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RETA- 6008:

**Gender and good governance issues in local
government of Bangladesh:
A Baseline Report of Extension Phase**

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1. Introduction:

1.1 Understanding the Local Government System

Local government means the elected or appointed local bodies with regulatory and development tasks and it works as a local agencies and staff of central government. The Bengal Local Government Act of 1885 provided the first framework with provisions for local governments at the three levels: union, thana and district (Rahman, 2002: 153). The present government has reintroduced the Gram Sarkar System, introduced by late president Ziaur Rahman, and so the local Govt. system in Bangladesh is comprised of Zila Parisads (ZP), Upazila Parisads (UZP), Union Parisads (UP) and Gram Sarkar (GS). Basically one Ward of a Union Parisad is recognised as 'Gram Sarkar', which works as a facilitator of the Union Parisad. Directly elected chairman executed the activities in the Upazila Parisads but it was abolished in 1991 and now the fate of the Upazila Parisads is uncertain. Zila Parisads have essentially existed only on paper since independence. In the four-tier local government, Union Parisads have the longest institutional history since 1870 and fully elected bodies were formed in 1962 and it has been the crucial point in the local government system. Two most important policy changes, brought in the 1990s, are (Rahman, 2002: 153):

- A streamlining of the representational base of the Parisad by demarcating a union into nine wards (electoral units) instead of the previous three and having a member from each ward; this provision first suggested in 1993 became operational through the Union Parisads election of 1997;
- A strengthening of the female representation within the Parisads by the 1997 provision for election to three reserved female seats.

Experts believe that local government system in Bangladesh is very fragile because bureaucrats take all the decision, not the public representatives and there are frequent changes of decisions with the change of the government. Union Parisad plays a vital role for rural development. Recent initiatives in the Union Parisad include the participation of

women in the UP election, which implies the participation and involvement of women in various development activities, which in turn, empowers them. Direct election of women to Union Parishads, introduced by the Awami League Govt. in 1997, is an important way of women participation in local government at the grass root level and can be considered as an entry point to democracy. At present, at the UP level, 30% of seats are reserved for women, numbering about 1200 all over Bangladesh (Gani and Sattar, 2004:7). Estimates suggest that 41% of these women UP members come from poor households and most of them are organized into community-based organization by NGOs (Inception report 2002). The 2001 report of the Asian Development Bank reveals that elected UP members are discriminated in various ways making it difficult for them to participate effectively in the UP affairs. That is why it is important to develop the capacity of UP women members so that they can participate more effectively in local governance matters.

1.2 RETA-69008: Gender in good governance and BRAC

BRAC started as a relief and rehabilitation organization in 1972 and is now recognized as a national private development organization. In course of time, it has gradually turned into a multifaceted development organization with the objectives of poverty alleviation and empowerment of the poor, specially the poor women through various programs like BRAC Education Program (BEP), Economic Development Program (EDP), Employment and Income Generation Program, Social Development Program, Challenging the Frontiers of Poverty Reduction-Targeting the Ultra Poor (CFPR-TUP) Program etc. It mainly works with people whose lives are dominated by extreme poverty, illiteracy, disease and other handicaps. BRAC firmly believes and is actively involved in promoting human rights, dignity and gender equity through poor people's social, economic, political and human capacity building, which in turn, helps the poor to break out of the cycle of poverty and hopelessness.

The focal objective of BRAC Social Development Program is to strengthen women's socio-political assets through promoting awareness of social, political and economic issues. BRAC believes that women must be aware of their legal rights to protect themselves from discrimination and exploitation, and be encouraged to take action when

their rights are infringed. As a part of the capacity building for the women, BRAC has taken initiatives to provide the technical assistance to the elected women UP members and has been striving to bring about positive changes in the quality of women UP members. The Regional Technical Assistance (RETA) for Gender and Governance Issues in Local Government was designed and sponsored by ADB to promote capacity development for the women Union Parisads representatives. It was piloted in the three countries, Bangladesh, Nepal and Pakistan. BRAC is implementing this program in Bangladesh with the objectives to build the capacity of women leaders in Local Government to provide more efficient and transparent public service delivery. BRAC believes that it must develop effective linkage among gender, poverty reduction and good governance in local government.

II. Objective and Methodology

The objective of the baseline survey was to obtain the baseline profile of the women UP members in the areas where the RETA pilot was implemented. In addition to some basic socio-demographic variables, data on knowledge of responsibilities and duties, participation, and involvement in socio-economic development activities of the women UP members were also collected.

Table 1: Distribution of baseline sample

District	Upazilas	District	Upazilas
Khulna (n=98)	Dumuria Fultola Dighalia Paikgacha	Satkhira (n=82)	Tala Kararoa Debhata Ashashuni
Jessore (n=197)	Baghapara, Jessore Sadar Chowgacha Jhikorgacha Keshabpur Sharsha	Bagerhat (n=82)	Kachua Moralganj Sharan Khola

This baseline study was conducted in 17 Upazilas (sub-districts) of 4 southern districts of Bangladesh listed in table 1. A structured questionnaire was designed and administered

on a sample of women UP members for this study purposes. The sample was drawn following a proportionate random sampling method.

III. Findings

3.1 Socio demographic profile

Table 2: Socio demographic profile of women UP members

Variables		Districts				Total
		Khulna	Jessore	Satkhira	Bagerhat	
Age	≤30	19(19)	49(26)	8(7)	18(22)	94(19)
	31-40	61(62)	107(56)	91(76)	39(47)	298(60)
	41-50	15(15)	31(16)	19(16)	22(27)	87(18)
	51-60	3(3)	5(2)	2(2)	3(3)	13(2)
	Average age	37	36	38	37	37
Marital status	Married	84(86)	173(88)	111(94)	79(96)	447(90)
	Unmarried	5(5)	8(4)	4(3)	2(2)	19(4)
	WDA	9(9)	15(8)	3(2)	1(1)	28(6)
Education	No education	2(2)	2(1)	4(3)	23(28)	31(6)
	Primary	48(50)	64(32)	12(10)	38(46)	162(33)
	Secondary	14(14)	59(30)	56(48)	1(1)	130(26)
	S.S.C.	23(24)	51(26)	34(29)	7(8)	115(23)
	H.S.C. or higher	10(10)	21(11)	11(9)	13(16)	55(11)
	Av. years of schooling	5.85	7.13	8.33	3.65	6.24
Occupation of members	Household works	89(92)	179(93)	100(92)	75(94)	443(93)
	Service	5(5)	11(6)	7(6)	4(5)	27(6)
	Agriculture	1(1)	2(1)	0(0)	1(1)	4(1)
	Business	2(2)	1(0.5)	1(1)	0(0)	4(0.8)
Occupation of household head	Business	38(40)	44(24)	67(57)	23(29)	172(36)
	Service	27(29)	43(23)	18(15)	20(26)	108(23)
	Agriculture	10(11)	43(23)	8(7)	21(27)	82(17)
	Household works	12(13)	19(10)	2(2)	14(18)	47(10)
	Small enterprise	7(7)	35(19)	22(19)	0(0)	64(14)

Note: Numbers in parenthesis are the percentage of number of respondents.

This section presents the salient features of socio demographic characteristics of the UP women members and their household such as age, marital status, education and occupation etc. A summary is presented in Table 2 suggesting that on average the UP

women members are in their prime, are married, and tend to have some schooling, and come from relatively economically secure households. Most of them are not themselves directly involved in economic activities, which probably allows them the time needed to be involved in local government activities.

3.2 Involvements and Participation in Socio-Economic Development Activities

Table-3: Regional disparities of participation in social, judicial and development activities

		District				
		Khulna	Jessore	Satkhira	Bagerhat	Total
Reported prior involvement		23 (23)	7(4)	26(23)	69(84)	125(26)
Participation in UP committees		5 (5)	134 (69)	25 (22)	59 (72)	223 (46)
Participation in developmental activities		65(66)	173(88)	6(5)	62(76)	306(62)
Developmental Activities	Infrastructure	65(66)	169(86)	4(3)	52(63)	290(58)
	Education	2(2)	5(2)	2(2)	21(25)	20(4)
	Health	1(1)	4(2)	3(2)	22(27)	30(6)
	Peace and discipline	4(4)	2(1)	0(0)	16(20)	22(4)
Participation in social activities		63(64)	192(97)	43(36)	78(95)	376(76)
Social Activities	Divorce	58(59)	122(62)	17(14)	61(74)	258(52)
	Child Marriage	51(52)	62(31)	12(10)	47(57)	172(35)
	Dowry	8(8)	44(22)	12(10)	53(66)	117(23)
	Acid Throwing	2(2)	0(0)	1(1)	5(6)	8(2)
	Rape	0(0)	1(0.5)	0(0)	21(26)	22(4)
Beneficiary selection	Relief goods	67(68)	73(37)	14(12)	50(61)	204(41)
	Destitute women	82(83)	195(99)	43(36)	71(87)	391(79)
	Widow	78(80)	192(98)	46(38)	63(77)	379(76)
	Old age allowances	78(80)	190(96)	46(38)	56(68)	370(74)
Monthly meeting		68(70)	190(97)	34(28)	77(94)	369(74)
Shalish		94(96)	192(98)	109(91)	82(100)	477(96)
Rehabilitation of destitute women		69(70)	53(27)	19(16)	77(94)	218(44)
Credit facilities		79(81)	170(86)	68(57)	64(78)	381(77)

Note: Numbers in parenthesis are the percentage of number of respondents.

Before being member, on an average 26% members were involved in various public activities. While 84% percent members of Bagerhat had prior involvement, the figure for Jessore is only 4%.

On an average 46 percent women UP members reported being involved in different UP committees, such as finance, education, health and family planning, agriculture, cottage and cooperative, law and discipline, social welfare and community committee etc. The rate of involvement is the highest in Bagerhat and the lowest in Khulna district. Inter district comparison of involvement in various committees is presented in table 3 above.

More than 60 percent of the women UP members reported participating in the Union Parishad development activities like infrastructure, health, education and peace and discipline etc. The rate of participation is very low in Satkhira (only 5%) while 88% members of Jessore district participated in such activities.

Among the participants in development activities, most are involved in infrastructure development. Participation in education, health, and peace and discipline activities is higher in Bagerhat district compared to others. Overall participation is very low in Satkhira district compared to Khulna, Jessore and Bagerhat.

About 74 percent members responded that they played role in the cases of divorce, child marriage, dowry, acid throwing, women repression, rape etc. but very poor level responses came from Khulna and Satkhira districts. Members' participation in issues such as divorce and child marriage aspects is much higher compared to other areas such as acid throwing and rape.

As a whole, participation in the monthly meeting of the women UP members is quite high -- approximately 74 percent members participate in the monthly meeting but there is variation in the level of participation by district. Almost all members of Jessore and Bagerhat district participate in the monthly meeting whereas it is only 28% in Satkhira district.

In terms of participation in Shalish, there is hardly any regional disparity. However, there are differences in the form of participation in different districts. Of the 477 members in all four districts participating in *shalish*, 314 members (66 percent) are regular participants. In Satkhira, 33 percent members are regular participants whereas the

percentages of members who participated regularly in *shalish* in Khulna, Jessore and Bagerhat are 81, 75 and 69 percent respectively. In the case of mediators in the *Shalish*, the level of participation is very high in Jessore (80%) compared to other districts.

Women UP Members from Khulna and Bagerhat are found to be more involved in assisting the poor women to rehabilitate through social and economic cooperation compared to their counterparts in Satkhira and Jessore. The financial assistance to the destitute comes from personal and government sources. However, the women UP members involved rehabilitating the destitute reported using personal sources for providing such assistance.

UP members' involvement in helping the women for getting access to micro credit is quite common. 77 percent of the members assist the women of their area to get access to micro credit from various sources. The level of participation in this case is approximately same (around 80 percent) for Khulna, Jessore and Satkhira districts but it is only 57 percent for Satkhira.

IV. Determinants of participation

Participation is a multidimensional phenomenon and involvement in specific activity can be associated with number of factors. We tried to explore determinants of participation in different activities discussed in the previous section. The explanatory variables are UP members' age, education, and knowledge of responsibility, marital status and earlier involvement in social activities along with the education of the household head.

Findings reveal that knowledge of responsibility and members' earlier involvement in social welfare activities are the key factors that determine UP member's participation in social awareness raising, organizing vocational training for the destitute women and bargaining for project allocation. Marital status is insignificant in all. In district dummies only Satkhira comes out as significant (not shown) factor, which has negative association

with the probabilities of all dependent variables, and in that case coefficient of member's education remains significant for the participation in project allocation.

Table 4: Binary logistic analysis of probability of participation in different social activities

Explanatory variables	Y1	Y2	Y3	Y4
Member's age	-0.387 (0.2932)	0.230 (0.393)	-0.204 (0.229)	0.230 (0.393)
Member's age squared	0.005 (0.0039)	-0.003 (0.005)	0.0027 (0.0030)	-0.003 (0.0053)
1= if members had prior involvement in social work; 0 otherwise	0.114 (0.4555)	2.761*** (0.480)	2.623*** (0.342)	2.761*** (0.480)
1= if member knew of UP responsibilities; 0 otherwise	3.806*** (0.3603)	-0.365 (0.557)	1.855*** (0.651)	-0.365 (0.557)
1= if members currently married; 0 otherwise	0.411 (0.8555)	0.346 (1.178)	0.130 (0.865)	0.346 (1.178)
1= if member's education is at least primary; 0 otherwise	-0.565 (0.4437)	-0.056 (0.487)	-1.056*** (0.376)	-0.055 (0.487)
1= if HH head's education is at least primary; 0 otherwise	-0.195 (0.5679)	-0.710 (5.67)	0.497 (0.438)	-0.710 (0.566)
Constant	6.3201 (5.4741)	-7.220 (7.309)	-0.326 (4.448)	-7.220 (7.309)
Pseudo R ²	0.609	0.26	0.40	0.26

Note: Figures show the change in log odd ratio of the member's participation in specific social efforts. Values in parenthesis are the standard deviations. *** 1% level of significance

Y1 implies the role of female UP members' participation in social mobilization (e.g. divorce, child marriage, acid throwing, rape, women repression, child and women trafficking.)

Y2 implies members' participation in vocational training for the destitute women

Y3 implies members' participation in bargaining to allocate projects.

Y4 implies whether the members participate in *Shalish*

Members' education has negative impact on participation in social mobilization against child and women repression, bargaining for project allocation. This could be due to a possibility of a relationship of substitution between education level and history of public affairs involvement---those with lower levels of education may have higher levels of prior public affairs involvement and vice versa. If so, the interpretation of the educational status is not that women UP members having lower education status are more likely to participate in various public activities, but that those having lower education status had a

more active past history of public life involvement making them more active in the present.

To test this, we compared the knowledge of responsibility of UP activities and prior involvement of women UP members having low (up to primary) and high (more than primary) educational level in table 5.

Table 5: Differences by educational status

	Educational status		
	Below primary	Above primary	t-stats
% knowing the number of committees in UP	25%	50%	5.262***
% having knowledge of responsibilities and duties	87%	68%	4.491***
% having prior involvement in social welfare activities	42%	18%	5.827***

*** Implies 1% level of significance

Results show that compared to women UP members with relatively higher levels of education, those having relatively lower educational status are significantly more likely to have knowledge about their roles and responsibilities in the UP and also a history of involvement in social welfare affairs in their communities.

IV. Conclusion

The pilot project, 'Gender and Good Governance Issues in Local Government', supported by RETA of the Asian Development Bank aims to address an important constraint that impedes effective participation of the women UP members. This baseline study focuses on drawing a profile of the female UP members and their level of participation in various socio-economic development activities. While no significant difference in their socio-economic profile is observed in different districts, their participation in various public and social activities has some regional variance. Findings reveal that many of them lack

knowledge and information about the overall functions of the Union Parisads, their duties and responsibilities. Members from Satkhira have the lowest level of participation compared to members from the other three districts although the average years of schooling is the highest in Satkhira. Findings show that most of the members, who had knowledge of responsibilities and duties and prior experience in social welfare activities, had a lower level (below primary) education. Regression analysis suggests that prior involvement in social activities and knowledge of responsibilities and duties enhances the level of participation of the women UP members.

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