



European Union



Bangladesh

# NEWS Bulletin

## Rural Employment Opportunities for Public Assets (REOPA)

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### IMPACT OF REOPA ROAD MAINTENANCE EMPLOYMENT

European Union fielded a Mid-Term Evaluation (MTE) of REOPA in January-February 2010. The MTE included an in-depth survey of 336 women employed as Women Crew Groups (WCG) for maintenance of earthen roads. Their current socio-economic status was analysed against baseline data of their situation before they joined the project.

Not only the income earned from REOPA employment is expected to contribute to improved living conditions, but also the simultaneous training and awareness raising on issues like health & nutrition, rights & entitlements, micro-enterprise management, leadership development, group management, gender and development, etc.

The first cycle of WCG women had been employed for close to two years at the time of the survey. The MTE observed significant improvement of their socio-economic status since they joined REOPA in February 2008. A few key findings are highlighted below:

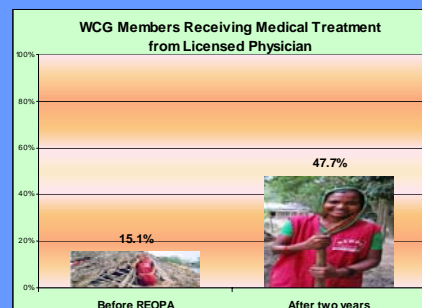
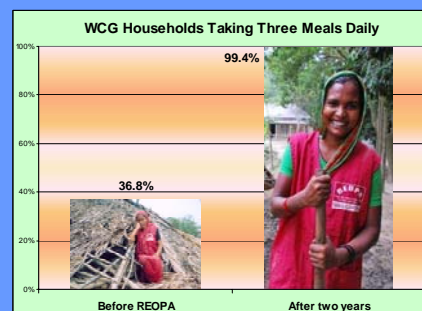
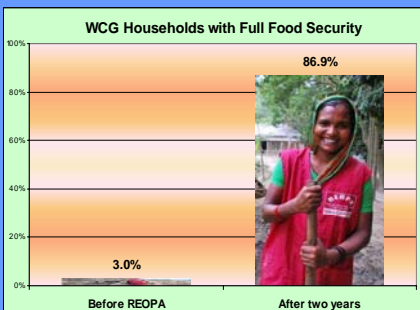
- While 97% of the first cycle WCG women reported not having enough daily food prior to their REOPA employment, 87% now say they have never faced a day of food shortage since. The percentage of households with chronic food deficiency has at the same time come down from 44% to 4%.
- Only 15% of women sought medical treatment by a licensed physician before they joined REOPA. Now 48% seek such treatment in case of illness.
- 50% of the women had hygienic slab latrines before the project, which has now increased to 83%.
- 37% of the women owned a house before the project, but now 64% of REOPA's WCG members live in their own houses. Only 22% lived in weatherproof tin shed houses before REOPA. This figure has now increased to 59%.
- 37% of the women owned a homestead before REOPA, now increased to 61%.
- Only 1% of WCG women had full control over their income before joining REOPA, while 99% now fully control their income.
- 31% of women were allowed to move outside their communities in the past, while 93% now enjoy such freedom.

#### Change of the status of food security in the households of WCG members:

Consequent upon increased per capita consumption of rice per day by all household members, increased frequency of taking supplementary food items - especially vegetables - and an increase from previously two meals per day to now universally three daily meals, the level of food security has shown a dramatic upward trend. Basically every household suffered from occasional or chronic food deficiency in the past, while two thirds of households now break even in food and more than a fifth of them enjoy a surplus. The average number of days with food shortage in a year has been reduced from 119 days before REOPA to only 9 days now.

#### Improvement of medical treatment seeking behaviour:

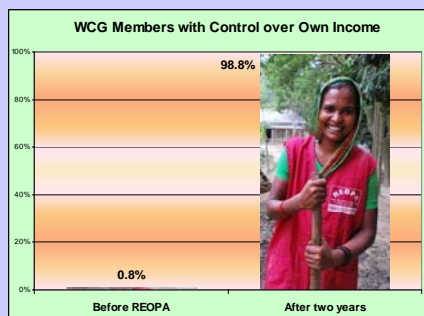
The medical treatment seeking behaviour has improved in that qualified licensed doctors are now the primary choice as medical service providers, with significant reduction in over-the-counter pharmacy medication not accompanied by prescription from consultation with a physician.



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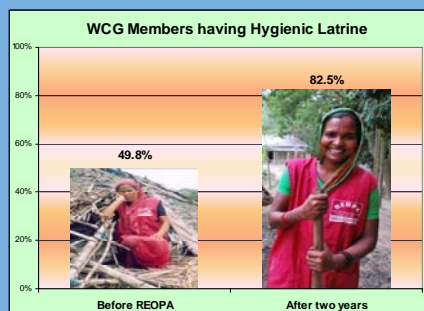
## Control over wealth:

WCG members acquired more control over all their assets due to increased awareness of rights and economic empowerment. After project interventions WCG members' control over own income, savings and physical assets has increased considerably.



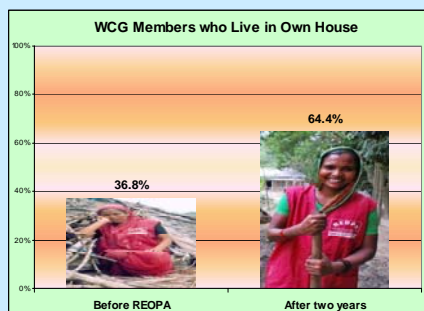
## Change in access to toilet facilities:

Among various latrines used, such as slab latrine, pit latrine, hanging latrine and defecation in open place, only the slab latrine is considered hygienic. Ownership of slab latrines has considerably increased between baseline and MTE survey 2010 and the use of hygienic latrines amongst WCG members is now higher than the national rural average of 79%.



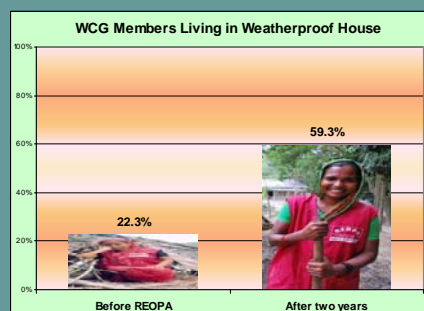
## Improvement in ownership of housing:

The proportion of members owning the house they live in has considerably increased, while fewer women live with relatives or in houses belonging to others. There has been a similar parallel increase in women's ownership of homestead.



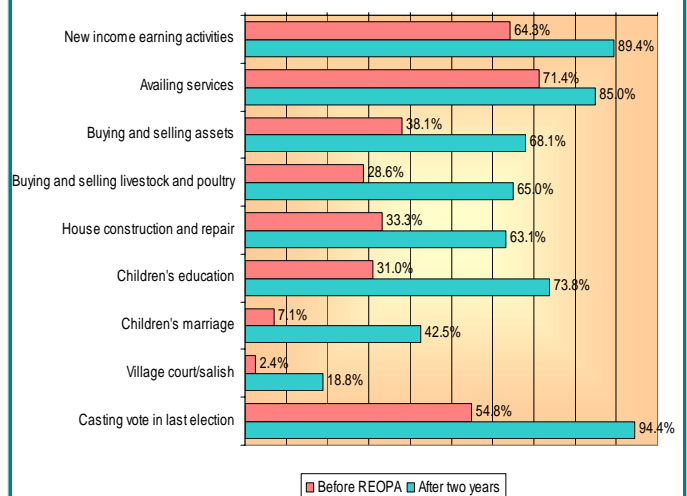
## Condition and type of house:

With increased income the condition of houses that WCG members live in has significantly improved. Proportion of members living in a house made of bamboo/straw/mud has reduced, with close to 60% of households now living in houses with tin roof & walls - an almost threefold increase between 2008 and 2010. Apart from investing in various micro-enterprises, the WCG women have typically invested savings in improved housing.



**Decision-making at different levels:** The MTE survey analysed the level of empowerment of WCG members for decision-making at three levels: personal, family and community. The data from 2008 baseline and MTE 2010 indicate a quite significant improvement of empowerment for decision-making at all three levels – very high at personal, high at family, and moderately high at community level. Notably, empowerment for new IGAs, availing services and casting vote is appreciably high.

### Decision Making by WCG Member Alone



**Knowledge of rights and services:** MTE noted critically important improvements among WCG members in advancement for knowledge and information of rights and services. Improvements of the wealth of knowledge of rights for inheritance, citizenship and control over own body are excellent. Likewise, advancement towards knowledge and skills to availing various essential services is also appreciable. Especially the achievements of increasing knowledge and information of services like health and family planning and agriculture/livestock/fishery will help the WCG members not only under REOPA but also subsequently in running their IGAs more profitably and sustainably.

### WCG Members' Knowledge of Rights and Services

