

## **Programmed Initiatives for Monga Eradication (PRIME): Design and Challenges**

**Jashim Uddin**

As an effort to eradicate *monga* permanently, a seasonal-cum-chronic poverty in the northwestern part of Bangladesh, Palli Karma-Sahayak Foundation (PKSF) has launched its programmed efforts in 2006. The focus has been kept on rescuing the poorest of the poor from income deficiency through giving them seed money wherever applicable and managing and/or linking them to 'protection nets' in the most vulnerable cases. Through the 'Programmed Initiatives for Monga Eradication' as has been named the program, the apex institution also has vowed to make a convergence of agencies/programs/projects working for the same cause.

The objectives of the program have been framed keeping in consideration the causes and consequences of *monga*. Although the poverty and food insecurity indicators used by the World Food Program were applied in the selection of the program location, but the program participants were selected through focus group discussion and census/survey. The data collected helped determine severity of *monga*-vulnerability of the population. In 2005 a census was conducted in Lalmonirhat district, while prior to expansion of the program to the rest four districts of Greater Rangpur, a survey, preceded by focus group discussions, was conducted in the selected areas (upazilas). In 23 upazilas of five districts of Greater Rangpur 1,27,306 severely *monga*-affected people, living below poverty line, have been identified. The PRIME has covered the areas with its program-nets.

The activities can be put in two broad categories: (i) year round: suitable microcredit services including consumer loans; establishment of labor-intensive small industries; support services in income generating activities such as poultry and livestock, vegetable cultivation, and crop diversification; and remittance services for the beneficiary families suffering economic migration; (ii) lean season: emergency loan; investment in infrastructure building such as raising the plinths and /or grounds of homesteads, schools, *madrashas*, mosques, and village markets; construction of flood shelters, repairing roads and dams; and cleaning ponds, canals, lakes, etc.

In the selection of the organizations to implement the activities some defined criteria were followed. Six partner organizations implemented the pilot program in Lalmonirhat district in 2006. In Lalmonirhat 53,013 *monga*-affected people were organized in 2054 groups. Among them 32,398 ultra poor were given Tk 168.3 million flexible loan for income generation. Emergency loan of Tk 8.58 million was given to 6,083 people. The borrowers used the microcredit loan in various crop and non-crop activities. As of 30 November 2007, the borrowers had 177 papaya gardens, 927 fishery projects, 176 day-old chick rearing units, 2,558 homestead gardening spots, 22 nurseries, and 9 apiculture projects. As part of crop diversification initiative the borrowers were given 24,007 cassava tubers to popularize its cultivation.

Now 11 organizations are implementing the PRIME activities in all the five districts of Greater Rangpur. In the 'Cash for Work' program designed for the severely *monga*-affected people towards ensuring their food security by involving them in local infrastructure development activities, 4.46 million man-days of work were created in two lean seasons of 2006 and 2007. Employment was created for 115,000 people with an investment of Tk 298 million.

From an implementer's view, it has been seen that the program has significant impact in *monga* mitigation. No man died in *monga*-starvation in the last two years. PRIME and other programs along with the government initiatives undoubtedly accrue credits for it.

Towards elimination of *monga* there is still a long way to go. PKSF sees the way as a continuous process where coordination among the stakeholders is a must. Thus, the eradication of *monga* or the success of PRIME largely depends on the efficient and synchronized coordination among the stakeholders and efficiently tackling of the challenges and providing demand-driven services to the beneficiaries.

The challenges ahead, among many, are ensuring continuous and concerted interventions, effectively imparting awareness, asset building, technology and skill development, and creation of full-time optimum employment through establishing/helping to establish adequate number of suitable industries, linking workforces of the region to wider job market inclusive of Ready-made Garment Sector in urban centers and remittance abroad, fabricating appropriate channel to ensure needed quality inputs to their IGAs and market linkages for their products, ensuring something for those who are not economically active, particularly mentally or physically retarded people, the children and the elderly ones. PKSF has reached understanding with some agencies to work together towards *monga* eradication.