

## From Rags to Riches

My name is Piara Begum. I am from Bagaikandi village in Chararali Union of Narsingdi district. I have a daughter and a son. I had a husband, but he abandoned me for another woman.

For many years I have lived in extreme poverty. When we were first married, my husband and I lived hand-to-mouth, living on the land of others in a small hut.



My husband used to beat me and torture me; blaming me for being weak, for being sick, for not being beautiful. Eventually he left us and married another woman. Our

situation got worse and we took shelter in the house of a rich man in the area, where I began work as a maid servant. Even with his generosity, this time was very difficult for me and my children. The clothes we wore were torn and in tatters, and we often went days without food. We spent many nights sleeping in the kitchens and verandas of others' houses.

I was abandoned and alone, with a daughter and a son to support.



My life changed the day that I heard about the REOPA project. I heard that REOPA recruitment was about to take place at the UP office. I attended and was lucky enough to be selected through the REOPA lottery. I received training and began work on road maintenance in my local area. Because I did not know how to write my signature, the UP Secretary did not want to pay my salary – REOPA taught me that, and I received my wages on a fortnightly basis. On this amount I was able to support my family as well as save a small amount each month.



I also received training through REOPA. I was trained in different ways of earning my own income by the staff of the REOPA Partner NGO PAPRI. I was motivated by this training and began to do some income generating activities of my own for a regular income after I finish with REOPA.

In 2009 I got arrear wages of 3,680 Taka. With this money, I bought a cow. Now this cow has a calf, and they are worth almost 35,000 Taka. I also have a goat, 14 ducks and 6 hens, and 21,000 Taka as savings. When I left REOPA, I leased 26 decimals of land with this money, which I will get back when the lease is over. I am cultivating *dhaincha* (a jute-like leguminous tree) in this land. This gives rich fodder for my animals and firewood I use and sell. As well as this, I am running a cloth business, ferrying door-to-door, which I started with 4,500 Taka I saved during my REOPA job period. This business is now worth 20,000 Taka. With my savings I have been able to take out insurance for my daughter. I have also repaired my house.

Now, I am the owner of assets worth 86,000 Taka. I am trained. I run a business. I provide for my children. I have a voice.

My name is Piara Begum. I am a REOPA graduate.

