
Abstract

The national poet of Bangladesh, Kazi Nazrul Islam, wrote "*Whatever great or benevolent achievements, that are in this world, Half of that was by woman, the other half by man.*" It states the universal truth that the pursuit of equal opportunities between women and men is an important goal in its own right. It has been increasingly reaffirmed that all the development approaches including accelerated economic growth, poverty alleviation and employment creation cannot be achieved without the equal contribution and participation of women. Effective empowerment of women can ensure this sort of equal participation in every section of the society. This issue has been recognized as such, in the context of policy reforms in local government bodies. The constitutional provisions and the enactment of the Local Government (Union Parishad) (Second Amendment) Act, 1997 had of course enabled women to come to power but not actually empowered them in real sense. The reserved seats in the Union Parishad are really a step forward towards women's empowerment in the grassroots level but at the same time this provision has brought another story in the front. A woman had to cover three wards with all odds stacked against her to contest for one position against men who contest from one ward. Furthermore, lack of effective and timely planning, lack of appropriate organizational framework, lack of skill and training put women behind in proving their competencies compared to their male counterparts. The empirical findings of this study indicate that due to socio-cultural and structural grounds, women have limited scope to exercise their rights, lack of control over resources and have a limited choice in decision making in the present system of the Union Parishad. The study therefore seeks to critically appraise the extent of women's empowerment through the Union Parishad of Bangladesh. It also investigates the challenges within the existing structure of the Union Parishad which are the major impediments of enabling women's empowerment in rural Bangladesh. At the same time this study has tried to explore some policy recommendations to overcome the existing structural deficiencies of the Union Parishad for women's empowerment in the country. Equal representation in the structure of UP and Government's strong monitoring in ensuring women members' participation in the decision-making process of UP have been strongly recommended at the end of the study.