enthusiast Meetings (Advocacy Meeting)	6 Meetings	6	
11.	Follow-Up Trainings	6 Events	6	
12.	6 District Dialogue Meetings	6 Events	6	
13.	Decision Analysis for legal Processing	1	1	
14.	Research Paper Publication & Website Maintenance	1	1	
15.	Impact Study Consultant	1	1	
16.	RTI Application	5000	5047	
17.	Interactive Theater on RTI at Public places	2 events	2	
18.	Day Observations (10th December 2022 (Human Rights Day), 8th March 2023 (Women's Day), 1st May 2023 (Labor Day), 5th June 2023 (World Environment Day)	24 events	24 events	

19.	RTI Booth Camp (4 Districts)	6	6	
20.	Courtyard Meetings	48	51	
21.	Improving safety and economic condition of people effected by Covid-19 crisis, through inclusion and networking with government	1	1	

RTI Application data breakdown

Area	**General application**	**UNESCO work**	**Total Appeal**	**Total complaint**	**Replies received**	**Mail returned**
Rajshahi	380	140	01	01	50	03
Bogura	427	222	42	00	250	199
Rangpur	445	209	01	00	133	60
Dinajpur	1341	761	330	82	912	79
Nilphamari	410	172	20	02	425	15
Moulvibazar	418	122	00	00	70	04
Total RTI	3421	1626				
Grand total	**5047**		**394**	**85**	**1840**	**360**

General applications breakdown at different levels

RTI requests at Unions/Pourashava	803 (23.5%)
RTI requests at Upazila level	1580 (46.2%)
RTI requests at District level	434 (13%)
RTI request at Divisional level	140 (4.1%)
RTI requests at Ministry	439 (12.8%)
RTI requests to NGOs/private	25 (0.7%)
Total	**3421**

The filed applications were focused on three stages/tiers (a) issues emerged at community level (b) issues with focus on regional/zonal context (c) issues at national context and at all three stages applications were categorized into three categories: (1) those seeking primary information i.e. service or benefits; (2) those seeking institutional accountability; and (3) those seeking transparency. It was the objective of the grant to create RTI activists to enhance demand for RTI in the project Districts at the same time enable and empower them so that they may learn to upscale their information needs from asking basic primary service-related questions to the level of addressing and engaging public authorities on accountability and transparency issues.

Under the current grant, within a period of 22 months a total of 3421 general RTI applications, were submitted, of which 1638 applications received full response and partial responses. The rate of response was considered 48%. We have seen that in case of information sought which are in nature of first category like information on ordinary or mundane issues or services and so on, the rate of responses by DOs are relatively higher than information sought on transparency and accountability, it has been possible to deepen and scale up the process of implementing the RTI Act among mainstream and communities in the sense of generating more applications on accountability and transparency of local level public institutions and authorities.

The rate of appeals although relatively low was nevertheless encouraging. Applications at the appeal level were highest on transparency issues which were least responded to by authorities during application stage. Most of the appeals were backed by a broader public interest and this had the effect of boosting the determination of RTI activists to take it up to the next level. One factor responsible for higher response rate for appeals could be that in the RTI appeal process, more pressure is exerted at a higher level of administration than at the lower. This is especially so if the subject is a sensitive one, indicating that a non-response at the Appeal level would motivate the applicant to go through a complaint procedure at which point the service providers in question would face the risk of being summoned by the Information Commission for a hearing. Hearings by the Commission were however found to be few and far between. Also, during hearing stage complainants relatively face many challenges and, in some cases, we have seen that this works as deterrent factors that people feel discourage to go to appeal and complaint stage

The nature of the questions asked in application forms were often focused on services, government's responsibility to provide better services, linkage between government and citizens, development agenda and their fulfillments particularly depending on the discussions among stakeholders, additionally government's commitment to achieve Sustainable Development Goals and government's commitment under Five Year Plan as a reference point for asking questions to the authorities. Few goals like End Poverty, Education, Health, Gender Equality and Goal 16 which talks about strengthening institution and access to justice as well as corresponding goals from government's 5 Year plan based on which RTI requests were filed to concerned government offices. RIB helped group members forming questions on these topics which looked like dissemination of knowledge while also contributing **in building relationship between the system and the citizens** which ultimately leads to greater transparency, accountability and emergence of good governance system.

These were also questions which had mostly to do with basic services such as safety net measures, government incentives including Covid crisis and stimulus packages and sometimes even corruption e.g. issuing license to store hazardous chemicals without following due process or taking bribe to allow plying small vehicle on highways thus indicating that **some form of malpractices were systemic in local governance**. Other questions were however distinctively related to the political or social context which was more targeted at high profile cases involving highest form of corruption or mal practices or of issues those were of national interest. The mainstream communities were prone

to asking information on safety net services, distribution of land, registration process and repair works of infrastructure like culverts, roads while group members with more urban exposure tended to ask pointed questions on accountability and transparency of institutions such as schools, courts, hospitals, trainings, narcotics control department, disbursement of social development funds, road management systems, status of implementation of laws and environmental issues.

The deepening and scaling up of the RTI implementation process was possible because of (a) the inclusion and engagement of mainstreams formed as RTI Activists group who are more exposed to public life than rural-based groups and hence can overcome the hesitancy to deal with pubic officials; (b) enhanced skills of facilitators or field level expertise on RTI. (c) the intensive 'hands on' participatory processes through which RTI Activists were trained in the understanding, and internalization of the RTI Act to their 's own experiences. (d) constant discussion and strategizing findings from fields to adopt different approaches as and when needed. All these factors have to be taken together as not one single factor can be seen to be responsible.

(III)Nature of Issues covered for RTI applications under general categories

Government services and facilities:

RTI users submitted requests with queries on Special Safety Net Program of the government and other facilities. How the potential beneficiaries are selected, services are being accessed by the citizens, how citizens are made aware about these services and what initiatives were taken, who were the beneficiaries of such services are few aspects based on which users submitted RTI applications under the project. There were RTI applications focusing on services which citizens can claim from government as a matter of rights but access to the same remained a far-fetched dream for many.

Climate change and environment:

RTI questions were submitted on several issues involving climate change and issues affecting environment like people asked what are government plans to fight climate and environment degradation, how the rising pollution due to construction works under development projects have been dealt with, how river encroachments have been prohibited by government and how unplanned dumping of garbage can be prohibited and so on. There were RTI made on storing hazards chemical in a populated area creating danger equally for the people as well as for the environment.

Governance and administration:

RTI users submitted queries with focus on local and national administration to ensure good governance and develop accountability culture in the country. Questions were submitted with focus on how public funds are used to ensure maximum services to the citizens and how citizen's grievances regarding a service is addressed and resolved. There were questions like how development projects are implemented effectively to ensure better life to the citizens. There were RTI with focus on safety and security of women and prevention of violence against women.

Health and Education

Under this caption good number of RTI applications were submitted locally and nationally given the fact that country has going through Covid crisis recently as well as Ukraine Was has affected the lives of developing and under developed nations too. So, few RTI were submitted targeting the mismanagement under health sector as well as education sector. This was done to test government's efficiency in dealing with health and education issues in times of crisis.

Some changes & achievements

- Despite the general lack of knowledge about the RTI law, the few who are aware of its tremendous power are indeed using it for beneficial purposes. And the objectives, though still largely limited to personal and professional needs, often include important areas of public interest.
- While we search for other ways to excite our fellow citizens, bring awareness to them, and motivate them to a greater use of the law, one effective approach was to acquaint them with success stories through dissemination of publication materials that continue to emerge from its use.
- In working districts, a sense of fear that prevailed previously, have now been removed to some extent and people though on limited scale but feel to encourage use of RTI law to deal with many pertinent issues. They no longer fear government officers.
- Government officers in working districts have started showing positive attitude when they receive RTI requests. Their mindset has changed and they no longer put up a hostile behavior towards RTI requesters.
- There has been multiplicity in the sense that among general people an interest has been developed to use RTI. Local people who are not part of RTI activists' groups also take help from group members in filling RTI requests for their problems or any thing that they do not seem right.
- It is also very elating to see that local influential individual and paganizations have developed interest to become RTI activists and they express willingness to join RTI activists group under the project. This is indeed a positive social change as people have found RTI a mechanism to directly interact with government and in the process making the institutions accountable and transparent to some extent.
- During project period, we have seen that in Dinajpur district, one elected local representative was expressed dissatisfaction over the way local election was handled therefore he filed RTI request to resolve the issue. So far after enactment of RTI law we have seen the use of it has mostly remain in the citizens domain but its very encouraging to see that now government officers/ elected representatives are also using RTI for issues which bother them.
- There is scaling in the nature of RTI applications and further deepening of process. People have become more aware and no longer focus RTI requests on their personal need, rather local or national issues are taking priority.
- During the reporting period we have noticed that due to RTI interventions some of the offices have started establishing transparency or accountability culture, this can be corroborated through the case studies collected from working districts.
- RTI interventions have brought meaningful change in the administration and governance systems in many project areas, for example after submitting RTI application DC of a district intervened

and illegal brickkiln factories were not only closed down but owners had to pay heavy penalty for operating the same, in few other cases we have seen a better road management has emerged and people's sufferings have been reduced after submitting RTI requests highlighting the issue.

- In working districts quality of service delivery have increased, in many places we have seen that public authorities remain mindful while preparing list of beneficiaries which used to be one of the prominent areas of corruption in earlier days.

Case studies to highlight change and potentiality:

A. RTI request compels Bangladesh Telecommunication Regulatory Commission (BTRC) to upload website information in Bengali:

Nowshad Hossain of Dinajpur was unhappy about some charges being levied by telephone companies from their users. He wanted to find out the actual rules in this regard from the website of BTRC. To his dismay, he found that the information was uploaded in English only. So, he submitted an RTI request to the Commission seeking the specific information on the charges, but also asking the reason why the information on the website was not put up in Bengali. To his great delight, he discovered that in less than ten days after his RTI intervention, the website was updated in both English and Bengali.

B. RTI request eases unique ID registration by students:

A recent government decision to introduce unique identification cards for students had caused a great deal of consternation for students and their parents. Digitalized birth registration was required for all students; for those whose birth registrations were not digitalized, their parents' birth had to be registered digitally first. Apart from the hassle of obtaining such documentation, the requirement put pressure on the servers, slowing them down immensely. This led Shahidul Islam of Fulbari Upazila, Dinajpur District to submit an RTI request online to the Education Ministry asking to know the process for possible extension of the deadline. Immediately upon receipt of the request, the Ministry reportedly extended the deadline and eased some of the provisions.

C. RTI promotes setting up of Committees to resist sexual harassment in educational institutes:

Hamidul Islam of Nawabganj Upazila of Dinajpur District submitted an RTI request to the DC office in Thakurgaon asking to know how many educational institutions in the district had set up Committees for prevention of sexual harassment at educational institutions as required by a High Court Directive of 2009. In a prompt action, the Deputy Commissioner office which is the highest authority of a District, attached the RTI request with a forwarding letter to all Upazila(Sub-district) Executive Officers asking them to ensure swift action by all educational institutions in the district. Hamidul was later informed that the entire district had taken action, albeit after a long delay since the issuance of the High Court Order.

D. RTI intervention led to closure of illegal chemical factory:

One RTI activist from Bogura working district submitted a RTI request seeking information from concerned Directorate office of Environment whether the chemical factory in question has obtained license and clearance certificate to release chemical waste in the nearby paddy field as such release of chemical waste is causing irreparable loss to the farmers. Upon receiving the RTI request, concerned authority informed applicant that the said chemical factory does not have any license, the authority has imposed Tk. 10,000 fine upon the chemical factory and have issued order for suspension of operations of the said chemical factory. Following receiving the above RTI requests, concerned local authority on a regular basis started making monitoring visits to all chemical factories and industries in that Upazila (sub-district)

E. RTI request compels authorities to complete construction of road lying idle for a long time:

One RTI activist from Saidpur of Nilphamari district decided to take up the issue of an under-construction road which was lying idle for a long time after local authorities invited tender and contract was awarded for the construction. But construction company nor local authority took it seriously to finish construction work within short time hence cause huge discomfort to the local people and good number of accidents took place as well. RTI activists Ruhul Alam through his RTI application to local Mayor demanded information that even after completion of tender process and after some initial work for the road construction why the work has yet not been completed and by when the work will be completed. Interestingly after receiving this application from Ruhul Alam and from other activists, local Mayor dealt the issue with emergency and within very short time the road construction work has started and it is now towards completion stage. Such RTI applications help government become more accountable.

MISEREOR: BUILDING CAPACITIES OF LOCAL COMMUNITIES TO MITIGATE PROBLEMS CREATED BY THEIR DISCRIMINATION IN MAINSTREAM SOCIETIES: ETHNIC COMMUNITIES, DALITS AND MARGINALISED WOMEN IN WEST-BANGLADESH

Project Area : Rajshahi and Jessore

Participatory Action Research, the method which was followed in the current project, depends on the engagement of the community in every step of inquiry and action. The outcome of the project according to the agreed objective (the project contributes to improving the socio-economic situation of marginalised population groups in the project area), engaged community participation (more specifically the target groups) at every step. The report is collated from monthly meetings of the community action researchers, training workshops, mapping workshops and Right to Information-related documents and processual evidence and discussion meetings.

In the specific objectives and indicators stated in the project agreement it mentions the following:
Objective no. 1: The target groups make use of their access to justice and public services and address their problems. Indicators: 1.1. The target groups have identified and prioritised their problems. 1.2. The target groups (continue to) make use of their Right to Information (RTI) to report these problems to local authorities.

In accordance with the two indicators mentioned above, the target groups have successfully attained Objective no. 1. By participating in the monthly meetings and training workshops in the first year the target groups could identify the problems that concerned them, and then prioritized them according to importance on the basis of consensus. After prioritizing them they submitted it ot the local administration to seek a solution to the problems. Among the more important subjects, were the construction of new crematory/burial grounds and the repair of existing one, the distribution of khas lands (government owned land), to provide settlements for those being evicted from railway property, to ensure wider coverage of various safety net measures and allowances for students

Around 100 RTI applications were made to different local government offices for information related to the problems they face. This enabled the government offices dealing with various services provisions to be in cognizance about their situation.

The target groups benefitted from the work they put in during the last one year. They felt less isolated as their engagement with the government grew through RTI applications as well as through regular contact with government officials on a day to day basis. Participation Action Research or "Gonogobeshona" as it is called in Bangla, gave them strength and a sense of dignity as a new sense of citizenry took over. They felt they were no longer neglected by state officials and policies and their petitions were well received. Their problems received cognizance.

Objective No. 1: The target groups make use of their access to justice and public services and address their problems.

The target groups have identified and prioritised their problems. The target groups (continue to) make use of their Right to Information (RTI) to report these problems to local authorities. **56** target groups (community) identified and prioritised their problems and **1200** RTI applications submitted.

Objective No. 2: The target groups use further methods of lobbying and advocacy
All target groups, in cooperation with representatives of the multistakeholder groups, conduct public advocacy events, submit petitions and disseminate information materials. 60 target groups achieve above objectives

Objective No. 3: The capacity of target groups and multistakeholder groups to work together to address the multidimensional problems of marginalised populations has been strengthened.

- The multistakeholder groups participate in six dialogue events on the results of the participatory action research of the target group
- 90 members of the multistakeholder groups participate in trainings (6) on advocacy and the rights of marginalised groups.
- Selected members of the target groups participate in trainings (10) on advocacy and the rights of marginalised groups

All objectives will be achieved by the end of the project. All 60 target groups have been formed and 56 + target groups and members have received training on advocacy and rights of the marginalized.

The following key activities have already been implemented:

a) building the capacity of 56 participatory research groups (28 per district), PAR teams have been formed and monthly meetings are in progress.

b) conducting orientation events and participatory action research to analyse the existing legal situation and problems attached to it and prioritising claims strategically; Project orientation events have taken place in both districts of Rajshahi and Jashore

c) preparing meetings with multistakeholders has been partially completed. Trainings and meetings have taken place in Jashore. It is yet to be held in Rajshahi.

Training on PAR, RTI and Human Rights have enabled participants to identify and prioritise their problems, conduct mapping exercises of their region, and submit RTI applications

The target groups feel more confident than before and more empowered in being able to deal with the local administration than before civil society and local administration as well as community leaders have come to know about the activities of the participants and have been reassured about the goodwill of RIB.

Our organization has learnt that the methodology of PAR used in this project has been very useful in mobilising and motivating the target groups about their rights and welfare. It enables the research assistants to probe in depth inquiry into the problems facing the marginalized and seek ways out of it.





PORTICUS : Recovery, Extension and Evaluation of Kajoli ECL Centres for and Setting up of a Kajoli Foundation

The main purpose of the project is to assess the Kajoli Model school in order to make recommendation for the establishment of a Foundation to sustain the program without affecting its present form of community initiative. The Kajoli Model has uniqueness of its own. Through people's research of RIB it was learnt that there were special circumstances which discouraged the disadvantaged families in rural areas of Bangladesh to send their children to the school. One such circumstance resulted from the fear of the parents that their children will not be able to continue with study because they were not capable for this pursuit or their economic condition is not suitable for it. The Kajoli designer thought if the interest for study can be inculcated into the children of such families that will create motivating force to opt for education with its continuation. Thus, the model wanted to provide education to the pre-primary children from this section in the mode of games.

It examined the initial ideas of the model in Magura district in the village called Kajoli (from where the name of the model is derived) and attendant successes motivated its large-scale replication. The very process of unfolding of this model as a program was equally revealing. In a response to the advertisement to apply for this school to RIB plenty of applications were submitted. In many places the schools in this model were also opened with the expectation that regular financial support will come from RIB to keep the school functional. At the very initial stage being a funding organization RIB extended some financial support to such schools but soon started focusing more on the community initiative to make it a sustainable program. Witnessing this strategic shift many schools were shut down by the organizers particularly those who viewed it as a source of revenue from RIB, but many survived too who wanted to make it a truly community initiative one. Despite so many odds like the Covid 19 crisis as many as 80 schools are now there in Nilphamri, Panchagarh and Naogaon. This study has now been commissioned to find out how such schools with a unique mode of teaching and a substantial engagement of the community are functioning, what contributions these are making to the evoking of interest for study among the pre-primary children belonging to the class of marginal social existence, what is the level of attainment of success among these children to acquire literacy and numeracy or what kind of effects it created on the rural women who are working as teachers in these schools.

There are three major actors in the Kajoli school program, namely, pre-primary students, their mothers and the teachers. Besides them, there are champions or catalysts who volunteer their time and labor to the functioning of the school in various ways, seniors of the community who help mobilization of community initiative and other well wishers. While this study will focus on them with a varying focus, it will ascertain the contribution of the Kajoli school in the promotion of education, empowerment and community initiative. It is a low-cost program with limited material support form RIB such as the provision of learning materials, teachers training or monitoring. In a condition of dependent development when a program is sustained exclusively by external support, it is an imperative to verify how Kajoli is sustaining with minimum of such external support and this study is driven to that goal.

The methodological approach of this study has combined quantitative and qualitative procedures. The nature of the study has required such combination. To assess the effect of the Kajoli program a number of issues have been investigated what includes inclination of the Kajoli children for study, attainment of competence, community initiative of the mothers or the teachers' feelings about their job. Some of the issues here are suitable for quantitative assessment while the others for qualitative assessment. The combination of the two has provided opportunity for triangulation of the quantitative and qualitative assessment.

The Kajoli schools are distributed in three northern districts, namely, Nilphamari, Panchagarh and Noagaon. There are 50 schools in Nilphamari, 15 schools in Panchagarh while 15 in Naogaon. This assessment

comprised of different exercises that included individual interview, group discussion, class observation and observation-based competence test of the Kajoli students.

With uniqueness the Kajoli Model School pursues the goal of nurturing interest for study among the pre-primary children belonging to the disadvantaged families. Its method of teaching deviates from the conventional one which primarily comprises of lecturing the students. Instead, it applies the technique of games. This model is also low cost engaging the female teachers who belong to the same village with moderate education level (e.g., secondary school or higher secondary college graduates mostly) and the space for the class and remuneration of the teacher are organized by the community. Selected teachers are given training by RIB initially for three days and later annually once, both free of cost. RIB also provides teaching materials and curricula free of cost. The teaching method applies a number of techniques to dispense with monotony or boredom generally felt by the pre-primary children when they sit for study instead of games and engage them in the class. Three subjects, namely, Bengali, English and Arithmetic are taught to the students. The model's uniqueness also includes a component of providing খিচুড়ি rice-pulse mixed meal to the students by their mothers by rotation. The school program was started with Bengali and Arithmetic, later English was added. The program was started in 2005. At present there are one hundred schools functioning in the districts of Nilphamari, Panchagarh and Naogaon.

The findings of the study revealed positive outcomes in various respects and this report also examined the logical premise that justified the evidence of positive outcomes. The findings on the development of interest for study was found positive through class observation and discussions with the mothers and teachers. The study then delved into the teaching method to find out the premise for developing interest. The teaching method has innovated pictorial technique in which a card is printed with a picture and a word. Both in Bengali and English these cards are arranged in a pocket board which are introduced to the students by the teacher. Later on, the students are called to pick up a picture from the pocket and identify the object of the picture. The identification of a picture and the learning of a word by a student takes place simultaneously. The class observations showed that the students became impatient to be called by the teacher to pick up a word ahead of other fellow classmates. Therefore, the learning of vocabulary turned into a game of picking up a picture card with a word. Mothers also informed that they do not need to urge their children to go to class because they are so eager to come to the class. The teaching methods also uses songs, dance, recitation or story telling which are hardly noticed in the conventional teaching method. Above practices were found effective methods to attract the children in study and ensure their attention in the class. During the class observations students were found much eager to recite a rhyme or a poem. The mothers and teachers also endorsed the role of pictures for effective teaching and making learning an interesting exercise.

Knowledge advancement and competence of the students were both qualitatively and quantitively assessed. With the help of class observations, it was found students were quite competent to identify a word, pronounce it correctly, spell it correctly and writing it correctly. In addition, observation-based competence assessment was also made quantitively. The pre-primary Kajoli students are not assessed in a conventional way of answering written questions on a script, instead the teacher assesses their competence during the class practice of the lessons. For example, they are asked to pick up a word, pronounce it or spell it out. They are also asked to write down words and alphabets on the board. Our quantitative assessment remained consistent with it. The study found that the student learnt words and alphabets from the pocket cards in an innovative manner. This report has laid special emphasis on class practice for the success of the teaching program. The students are not required to prepare lessons back at home.

The quantitative result shows that about 98 percent children correctly identified a Bengali word from the set of words and wrote also correctly that word on the blackboard. As high as 95.3 percent of the students correctly identified an English word they were asked for from the set of cards and correctly wrote that word on the blackboard. With respect to arithmetic 99.2 percent correctly counted number and added/subtracted

number correctly. The tally of the three subjects shows that 92.2 percents correctly answered questions on Bengali, English and Arithmetic while the rest 7.8 percent answered either of the above two correctly.

The cognitive capacity of the children has been found attained by them. There are stories in the Bengali manual followed by multiple choice questions, their answers are needed to be logically thought out. The students were found to answer such questions correctly. Besides the above, they were asked similar questions where the answers needed to apply logical intelligence during the class observation, and the children were found to correctly answer such questions.

A large part of the students in Kajoli Model School are from the families where the fathers' main occupation is laboring to earn income (about 41 percent). There are 6.5 percent who are share croppers. Own land cultivation is the main occupation of 13.4 percent of the fathers. 27.3 percent fathers do not know reading or writing while 57.3 percent attended school with or witout the completion of the school final. However, the marginality of the children was found convincingly in the nutritional data, because all (a sample 129 students) were found under weight in BMI calculation.

The teachers were found a critical component in the Kajoli Model School system. They were those who received training, mobilized mothers, contributed class space where no other community member came forward, taught the children with devotion, commitment and competently. In course of this program implementation, they turned out to be important catalyst with the role of champion. However, RIB's critical role was equally important. Mothers were also found to have played the role of watchdog particularly to remain updated about their children's progress and acting accordingly. Apart from the children's attainment of academic competence, the program has contributed to their behavioral development in terms of spontaneity and confidence. The interviews of the primary school headmasters revealed the good performance and continuation of study by the Kajoli graduates.

As a model of teaching Kajoli reflects its own uniqueness. It has been successful to combine game and study for the pre-primary school children. The use of pictures to introduce vocabulary constituted the premise of game which has been further strengthened with the procedure of picking up cards with pictures and a word from the pocket board. This game has aroused strong urge in the mindset of the students to pick up a card ahead of others and feel the pride of picking up it correctly.

To characterize the above procedure of learning one may called it a journey of pictorial understanding to picture less one. It is followed with the identification of the individual alphabets in the light of the word, not as a part of the set of alphabets. By arranging alphabets for a word the Kajoli students acquire the capability of identifying individual alphabets, so it is different from the conventional mode of learning.

Above innovativeness with regard to the language learning is also noticed with regard to learning Arithmetic. It is a game of counting in a lace with beads. Again, there is competition among the individual students to come ahead of others and count a number or add numbers.

Class practice is a major key to the transfer of literacy and numeracy to the Kajoli students. All lessons are taught in the class, students learn writing with a chalk on the blackboard, the teacher physically verifies the performance of the students in the class. No homework back home is given.

Teachers and mothers are important pillars of this program. With the help of training rural women with moderate educational background have become efficient Kajoli teachers. They have been inspired to such an extent that they mobilized the mothers to send their pre-primary school children to the Kajoli school and the mothers arranged fees themselves to pay to the teacher in recognition of the services given to their children. As a result, a certain level of self-propelling capacity has been gained by the Kajoli school as a consequence of community initiative comprising the roles of a teacher and a mother.

The empowerment implications of the program for the rural women are quite striking. Those who are Kajoli teachers would have found it quite difficult to get such jobs in the government primary schools in the rural or urban areas. This program has helped them to come out of the patriarchal division of labor, earn economic and social status.

PROSPECT : Promotion of Social Partnership for Empowerment of marginalized communities i 6 Districts and at national level in Bangladesh

RIB along with 3 partners implementing a rights-based project on empowerment of marginalized communities in 6 northern districts, promoting fundamental and human rights of the citizens especially of deprived communities. DASCOH, Pollisree and MKP are implementing this project in Dinajpur, Rajshahi, Naogaon, Thakurgaon, Rangpur and Panchagarh and RIB at national level. The project is funded by BMZ and technical support is provided by NETZ Bangladesh.

Overall Objective and Outcome of the PROSPECT project

Human Rights Defenders and public authorities are strengthened to protect and promote rights of marginalized communities in 6 districts and on the national level

12,500 capacitated human rights defenders (HRDs) and 1,200 representatives of public authorities effectively cooperate to protect and promote the economic, social and cultural rights of women, religious minorities and indigenous peoples; they disseminate their experiences in wider civil society networks in South Asia

Specific Objectives of the study

To have a comprehensive understanding on overall situation of gender justice and structural causes of deprivation of access to justice for members of marginalized communities.

To further look into and undertake an analysis on challenges of gender justice mechanism in rural areas that will inform and pave the way for a policy brief for strengthening institution and existing mechanism with a view to incorporate social inclusion as well as to explore how far socially excluded groups are able to access justice and what are the barriers.

Methodology

Document review: Existing documents (e.g. reports and review materials) related to the selected themes were reviewed at the beginning to understand the project objectives and activities.

For field data collection, a semi-structured questionnaire was developed with consultations, inputs and revisions by RIB and NETZ Bangladesh.

For qualitative data collection, Indepth Interview and KII with indigenous leaders, government bodies, students and project staffs of 3 organisations namely DASCOH, MKP and Pollisree working in 6 districts

Collect case studies at the field through In-depth interview.

Nature of gender-based violence

27.8% respondents spoke about domestic violence, 0.5% women respondents violence against throwing acid and use of other burning materials, 35.5% women reported of trafficking women and children, rape, eve teasing etc. Harassment through social media has been newly found avenue of gender-based violence. Among the respondent's sexual harassments through social media, 10.7% reported on derogatory and negative post on social media, 7.3% suffered due to posting picture without permission), 3% responded about harassment using apps like imo, WhatsApp, Messenger, 8.7% responded harassment through receiving inappropriate video clips, and 0.5% through receiving inappropriate picture, 0.7% respondents claimed to be stigmatized and dishonored due to uploading picture and videos, 0.5% reported facing extortion and demand money against threat of uploading picture and videos. 63.8% women did not faced these type experience, perhaps they do not use the social media.

Challenges of accessing justice in everyday life of marginalised women

1) 22.5% of the respondents affirmed they face obstacle in terms of weak economic condition. There has more obstacles to access to justice including stigmatisation, lack of awareness about the laws, without maintaining legally permitted steps during marriage, no appropriate application of laws, long process in getting relief from court.

(2) 96.2% respondents reported they have experience of facing persecution.

(3) Type of persecutions- 28.5% of the respondents reported they have been tortured by their addicted husband. The rest of the respondents reported different type of persecution and torture including economic crisis, eve teasing, harassment on public places, sexual harassment, rape, forced marriage and religion conversion, persecution at workplace, torture by family in-laws, extra marital affairs, family threat and acid use.

(4) Responses on getting justice on persecution of economic, caste and ethnicity based :27.5% admitted of getting justice and 72.5% respondents gave no answer

Case studies: On nature of violence and status of access to justice

A woman from Rishi community of Pirgonj, Thakurgaon leading a miserable life due to her drunkard husband's perverted act, demand of dowry and physical assault.

Field observation: When the woman was talking about her painful experiences to the female data collectors in the field. That time other women present there were bad mouthing about her and exclaimed "Don't you have shame? By telling these secrets to outsiders, you are defaming your husband. Husband's family has to be taken care of. You have to stay with your husband's house"

(2) I am still waiting for justice for my daughter said a mother from Rangpur

My daughter was raped ten years ago and a case was filed by my daughter. Case is still pending, my husband is a wage laborer, he is only one earner of our family. We face difficulty in running the case. We pay two thousand BDT for each hearing and we are unable to bear the cost. Six witnesses called several times by the court. The day when the witnesses are present, the cost increases to five thousand BDT. In the meantime, my daughter got married to another boy, she is staying with her in-law's family. Her husband is not interested to attend the hearing, still my daughter attend the hearing but how long she can continue if this persists.

Violence against marginalised women

Out of the total respondents 96.8% respondent had no answer. 0.5% women respondents admitted of violence against them which included throwing acid and others burning materials, trafficking rape.

Other form of harassment

Among the respondents, 35.5% reported eve teasing, 11.3% harassment on road, 4.3% false promises in love affairs, 3% lured into marriage , 2.2% force conversion of religion,1.8% harassment in work place, 6.3% force sex work.

Harassment through social media

KII participant observed many people harassed the girls by sending nude pictures and videos, even many ones harassed me by sending nude pictures and videos. They are used to entice girls into adultery or love and sexual activities.

Deprivation of women

Among the respondents 47.5% respondents talked about deprivation in wage, 29.5% Deprivation from the father's property and 11.7% Deprivation from the husband's property and 11.3% did not respond.

Behaviors at police station

On facing obstacles at police station

Majority of the respondents (83.3%) preferred no answer in response to the question.. 12% said Yes, 0.7% said No.

During KII, participant informed that when the marginal woman victim goes to the police station alone, police misbehave especially while writing a statement. If marginal women go to the police station/village court with a local representative, the law and order forces take it very seriously.

The case of a Santal indigenous woman can help understand the situation at a police station. She went to work in a crop field that time a young person of the mainstream community raped her. She told this to her husband and they filed a police report. The woman described how she was treated at

the police station filling FIR. She had to tell what happened on her in front of three police officers separately. After giving a statement, one sent to another room to give same statement to other person. In this time, they were talking to themselves through wireless. After taking the statement, she was sent to the hospital for medical test. During this period, the police contacted the accused through the local union council. The woman did not know what was in the medical report. When she asked the police, they said there are a few symptoms of positive result. The verdict will not go in your favor. The police came to his house for investigation and spoke to the neighbours. Then the case was settled for Rs 2 lakh BDT with local mediation. Out of these two lakh BDT, the woman's family received only 80 thousand BDT

Awareness about the work of CSO in the working area

Out of the total respondents, 55.3% reported yes, they know the work of CSO and 39.3 % did not know the works of prospect project.

Awareness about national help desk number

Out of the total respondents, 33.5% reported yes, they know the national help desk number and 55 % did not know the number.

Among the respondent's knowledge of the National Help Desk number, 33.0% reported of 999, 3.2% reported of 333, 2.2% reported of 109 and 61.7% did not know about the service of National help desk number.

Seeking help from National Help Desk Number

The report says, no one has taken help from the national Help Desk number.

Knowledge about Legal Aid institution

The respondents knowledge of government legal aids has been tested. Among the total, 39.3% respondents kept silent and 34.5% respondents do not know the services. Only 9.3% responded about DLAC, 5.7% about UZLAC, 3% about Upazila Nari O shishu Nirjaton Protirodh Committee and 8.2% about Union Nari o Shishu Nirjaton Protirodh Committee has been reported.

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Research Initiatives Bangladesh (RIB's) activities on RTI law for the year 2023:

(1) In the year 2023, RIB has not received any RTI requests, however stakeholders who are promoting RTI law with whom RIB closely works have submitted several RTI requests to various authorities. The details of those are as follows:

RTI Application data breakdown

Area	General application	UNESCO template to assess RTI performance	Total Appeal	Total complaint
Rajshahi	280	140	01	01
Bogura	327	222	42	00
Rangpur	325	209	01	00
Dinajpur	841	761	330	82
Nilphamari	310	172	20	02
Moulvibazar	298	122	00	00
Jessore	30			
Dhaka		192		
Total RTI	2411	1818		
Grand total	**4229**		**394**	**85**

General applications breakdown at different levels

RTI requests at Unions/Pourashava	567 (23.5%)	Seeking primary information like services/benefits
RTI requests at Upazila level	1109 (46%)	Seeking primary information like services/benefits. Institutional accountability
RTI requests at District level	313 (13%)	Institutional accountability
RTI request at Divisional level	96 (4%)	Institutional accountability/Transparency
RTI requests at Ministry	309 (12.8%)	Transparency
RTI requests to NGOs/private organisations	17 (0.7%)	Seeking primary information/ Transparency
Total	**2411**	

2. RIB adopts following process to promote RTI law in Bangladesh

(1) Build the capacity of prospective RTI users to use RTI i.e. Right to Information Act on service delivery, accountability and transparency issues;

(2) Support and facilitate the filing of applications;

(3) Help deepen the process of RTI by addressing core issues of accountability and transparency;

(4) Continuous interaction between government and citizen through participation at various events which helps in reducing the gap and improve relationship between the two sides.

(5) Documentation and dissemination of the results derived through RTI requests fillings.

The core of RIB's RTI-related capacity-building activities has been to organize socially aware citizens/activists/ communities around principles of self-management through the process of Participatory Action Research. The groups are trained in the understanding and application of the Right to Information Act through an interactive process of internalizing the different clauses of the law with their own lived experiences. Through this hands-on training, they learn how to best frame their questions, how to address the appropriate authority and taught how to file applications in the correct way.

3. Activities performed in 2023

A. Day observations

Rally and discussion meetings were organized in 6 working districts to mark observations of Women's Day on 8th March, Labour Day on 01st May, World Environment Day on 05th June. There were mass gatherings during rallies. In these events discussions were made on importance of RTI to governance system which ultimately leads to protection and promotion of rights of women, worker. Additionally, participants in these events discussed about importance of preserving environment and dealing with issue of climate change and how RTI can be used to tackle problems that emanates from environment and climate change issues. During activities to observe World Environment Day, many school students in working districts planted large number of saplings and initiated meaningful discussions. These events saw presence of representatives from government authorities too, which provided an opportunity for government representatives and citizen to come together and interact on issues which affects everyone on large scale. These events provided good opportunity to create mass awareness on themes like promotion of workers' rights, RTI and climate induced disasters and state responsibility to ensure protection of its people.

B. Exchange learning visits

There were multiple exchange visits among districts with several RTI enthusiasts that took place in the year 2023. During these visits, RTI enthusiasts had opportunity to exchange views on their works on RTI as well as learnt on the techniques of making right kind of RTI requests, strategy to mitigate challenges, those may come along following submission of RTI requests. Additionally, the visiting RTI enthusiasts had opportunity to attend meetings, dialogues with government officers and people's representatives and other RTI users of the visiting area. It was a fruitful event as both sides had opportunity to share their experiences as well as took away the experiences from the districts they visited.

C. Courtyard meetings in villages

Courtyard meetings were held in villages of working districts to promote RTI at grassroot level. The



meetings were attended by the common people of the villages who mostly consist of local traders, school and colleague teachers, journalists, women, farmers, women leaders, CBOs representatives, daily wage earners, home makers, local leaders and workers. The purpose of these meetings was to promote RTI and increase its use among the grassroots people and after the meetings were held it has been observed that the use of RTI has been increased among the grassroot people from those areas. These meetings were turned out very effective as during meetings discussions were centered around to raise knowledge and awareness about RTI law as well as how effective implementation of RTI law can improve overall governance system and access to information can increase delivery of service in our country.

D. Monthly meetings of group members (RTI activists)

During the year 2023 several monthly meetings with RTI group members and enthusiasts were conducted through participatory process, discussions focusing on issues those were derived through monthly exercise of newspapers scanning as well as existing local pertinent issues or problems in the relevant working districts are taken into consideration for making requests and RTI has been submitted with a view to resolve such identified issues or problems. In such meetings, discussions are generally made on (a) further deepening of understanding on Right to Information Act 2009 and how the law is being implemented in the country including the right process to submit RTI (b) what are the pertinent issues in that particular district as well as nationally, against which RTI applications can be submitted in order to bring systemic change by improving governance and transparency culture (c) what were the outcomes of submitted RTI applications, learning and experiences of RTI activists in submitting these requests and challenges they face while making RTI requests are documented. This monthly exercise has proven to be very effective and result driven exercise which motivates RTI activists a great deal.

E. Dialogue between Government authority and RTI Activists, enthusiasts on functioning of RTI in working districts

Many Dialogue meetings were organised between government authorities and RTI activities as well as general publics in the year 2023. These meetings were organised in Rajshahi, Dinajpur, Rangpur, Bogura, Nilphamari and Moulvibazar districts, in these dialogue meetings government officers, civil society members and RTI activists from above-mentioned districts participated. The objective of the dialogue meetings were to create a space for demand and supply side to interact freely, at the same time to inform government officers about the challenges RTI activists are facing while submitting RTI requests in their offices, these meetings also served as a good mechanism to remove fear from citizens mind; exchange of experiences between demand and supply side also opened the windows of opportunities for existing users to increase use of the law as well as new activists to emerge. We have seen that after an open discussion between demand and supply side during these dialogue meetings, submission of RTI to those government offices later on yielded more responses and an improved relationship emerged between two sides.

F. Impact study

A Consultant has been engaged to evaluate the impact of RTI related projects those RIB implemented over the last few years. The Consultant visited working areas and conducted FGD, stakeholders' meetings and so on to collect data and case studies to furnish a final report to assess how RTI is functioning in those working districts, what are the challenges, RTI users are facing as well as to make future recommendations on the same.

G. Interactive theatre on RTI:

In the year 2023 interactive theatre on RTI were organised in Dinajpur and Moulvibazar. A drama script on RTI was prepared and it was presented before large number of audiences by performing actors. These events were quite successful because a large number of people could easily connect to the script (prepared on how they are faring in their daily lives) and at the end of the drama a discussion was initiated as to where we are now in terms of governance system and what needs to be done to bring a systemic change in the country. In each district the public drama took place in open space and there were gathering of nearly 300-500 people who received messages on RTI.



H. National Seminar

A national seminar was held in Dhaka at the end of July 2023. There were nearly 60 participants comprising of representatives from civil society, journalists, RTI activists from 6 districts, human rights defenders, representatives from INGOs, bureaucrats and former Chief Information Commissioner, Convener of RTI Forum participated in the event. The seminar was organized to disseminate findings of a just concluded project. A meaningful discussion took place where participants spoke about their experiences of using RTI in their daily works and how it has evolved as a necessary tool for establishing transparency, accountability as well as the challenges those mired effective use of RTI regime in Bangladesh.



I. Book and leaflet publication on RTI

RIB published a total of 500 books on Use of RTI and 1000 leaflet on RTI and its related theme was printed in the year 2023 and disseminated to the large number of publics. We are confident that the published book is going to be very useful to the readers because it covers all possible issues and matters under the RTI law relating to demand side (general people), supply side (designated officers) and adjudicatory body (information commission). This book gives comprehensive idea on RTI along with a global picture of RTI and a kind of hands on resource material to self-educate on concept of RTI.

J. Road Show and information fair on RTI to celebrate Right to Know Day

A road show and information fair on RTI was organized by RIB in Dinajpur and Moulvibazar Districts. That while covering various Upazilas in these districts' participants were able to spread message and awareness on RTI as well as discussed on the process of filling RTI to concerned authority. Through this attempt approximately thousands of people were able to receive messages and learn about RTI. This was regarded by most people as one of the effective mechanisms for spreading awareness on RTI law. The road show was comprised of local folk songs on RTI and discussion program. There was participation by the government offices in these programs. Through these events it was possible to disseminate knowledge on RTI law and motivate people for greater use of the law to increase demand.

K. Training on RTI and follow up

In the year 2023, RIB provided trainings and follow up trainings to local people including teachers, journalists, local and community leaders, students, representatives of CBOs, women leaders, homemakers, tea workers, different labours and few organizations working on various themes also received RTI trainings during the above-mentioned period. These trainings were provided in persons in the local area of working districts.

L. RTI Resource Centre

RTI Resource Centre in Dinajpur district has been established by local RTI activists voluntarily, these RTI activists are closely working with RIB. Such resource centers have been established to answer queries on process of drafting and filling RTI, development initiatives, social service as provided by government and any other information which needs to be given including assisting in filling RTI application. At resource centre activists make people aware about RTI law and helping them in filling up RTI form, appeal and complaint and keeping records of it. That resource centre has been prepared in a way to display some good number of information on service related matters from government to the general public.

M. RTI Booth Camps and workshops



During the year 2023 RIB organized various RTI Booth Camps and Workshops in 6 districts namely Moulvibazar, Bogura, Rangpur, Nilphamari, Rajshahi, Dinajpur. These events were organized to create awareness among general public and to provide hands-on experience on correct process to write RTI applications. These events helped in developing skills of people in understanding the objectives of RTI and process to correctly use it.

N. Monthly publication on use and status of RTI in the Daily Star newspaper.

RTI team at RIB regularly writes a column on RTI which is published in The Daily Star newspaper on 15th of every month. In the year 2023, twelve monthly articles on various important issues encompassing RTI were published. Copies of above articles published in 2023 are available at RIB's website: **www.rib-rtibangladesh.org**.

Impact of RTI intervention (Case studies)

(1) Intervention leads to improvement in the health sector

In Dinajpur Sadar, citizens were experiencing dissatisfaction with the quality of healthcare services provided by local government. Reports of inadequate medical supplies, lack of cleanliness, and insufficient staff were widespread. The lack of transparency regarding healthcare budgets and service standards further exacerbated the concerns of the community. In response to these challenges, a concerned citizen decided to utilize the Right to Information (RTI) Act of 2009. She filed an RTI application with the relevant public authorities, seeking information about the allocated healthcare budgets, expenditures, and the established service standards for local healthcare facilities in Dinajpur Sadar. The RTI application aimed to shed light on the financial allocations and guidelines for healthcare service delivery.

The RTI application had a notable impact on the quality of healthcare services in Dinajpur Sadar. Upon receiving the RTI request, the public authorities were prompted to review their healthcare budgets and service standards. This review led to increased transparency and accountability in resource allocation and

management. The information obtained through the RTI application exposed gaps and inefficiencies in the healthcare system, which then became the focus of corrective measures.

As a result of the increased scrutiny and awareness facilitated by the RTI application, there were visible improvements in the quality of healthcare services and facilities. Medical supplies were replenished, cleanliness and hygiene were emphasized, and efforts were made to ensure that staffing levels met the established standards. The public pressure generated by the RTI application played a crucial role in pushing for these improvements.

(2) Government incentives for Indigenous Communities

In Godagari, Rajshahi, indigenous communities, such as the Santhal community, often faced marginalization and lack of access to government incentives meant to uplift their living standards. These incentives were intended to address issues related to housing, clean water, education, and vocational training. However, due to limited information and awareness, these communities were often unaware of their entitlements. To address this issue and empower the marginalized Santhal community, a proactive individual from the community decided to leverage the Right to Information (RTI) Act of 2009. He submitted an RTI application to the relevant government authorities, seeking specific information about the allocations and incentives meant for the Santhal community in Godagari. The aim was to uncover the details of these incentives and ensure that the community could benefit from them. The information obtained through the RTI application had a profound impact on the Santhal community. Armed with the knowledge of their entitlements, community leaders and members were able to engage with the government more effectively and advocate for their rights. The information revealed by the RTI request showed that the community was indeed entitled to various incentives, including housing support, clean water initiatives, scholarships for students, and vocational training programs for women.

(3)A much timely intervention by local citizens

Saidpur Upazila in Nilphamari district is densely populated city and it was noticed that residents' plots were used to keep dangerous chemical goods which might severe accident anytime. Following an intervention through RTI, local authority prohibited practice of storing such dangerous chemical in residential houses. In Saidpur area, traders and dealers used to handle dangerous chemical in residential surroundings, they would even store huge containers of gas in residential buildings which they would supply to nearly districts. Due to this people living in those areas used to live in constant fear. Most of such traders/dealers/business persons used to operate those warehouses without any permit from government authority. Many times, there had been news in the newspaper regarding this but authority paid no heed to that. Even some of the warehouses to store dangerous chemicals were built illegally on railways land. Hence RTI activists from Saidpur submitted RTI applications seeking information on permission to given to how many people to build warehouse on railway property to store chemical hazards and in case of any explosion or severe disaster which authority or private person would be held responsible for that? They further sought copy of permission letters too. Following submission of these RTI, Railway authority through mobile court launched investigation and demolished few warehouses built illegally, as well as those who were operating illegally by storing chemical hazards gave written undertaking

The RIB Secretariat / 2023

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Name	**Designation**
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