



Following traffic rules in Teknaf, Cox's Bazar.

RURAL ROAD SAFETY EDUCATION PROGRAMME

A MUCH-NEEDED INITIATIVE

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"We learned about traffic rules to stay safe while walking on the road... we look right then left and right again and if there is no vehicle near, we cross the road quickly," said Md. Arif, a student of Jahajpura Dakhil Madrassa, Teknaf upazila under Cox's Bazar. Knowing road safety rules are crucial for all, considering road accidents have become endemic in Bangladesh. Every day, media reports on the road crashes, casualties, losses of lives.

Bangladesh is one of the most accident prone countries in the world where 60-65 percent victims are pedestrians. Unawareness from the pedestrians' side in using roads is one of the major causes of accidents. Also, the drivers – in most of the cases – do not follow traffic laws and basic rules of driving.

To promote road safety education, the Second Rural Transport Improvement Project (RTIP-II) of Local Government Engineering Department (LGED) has undertaken a pilot initiative for the people living in and around roads to reduce accidents. The programme mainly focuses on students and has been implemented at 135 schools of Sreepur, Kapasia (under Gazipur district), and Ukhia, Teknaf (Cox's Bazar) upazilas. Over 53,000 students attended the programmes.

Kawsher Ahmed, a student of class seven at Bormi

High School, Sreepur upazila (Gazipur), said, "I was not aware of traffic rules; now, I'm quite knowledgeable." "Following the programme, I witnessed a change among students – a willingness to obey traffic rules while walking on the roads," said Kabir Hossain, Head Teacher, Kirati High School, Kapasia upazila (Gazipur).

Students are also working to disseminate the messages in their respective communities. Md. Jafarul Islam, a student of class six at Mohammad Ali Academy, Sreepur upazila (Gazipur) said, "We relayed the road safety messages to our peer groups, parents, relatives, and neighbours."

The programme is supported by the Government of Bangladesh and the World Bank, and has been implemented in collaboration with Bangladesh Rural Advancement Committee (BRAC). It kicked off in May 2015 and continued until December 2016.

Chief Engineer of LGED, Shyama Prosad Adhikari, informed that LGED has prioritised road safety issues. According to him, LGED is working to incorporate engineering measures in road design and is simultaneously implementing the rural road safety awareness programme.

At the outset of the programme, a baseline survey was conducted to set activities, implementation approaches, media, and messages. Around 60 messages were developed, tested and disseminated through flip chart, quiz

book and video show.

A quiz competition was arranged to assess the learning of the students where 30,000 students participated. The assessment shows that the students could easily recall 87 percent of the delivered messages of the programme. Joya, a student of class eight at Kirati High School, recalled the messages very precisely, i.e. follow the traffic signs, do not play or chat on the road, and do not get in or down from a running bus.

At the end, a follow-up survey was done to assess impacts on various indices of the campaign. The changes made were significant – on the point of right way of walking on the road, the baseline status was 37 percent while the end line was 73 percent.

The synchronised efforts of the programme involved training 500 teachers, 360 community leaders, and 3,200 drivers of motorised vehicles. In addition, the planned use of diverse media, including communication, print and visual characters of the messages helped to maximise the results.

This pilot effort has been lauded as innovative and effective for engaging students to promote rural road safety education in Bangladesh.

The writer is Project Director, Second Rural Transport Improvement Project of Local Government Engineering Department.



Road Safety Education Programme at school.



Participating in the quiz competition.



A student who scored high in the quiz competition.