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Press Release

Pure Earth

House 8/1, Block C,
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Hundreds of community people at Mirzapur, Tangail district joined together in solidarity of putting an end to lead pollution

March 2022, Dhaka, Bangladesh – **“Together, we can end lead pollution, protect every child’s potential”** – this slogan was echoed among **more than 200 community people** of Rajabari village, Mirzapur Upazila, Tangail district during a **community gathering event which was jointly organized by Pure Earth Bangladesh and the Department of Geology, Dhaka University; with the support from UNICEF, and icddr,b; and funding from the USAID, TAUW, and Clarios Foundation to raise awareness on lead pollution and its impacts on human health and environment.** The event was joined by the community people, local leaders, project partners, and government officials. It was lively with the active participation of the community people who shared their experiences of being impacted by the once-active used lead-acid battery factory in the Mirzapur area.

Nannu Mia, a community member shared, *“We were unaware of the adverse effects of lead pollution. After a year, when our cattle started to die due to the poisonous smoke from lead smelting then we realized the danger of such informal, illegal lead-acid battery factories, and reported to move that out from the community.”* Pure Earth had identified the Mirzapur lead-contaminated area through its Toxic Site Identification Program (TSIP), and together, with the Department of Geology of Dhaka University, started the lead remediation program last year December.

While sharing insights into the program, the **Field Investigation Officer, Md. Lutful Kabir said** *“In Mirzapur, we have found an informal recycling operation processing used lead-acid batteries (ULABs). These activities occurred for more than three and a half years before it was abandoned in February 2019. The uncontrolled smelting of the lead battery components in open pits with no vapor controls left behind residual battery component wastes, concrete processing pads containing the smelting pits, and highly contaminated soil not only in the two processing areas but also in a wide surrounding processing area. This is a severe threat to the community people and the environment as*

this is a habitant of approximately 600 people. This is why we have started the remediation project to ensure a safe environment for all."

The special guest of the event, Abdul Motaleb, Deputy Director, Air Pollution and Control, Department of Environment said, *"If there is any battery recycling factory near your area, you can inform to Upzilla officer. Other administration or even Department of Environment's helpline or email address are at your service." "Pure Earth's lead remediation work is commendable. They have taken a great initiative to solve lead pollution in the Mirzapur area" he added.*

Dr. Mahbubur Rahman, Lead and Project Coordinator, Environmental Interventions Unit, Enteric and Respiratory Infections Program, Infectious Diseases Division, icddr,b said, *"Children and pregnant mothers have the most risk from lead pollution. A high level of lead in the blood causes memory and IQ loss. Lead exposure also causes permanent brain damage. It has been shown to cause bleeding, miscarriage, still birth, premature birth, and low birth weight, as well as minor malformations. So, preventing the exposure of lead is the only way to solve lead pollution."*

Jannatul Ferdous, Health Officer, UNICEF said, *"Pollution from battery factory can spread out to soil, water, and air. Lead pollution damages children's bone and intellectual development. It is our responsibility to ensure children's right to grow in a sound environment with full potential."*

Mr. Kashem, Local Member, Mirzapur said, *"Community people give their land as rent to these battery factory owners, and help to set up such illegal battery factories because of the greed for money. This caused damage to our village. I request all of you, do not rent your land for such poisonous activity. We will work together to stop lead pollution in our community in the future."*

The two-hour-long event ended with a folk musical performance from Sundarban Theatre on the lead pollution issue.

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