

Thinking Millennium Development Goals: Views of Grass- root Level Development Workers

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Abstract

Poverty is one of the biggest problem of Bangladesh. Creating employment opportunities in the rural areas could help improve poverty situation in the country. Human resource development through expansion of quality education could also help in this regards. Women's education facilities and health services need to be increased for their empowerment and reduce maternal mortality. Nutrition education and consciousness of parents could help reduce child mortality and reduce malnutrition of the children. Low cost drinking and sanitary material could also help ensure access to safe drinking water and environmental sanitation. At the grass root level linkage between GO and NGOs in implementing development activities could also play a vital role for rural development and poverty reduction in Bangladesh.

1. Introduction

The Millennium Declaration adopted by all 191 member states of the United Nations commits them to put in place measures necessary to attain peace, security and development. The declaration was further elaborated in the subsequent UN Secretary General's report entitled "A Road Map Towards the Implementation of the UN Millennium Declaration". Arising out of these two declarations and on the basis of further consultations and agreement reached between the UN, OECD/DAC, World Bank and IMF, eight target-oriented Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) were formulated as a set of quantifiable and time-bound goals for significantly improving human lives by 2015.

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As the international community's negotiated set of quantifiable and time-bound targets for reducing poverty, the MDGs offer a unique framework to guide development planning, resource allocation, and higher resource mobilization in low income developing countries like Bangladesh. They enable all actors in the development process to shift from asking "how well can Bangladesh do with respect to the MDGs with its given constraints?" to asking: "in order to achieve the MDGs, what does Bangladesh need to do?" (GoB: 2009).

On the eve of new millennium, Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) emerged as a guideline for reducing poverty for the developing countries. There are 08 goals which would be achieved with in 2015. The goals are: (i) Eradicate extreme poverty and hunger, (ii) Achieve universal primary education, (iii) Promote gender equality and empower women, (iv) Reduce child mortality, (v) Improve maternal health, (vi) Combat HIV/Aids, malaria and others diseases, (vii) Ensure environmental sustainability, (viii) Develop a global partnership for development. Based on the mentioned goals, Government of Bangladesh prepared Interim Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (IPRSP) in 2004 and it was finalized in 2005 as Poverty Reduction Strategy (PRS). PRS is comprehensive, it has strategic goals and targets, those are action oriented. Continuous feedback and monitoring system has also introduced in the PRS. The whole planning process was participatory in nature. Government provides more and more emphasis to achieve targets of the goals. To achieve the goals Government has been taken anti-poverty policies. The major policies were (i) increasing income and employment opportunities for economically pro-poor, (ii) human development of the poor for raising their capability through education, health, nutrition and social interventions, (iii) women's advancement and closing of gender gaps in development, (iv) social safety nets to the poor, and (v) participatory governance and enhance voice to the poor. Bangladesh government have already completed first phase of PRS in 2008 and second phase of PRS is going on. An attempt was made through this study to know the views of grassroots level development workers and beneficiaries about those goals as well as action needed to achieve the goals.

2. Objectives of the Study

The objectives of the study were (i) to know the views of grassroots level development workers about practical implications of Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and Poverty Reduction Strategy (PRS) and (ii) to make suggestions based on the identified issues related to field level works to help achieve targets of eight goals.

3. Methodology of the Study

A total of 100 mid and junior level field workers and beneficiaries of different Government and Non-Government Organizations (NGOs) and development projects participated in different training courses at Bangladesh Academy for Rural Development (BARD), Comilla were selected as respondents. Fifty seven field level workers of Sunamgonj Community Based Resource Management Project (SCBRMP) under LGED, 18 participants of Good Governance course(GG), 14 participants of Gender and Development (GD) course, 11 participants of *Pani Babostapona Samabay Samity (PBSS)* under Second Small Scale Water Resource Development Sector Project of LGED were interviewed with a structured questionnaire. Data were collected in the year 2009-2010. Collected data were presented in tables, graphs and charts. Simple statistical tools such as, percent, average were used to interpret findings of the study. The data were also tabulated by the researchers themselves.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1 Rural Poverty

Poverty is one of the biggest problems of the country. It hinders socio-economic development of the people. Reducing poverty is one of the major precondition for development of a country. Therefore, eradication of extreme poverty and hunger is mentioned as the first goals of Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). In Bangladesh 40% population were bellow poverty line in 2005 and it was targeted in the PRS to reduce poverty at 29.4% and extreme poverty at 14% by the year 2015(GoB, 2007).

4.1.1 Causes of Rural Poverty

In this study an attempt was made to know the root causes of poverty in the rural areas. Accordingly it was found that a number of causes were directly or indirectly responsible for rural poverty. It was observed from the Table-1 that lack of employment opportunities (22.11%) in the rural areas was identified by the respondents as the top most cause of poverty.

Table-1: Causes of Rural Poverty

No	Causes of rural poverty	No. of responses					Percentage
		GD	GG	PBSS	SCBRMP	Total	
01	Lack of employment opportunities	12	08	07	38	65	22.11
02	Lack of education	06	10	5	35	56	19.05
03	Natural disaster	03	06	01	31	41	13.94
04	Lack of self initiatives	10	03	01	10	14	7.82
05	Excess population	04	01	02	16	23	5.44
06	Lack of investment capacity	01	-	01	14	16	8.16
07	Location (saline, haor, river, slum, char)	03	03	-	08	24	4.76
08	Lack of skill	03	-	01	09	13	4.42
09	Lack of physical resources (land)	01	-	03	09	13	4.42
10	Lack of good transportation system	-	03	-	08	11	3.34
11	Lack of technology	01	-	02	04	07	2.38
12	Low wages	02	-	-	02	04	1.36
13	Others	01	01	01	04	07	2.38
	Total	47	35	24	188	294	100.00

Lack of education, natural disaster, lack of self initiatives to work by the rural people are also identified as the causes of poverty. Beyond these, excess population, lack of investment capacity, lack of skill, lack of physical resources and backward geographic location are also responsible for rural poverty.

4.1. 2 Poverty Incidences on Male and Female

In Bangladesh women are the most vulnerable section in the male dominated society. Socio-economically, culturally and politically they are deprived. In this study it was found that most of the respondents identified that 92% women of the rural areas are mostly affected by the incidence of poverty (Figure-1).

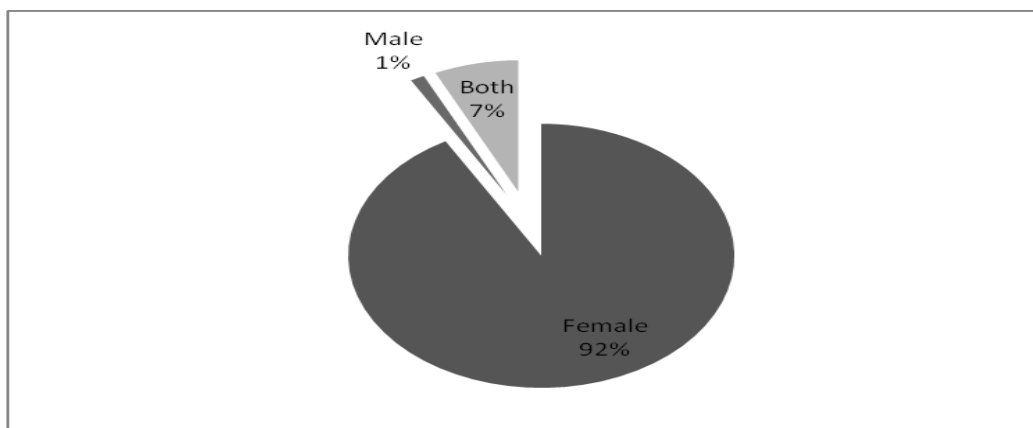


Figure-1: Vulnerability on Male and Female

To reduce rural poverty action should be taken to improve socio-economic conditions of rural women. There are different socio-economic factors those are responsible to make rural women vulnerable. Adverse social environment, lack of opportunities for education and lack of employment opportunities for women, lack of participation in decision making process are identified as the most dominant factors that leads to women's vulnerability.

4.1.3 Causes of Poverty Incidences

It was observed from the Figure 1 that women are the most vulnerable of poverty incidence. In the Table-2 an attempt was made to find out the causes of poverty incidences on rural women. Social barriers of women to participate in development activities are identified as the top most cause of poverty incidences on rural women. Lack of education and skill, lack of employment opportunity for women are also mentioned as the important causes of poverty incidences. Beyond these, dependency of women on men, lack of recognition of family works, unequal wage and poverty right, to take care more children, lack of participation in decision making and lack of capital access are also identified causes of incidences of poverty of rural women.

Table-2: Causes of Poverty Incidences

No	Causes	No. of responses					Percentage
		GD	GG	PBSS	SCBRMP	Total	
01	Social barriers to participate in development activities	08	03	02	44	57	27.68
02	Lack of education and skill	03	04	06	36	49	23.79
03	Lack of employment opportunity for women	08	07	04	24	43	20.87
04	Dependency on male	-	-	-	11	11	5.34
05	Lack of recognition of family works	03	01	-	07	11	5.34
06	Unequal wage and property right	02	03	-	06	11	5.34
07	Taking care more children	02	01	-	06	09	4.36
08	Lack of decision making capacity	-	05	02	01	08	3.88
09	Lack of capital	-	01	02	04	07	3.40
	Total	26	25	16	139	206	100.00

4.1.4 Action Needed to Reduce Rural Poverty

Reduction of poverty is the first goal of MDGs. Therefore, to reduce poverty appropriate action needed to be undertaken. According to the respondent, skill development training (21.09%) for IGA is the most important actions considered to reduce rural poverty, create employment

opportunities (20.36%) for rural women is also another important action to reduce poverty.

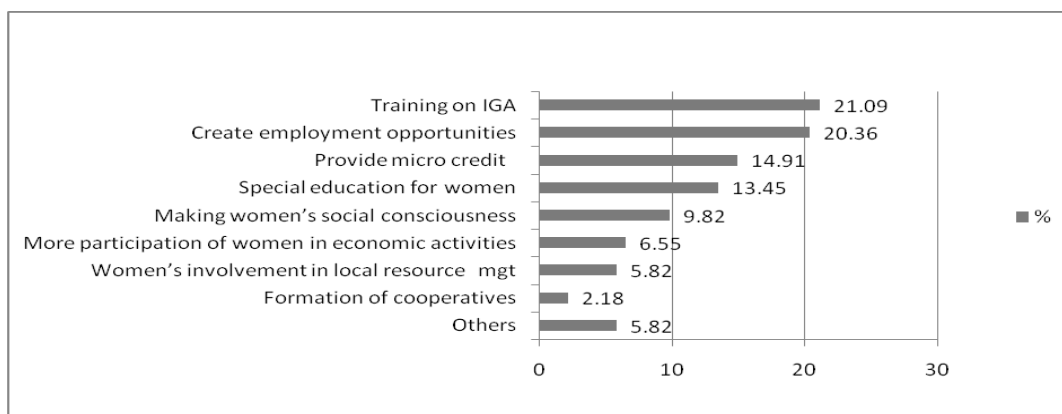


Figure-2: Action Needed to Reduce Rural Poverty

In the rural area beyond household works there are lacks of employment opportunities for the women. Micro credit distribution for self employment, implementation of education program, empowering women through social consciousness development, ensuring more participation of women in economic activities are also considered to reduce poverty in the rural area.

4.2 Achieve Universal Primary Education

Getting access to basic education is a fundamental human right of every citizen of a country. This fundamental right has been denied to a large section of the population living below the poverty line in many developing countries of the world including Bangladesh. Acute poverty in their families may be singled out as the major cause behind such a situation. Recognizing the critical importance of transforming them into effective human resources and thereby making them worthy citizens, the Millennium Summit that held in Dakar in 2000 declared 'achieving universal primary education' as one of its major agendas. As set out in the Millennium Declaration this goal, known as MDG2, has the goal of providing access to primary education to all by the year 2015. Bangladesh, as a signatory to the Dakar declaration, expressed a strong commitment towards achieving the goal of universal primary education which has sustainable positive implications for reduction in poverty by significantly large margin (GoB: 2009).

4.2.1 Attendance at Primary School

Primary school enrollment in the rural area has increased and at the same time drop out has also been reduced. It was found that enrollment rate in primary school was 87.2% in 2005 .It was expected that with in 2015 enrollment rate will be 100% and drop out rate will be 0%.(GoB,PRS:2007). It is due to different initiatives of the government help increase enrolment of student in the primary school. Female

scholarship program of the government help enrolling more girls at high school than the boys.

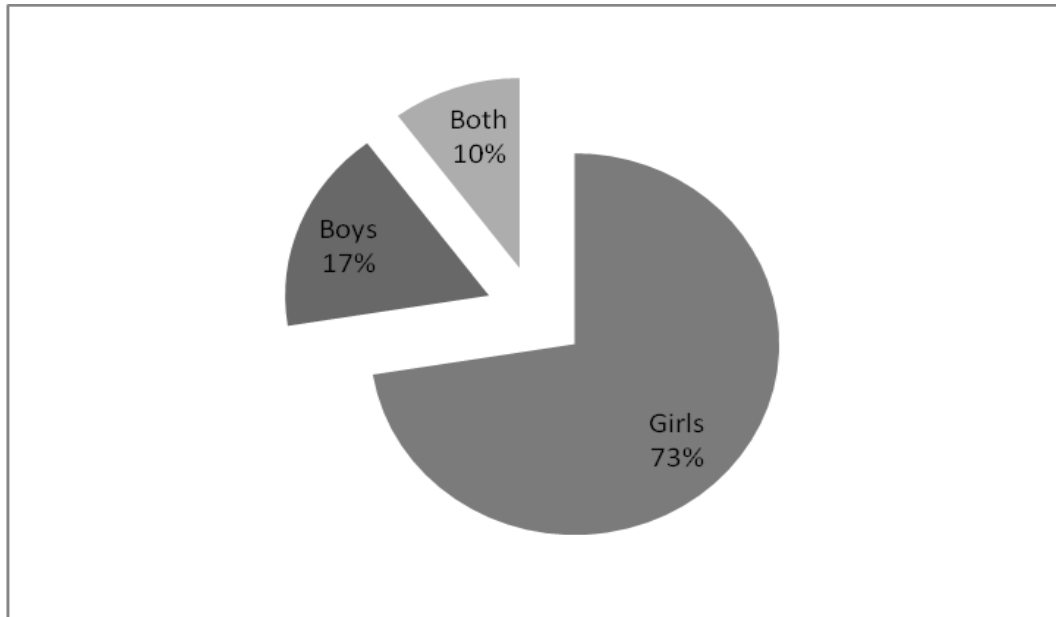


Figure-3: Sex Based Students at School

The Figure-3 shows that in the rural area girls enrolment rate is 73% and boys enrolment rate is 17%, which indicate positive scenario for achieving MDGs goal in the field of universal education.

4.2.2 Causes of Low Literacy Rate of Adult

The Table 3 revealed that poverty (31.41%) is the most important factor which causes for low adult literacy rate in rural area. The Table 3 also revealed that lack of consciousness of the parents, distance of school from home specially for *haor* or hilly areas, involvement in domestic work at early age, etc are the notable factors of low adult literacy rate in the rural areas.

Table-3: Causes of Low Rate of Education of Adults

No	Causes	No. of responses					Percentage
		GD	GG	PBSS	SCBRMP	Total	
01	Poverty	08	07	09	36	60	31.41
02	Lack of guardian's consciousness	10	05	02	41	58	30.37
03	School at distance place	03	03	03	30	39	20.42
04	Involve in domestic works at early age	05	04	-	14	23	12.05
05	Lack of teacher at primary school	-	01	-	07	08	4.19
06	Others	03	-	-	-	03	1.57
	Total	29	20	14	128	191	100.00

4.2.3 Causes of Low Literacy Rate of Rural Women

Rural adult women are illiterate (48.82%) as compare to men (58.48%) (BBS: 2007). To identify the causes of low literacy rate of rural women it was found that engaging domestic works and earning at early age as child labor are the main causes of low literacy of rural women. Giving less importance on girl students, lack of consciousness of the parents, early marriage of girl students are also the important causes of illiteracy of women in the rural area (Table-4).

Table- 4: Causes of Low Education Rate of Rural Women

No	Causes	No. of responses					Percentage
		GD	GG	PBSS	SCBRMP	Total	
01	Engage in domestic work at early age	07	11	07	33	58	45.32
02	Less importance on girls education	01	01	-	19	21	16.41
03	Lack of consciousness	03	03	01	09	16	12.50
04	Early marriage of girl students	02	-	01	13	16	12.50
05	Social constraints	03	02	01	03	09	7.03
06	Others	04	01	01	02	08	6.24
07	Total	20	18	11	79	128	100.00

4.2.4 Measures to Increase Literacy Rate

Education is considered as the basic element of human resource development. Therefore, it is essential to increase literacy rate of the country. Respondents mentioned that making consciousness of the parents about girl's education is the most important measure to increase literacy rate of the country. They also mentioned that giving common scholarship for all poor students, ensure life oriented quality education through involving more teachers, development of transportation facilities in the *haor* and hilly areas will play important role to increase literacy rate in the rural area (Table-5).

Table-5: Measures to Increase Literacy Rate

No	Measures	No. of responses					Percentage
		GD	GG	PBSS	SCBRMP	Total	
01	Make concisions of parents about girls' education	10	06	05	48	69	48.25
02	Common scholarship for all school students	06	12	07	20	45	31.47
03	Ensure life oriented quality education for teachers	03	04	-	12	15	13.23
04	Development of transportation systems	-	02	-	06	08	5.59
05	Others	01	-	-	01	02	1.40
	Total	20	24	12	87	143	100.00

4.3. Gender Equality and Empowerment of Women

Women in Bangladesh are becoming increasingly visible in economic spheres, and in practically in all spheres of the development women are contributing to the growth of economy. But reality is that despite the large scale involvement of women in economic activities "women are ignored socially, politically, deprived legally, exploited economically." It is against this that the situation of the girl's and women's socio-economic and political status needs to be understood.

In terms of MDGs there are several areas where women are at a disadvantage and gender gaps are apparent. While the country remains broadly on track ensuing gender equity in basic education, there are some significant challenges that need to be addressed. These include the strengthening opportunities through increased awareness to effectively sustain post-primary education for girls, the weak transition of girls to tertiary level education and the workplace, high levels of female youth unemployment and underemployment, involve more women in productive income generating activities, providing women with child care, low levels of female participation in political and high public office, reduction of violence and mainstreaming of gender (GoB:009).

Gender Equality in Education and Other Socio-Economic Aspects

Minimizing gender gap between men and women regarding socio-economic activities MDGs play a vital role for over all development of the country. According to PRS female and male ratio in primary, secondary and tertiary level were 53:47, 50:50, and 36:64 respectably which are targeted to make those as 50:50, 50:50 and 50:50 by 2015(GoB,2007). However, due to different social constraint, women are lack behind their men counterparts. It is pointed out that increase consciousness of women and develop human rights will help minimizing gender gap between men and women. More participation of women, creating equal opportunity of women at work, reduction of socio-economic constraints of women through education and training which will help in development activities are identify as the factors to achieve gender equality between men and women (Table-6).

Table-6: Achieving Gender Equality in Education and Other Socio-economic Aspects

No	Measures	No. of responses					Percentage
		GD	GG	PBSS	SCBRMP	Total	
01	Increase consciousness and develop human rights	07	11	04	20	42	32.81
02	More participation of women in development activities	02	03	05	25	35	27.34
03	Equal opportunity at work	04	05	01	12	22	17.19
04	Reduce socio-economic constraints	01	02	01	05	09	7.03
05	Enact and implementation of lows	03	01	01	01	06	4.69
06	Compulsory education for all	-	03	02	01	06	4.69
07	Others	02	-	-	06	08	6.25
08	Total	17	27	14	70	128	100.00

4.3.2 Measures to Increase Women's Empowerment

Expansion of women's education is considered as an instrument to increase women's empowerment. Creating employment for women and make equal opportunities of work for men and women is also important to increase women's empowerment in the rural area. Providing financial assistance or credit supports, involvement of women in decision making process, are also considered to empower rural women (Table-7).

Table - 7: Measure to Increase Women's Empowerment

No	Measures	No. of responses					Percentage
		GD	GG	PBSS	SCBRMP	Total	
01	Expansion of women's education	05	08	05	25	43	41.35
02	Create employment for women	01	09	01	15	26	25.00
03	Equal opportunity for man & women	04	-	01	14	19	18.27
04	Involve women in decision making	04	01	-	02	07	6.73
05	Provide financial assistance for women	-	04	01	01	06	5.77
06	Others	01	01	01	-	03	2.88
	Total	15	23	09	57	104	100.00

4.4 Child Mortality

4.4.1 Major Causes of Child Mortality

The Table-8 shows that child malnutrition (26.91%) is one of the major causes of child mortality in the rural area. Lack of parent's consciousness about child care (22.89%), lack of health services (17.67%), lack of trained midwife (10.04%), early marriage of girls (8.03%), lack of pure drinking water (6.02%) are the considered as causes of child mortality in the rural areas.

Table-8: Major Causes of Child Mortality

No	Measures	No. of responses					Percentage
		GD	GG	PBSS	SCBRMP	Total	
01	Malnutrition	07	07	07	46	67	26.91
02	Lack of parent's consciousness on child care	11	11	03	32	57	22.89
03	Lack of health service	06	08	04	26	44	17.67
04	Lack of trained midwife	03	02	-	20	25	10.04
05	Early marriage of girls	03	02	02	13	20	8.03
06	Lack of pure drinking water	01	-	-	14	15	6.02
07	Poverty	02	02	02	02	08	3.21
08	Other	05	-	01	07	13	5.22
	Total	38	32	19	160	249	100.00

4.4.2 Reduction of Child Mortality

Reduction of child mortality is one of the important indicators of development. Reduce child mortality is also an important goal of MDGs. In Bangladesh, infant mortality rate per thousand live birth is 45 (BBS, 2007) which is higher than any developed country. It was targeted to reduce at 31 by 2015 (GoB, 2007). According to the respondents, increasing health facilities for mother and children (31.34%), developing consciousness (28.36%) among the parents, improving nutrition level of the children (20.04%), increase service of trained birth attendance and others can reduce child mortality in the rural areas (Figure-4).

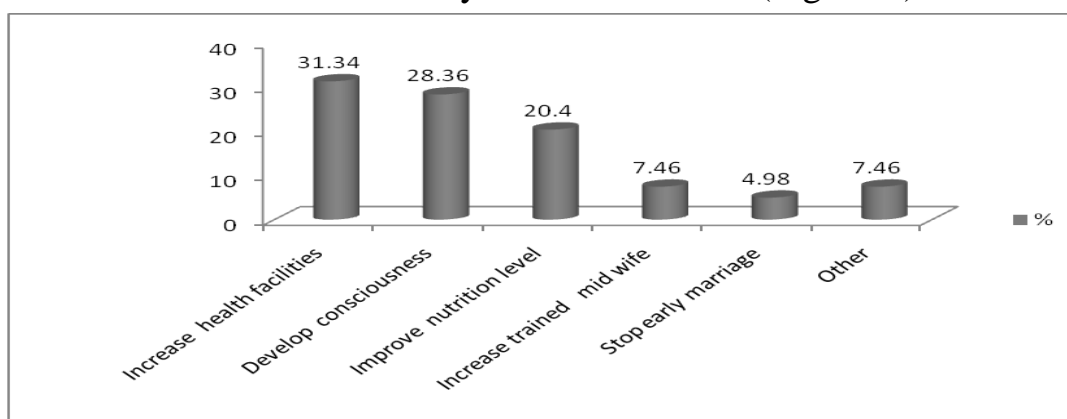


Figure-4: Reduction of Child Mortality

4.5 Maternal Health

4.5.1 Improvement of Maternal Health

Maternal health is very much related to child health development. Maternal mortality rate per 100000 women on live birth was 298 in 2006 and targeted to reduce at 143 by 2015 (GoB, 2007). Overall improvement of maternal health is very much essential for healthy child. Providing health services at grass root level and providing health education to the mother are mentioned as the important measures for improvement of maternal health. Implementing nutrition program, reduction of early marriage may help improvement of maternal health (Table-9).

Table -9: Action to Improve Maternal Health

No	Action needed	No. of responses				Total	Percentage
		GD	GG	PBSS	SCBRMP		
01	Provide health services at grass root level	08	10	07	25	50	29.95
02	Provide health education	05	03	-	33	41	24.55
03	More nutrition program	03	07	02	28	40	23.96
04	Reduce early marriage	01	03	-	19	23	13.77
05	Others	03	02	03	04	13	07.78
06	Total	20	26	12	109	167	100.00

4.5.2 Reduction of Violence against Women

Violence against women is considered as a hindrance for social development. Government has enacted laws and other support services to reduce violence against women. According to the Table 10, development of social consciousness through training (55.94%), enact and implement law (20.98%), increase women's education (15.48%) can help reduce violence against women in the rural areas.

Table-10: Reduction of Violence against Women

No	Causes	No. of responses					Percentage
		GD	GG	PBSS	SCBRMP	Total	
01	Social consciousness through training	12	14	05	49	80	55.94
02	Enact and implement law	05	04	04	17	30	20.98
03	Increase women's education	01	02	04	15	22	15.38
04	Others	-	01	02	08	11	07.70
05	Total	18	21	15	89	143	100.00

4.6 Combat Epidemics and Communicable Diseases

Diarrhoea is a common epidemic in the rural areas of Bangladesh. It is considered as one of the water borne diseases. Most epidemics in our country spread out from food, water, sanitation. Therefore, increase health consciousness through training and motivation, provide facilities for safe drinking water, providing improve sanitary materials and improve health services can combat epidemics and other communicable disease (Table-11).

Table-11: Combat Epidemics and Communicable Diseases

No	Measures	No. of responses					Percentage
		GD	GG	PBSS	SCBRMP	Total	
01	Make health conscious and practice good hygiene	13	16	05	20	54	38.18
02	Provide facilities for safe water	04	06	02	28	40	25.32
03	Provide improve sanitary material	03	05	02	27	37	23.42
04	Provide improve health services	06	04	04	13	27	17.08
	Total	26	31	13	88	158	100.00

4.7 Ensure Safe Drinking Water

Safe drinking water is a part of environmental sustainability. In Bangladesh 99.9 % urban and 79% rural people have access to safe drinking water (GoB, 2007). In the rural areas arsenic contamination is a big problem. To ensure safe drinking water in the rural areas, development of low cost infrastructure is a must. Making consciousness of the people about arsenic in drinking water can ensure safe drinking water (Table-12).

Table-12: Ensuring Safe Drinking Water

No	Activities needed for safe drinking water	No. of responses					Percentage
		GD	GG	PBSS	SCBRMP	Total	
01	Develop infrastructure for safe drinking water	17	12	12	53	94	68.61
02	Make consciousness about arsenic	02	06	01	07	16	11.68
03	Use surface water	03	-	02	09	14	10.22
04	Others	02	01	01	09	13	09.49
	Total	24	19	16	78	137	100.00

4.8 Ensuring Better Sanitation

Better sanitation is another part of sustainable environment. In Bangladesh 88% urban and 85% rural have access to improve sanitation (GoB, 2007). Providing low cost sanitation material to the poor rural households, making conscious about good sanitation and hygiene practice through training and motivation can ensure better sanitation (Figure-5).

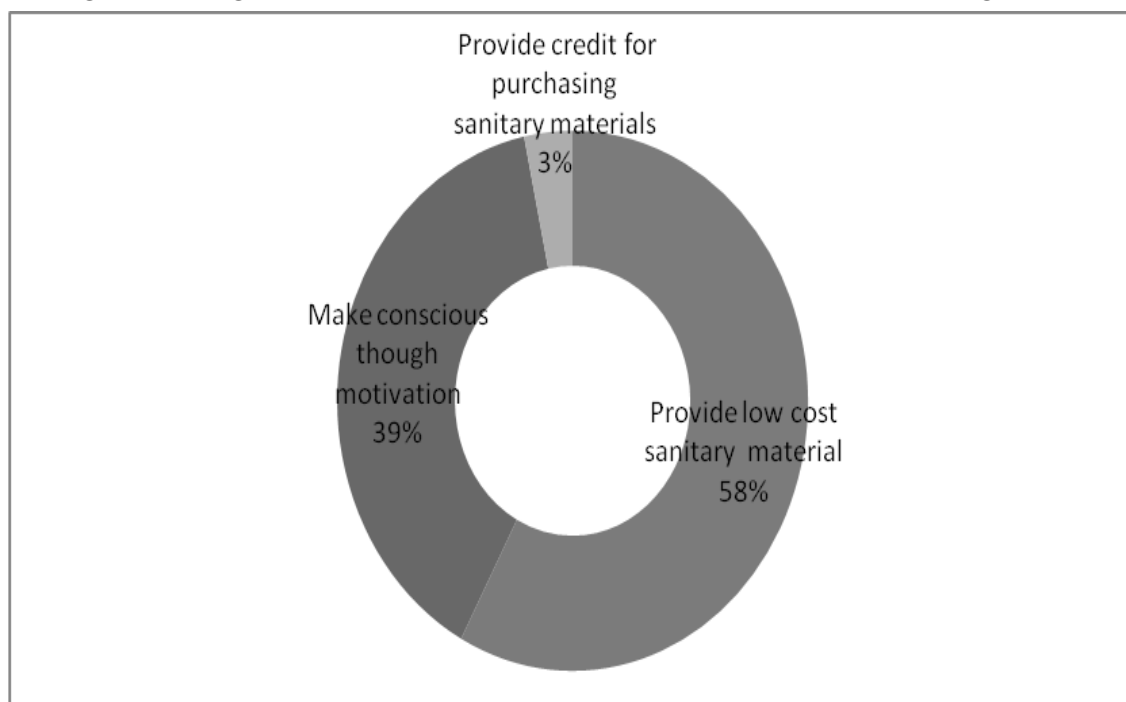


Figure-5: Ensuring Better Sanitation

4.9 Partnership for Development

Integrated efforts made by different organizations are very much essential for development of an area. Coordination among different development organizations working at the grassroots level can play vital role in this regard. Increase linkage of grassroots organizations with government departments and NGOs, making different development organizations at grass root level can help development of an area (Table-13).

Table- 13: Partnership for Development

No	Measures	No. of responses					Percentage
		GD	GG	PBSS	SCBRMP	Total	
01	Coordination among different development organizations	06	06	02	27	41	26.97
02	Increase linkage of grassroots organizations with GO-NGOs	04	05	03	27	39	25.66
03	Making organization at grass root level	08	07	08	33	56	36.84
04	Others	02	03	02	09	16	10.53
	Total	20	21	15	96	152	100.00

5. Conclusion and Recommendations:

Poverty is one of the biggest problems of the country. Lack of employment opportunities, lack of education, natural disaster etc is the most common causes of poverty. Different actions like training on IGA, create employment opportunities, providing credit may help reduce rural poverty. Poverty is also considered as the main reason for illiteracy in the society. Lack of guardians consciousness, engage of girl's in domestic works at the early age, giving less importance on girls education are most important causes of illiteracy of women, however making conscious of parents about girls education, providing scholarship for all school students, ensuring life oriented quality education may help educate more women. Gender gap in the society is another cause of underdevelopment. Development of human rights, participation of more women in development activities, giving equal opportunities at work, removing socio economic constraints may help reduce gender gap in the society. Malnutrition of children, lack of parents conscious on child care, lack of health services and lack of trained birth attendance are the major causes of child mortality. To reduce child mortality increase health facilities, develop conscious of parents, increase trained mid-wife can give good

result. To improve maternal mortality, provide health services at the grass root level, implement more nutrition program and health education is essential. Social consciousness through training, enact and implement law can reduce violence against women. Make health conscious and practicing good hygiene, providing arsenic free hand tube well for safe drinking water and improve sanitary material and providing improve health services can help combating epidemics and communicable diseases. For ensuring safe drinking water , development of infrastructure for safe drinking water and provide low cost sanitary material and making rural people conscious may ensure getting safe drinking water and better sanitation. Coordination among different development organizations and GO-NGO collaboration at grass root level can help improve poverty situation as well as development of rural areas of Bangladesh.

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