

Abstract

The Bengal Local Self Government Act was passed by the British in 1885 and it was a landmark in the evolution of local government institutions. Over the past decades there have been changes in the local government structure and functions in order to make them more people oriented and responsive to poverty alleviation and rural development. The Union Parishad is the third lowest local government structure in rural Bangladesh that oversees and administers development projects. The 1997 election brought 13,437 women members to the UPs and in the 2003 election this number was 13,452.

The general objectives of this study are to examine the role of woman members and their impact on the UP, to know about the involvement of female members in different meetings, development activities, in women empowerment and social welfare activities, to identify and assess knowledge, skills and other capabilities of female members, to identify the impediments of performing the duty on the part of the women members, to find out the achievement after reserving the quota for female member, to find out whether the system really is serving the purpose of the present needs and empowerment of woman, to compare between the performances of the male members and woman members in respect of their power and responsibilities.

The study was conducted among 20 elected woman members, 64 male members, 7 chairmen and 15 elite persons of the 10 Union Parishads in two different Upazilas of two districts. Primary data were collected from the field through formal survey. The sampled unions and the questionnaire used in the study have been annexed to the report. Survey data and qualitative information gathered for the study were analyzed and presented in the different chapter of the report. All the elected women have basic education. Most of their husbands influenced them in participating in election. In record it revealed that elected women were involved in standing committee but they did not conduct meeting regularly. Chairman and male members do not want to give proper share to woman members in various development activities. Furthermore, overlapping of jurisdiction, lack of specific job description and lack of awareness are the impediments of woman members in discharging their duties. From the field study it is revealed that though there are so many debates at the present form of reserved seats, introduction of reserved seat system in Union Parishad has some positive impact on woman empowerment.