

**REPOSITIONING OF THE WOMEN MEMBERS IN THE UNION PARISHAD TO
ENSURE WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT IN BANGLADESH**

A Dissertation by
MD. JAHURUL ISLAM
ID: 08272015
MAGD Batch III

Submitted to the
Institute of Governance Studies
BRAC UNIVERSITY
DHAKA

**In Partial fulfillment of the requirement for the degree of MA in
Governance and Development**



Institute of Governance Studies (IGS)
BRAC UNIVERSITY, DHAKA, BANGLADESH



October 2009

**REPOSITIONING OF THE WOMEN MEMBERS IN THE UNION PARISHAD TO
ENSURE WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT IN BANGLADESH**

A Dissertation by
MD. JAHURUL ISLAM
ID: 08272015
MAGD Batch III

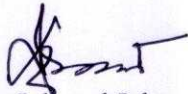
Approved as to style and content by
Salahuddin M. Aminuzzaman
Supervisor and Professor
Dept. of Public Administration
University of Dhaka

Statement of the Candidate

I hereby declared that I am the sole author of this thesis.

I authorize the Institute of Governance Studies and BRAC University to lend this thesis to other Institutions or individuals for the purpose of scholarly research.

I further authorize the Institute of Governance Studies and BRAC University to reproduce this thesis by photocopying or by other means, in total or in part, at the request of other institutions for the purpose of scholarly research.



Md. Jahurul Islam
ID: 08272015
MAGD III Batch
IGS, BRAC University

Table of Contents

	Page No.
Statement	i
Table of content	ii
List of Tables and Figures	iv
Abbreviations	v
Acknowledgement	vi
Abstract	1
Chapter 1: Introduction	2
Background	3
Problem Statement	5
Literature Review	7
Hypothesis	9
Objective of the Study	9
Rational of the Study	10
Methodology	10
Chapter 2: Evolution of Union Parishad	13
Evolution of Union Parishad in Bangladesh	13
Trends of Women's Participation in the Union Parishad	14
Structure of Union Parishad	15
Functions of Union Parishad	16
Role of the Standing Committees of Union Parishad	17
Social Development Committee in Union Parishad	18
Financing the Union Parishad	19
Authority of Union Parishad	19
Male-female Ratio in the structure of Union Parishad	19
Electoral Process of Union Parishad	21

	<u>Page No.</u>
Chapter 3: Women's Empowerment: A Conceptual Review	23
The Idea of Power	23
Participation as the Roots of Empowerment	24
Dimensions of Empowerment	26
Sharing Power and Responsibility	28
Chapter 4: Present State of Empowerment of Women UP Member's:	
Empirical Observations	30
General overview about the respondent	30
Prior experience in social activities	31
Involvement with the Political Party	32
Knowledge about the responsibility	33
Cooperation from male colleagues	33
Participation in various committees of the UP	35
Ability to solve local problems	37
Impeding factors in election campaign and functioning as elected representative in UP	37
Assessment of the Empirical Findings in line Theoretical Framework	38
Chapter 5: Impeding Factors of UP Member's Empowerment	41
Imbalanced Male-Female ratio	41
Authoritative Attitude of the Male Members	42
A 'chairman-dominated' institution	42
Lack of specification of duty and responsibility of the women members	42
Mobility constraints	43
Structural deficiencies	43
Lack of economic resources	44
Discriminations faced by women member in the Union Parishad	44
Less and ineffective participation in the Standing Committee	45
Absence of proper guideline of functioning	45
Chapter 6: Policy Options, Recommendations and Conclusion	47
Appendix	54
Reference	65

List of Tables and Figures

	<u>Page No.</u>
Tables	
Table 01: Study Areas and Sample Size	11
Table 02: Male-Female Ratio in UP's Structure	20
Figures	
Figure 01: Existing Structure of the Union Parishad	16
Figure 02: Male-Female Ratio in the Union Parishad	21
Figure 03: Women's Members Involvement with the Political Party	32
Figure 04: Level of Importance of Women Members' Opinion in UP Meetings	34
Figure 05: Participation in the Project Implementation Committee of UP	36
Figure 06: Impeding Factors according to the Women Members	38
Figure 07: Framework of Women's Empowerment	40
Figure 08: Proposed Structure of Union Parishad	47

Abbreviation

ADP	Annual Development Programme
CEDAW	Convention of Elimination of ALL Discrimination against Women
HDR	Human Development Report
MMC	Mass-line Media Centre
PIC	Project Implementation Committee
SC	Standing Committee
SDC	Social Development Committee
UN	United Nations
UP	Union Parishad
VGF	Vulnerable Group Feeding
WFP	World Food Programme

Acknowledgement

At the very beginning I would like to express my gratefulness to the authority of the Institute of Governance Studies of BRAC University for giving me the scholarship and the opportunity of conducting this study on 'Repositioning the women members of the Union Parishad to ensure women's empowerment in Bangladesh.

It is my privilege and great honor to show my gratitude to the Supervisor of this study, Professor Dr. Salahuddin M. Aminuzzaman who has inspired me to study the subject matter of the topic and patiently guided me through various theoretical issues on empowerment. In fact, his day to day valuable guidance has made this study possible.

I would also like to take the privilege to thank Barrister Manzoor Hasan, Director of IGS, Dr. Rizwan Khair, Academic Supervisor of MAGD program and Professor Dr. M. Emdadul Haq for their all out co-operation.

My special thanks to all of my classmates in MAGD Batch III for their continuous cooperation and inspiration. I am really proud of getting necessary advice from them in conducting this study.

But above all I want to express my heartfelt gratitude to the respondents of this study, the elected women members who met me without any hesitation and told me about their experiences in the Union Parishad.

At the end, I would like to thank all the officers and staffs of the Institute of Governance Studies, BRAC University, TARC Savar and Bangladesh Public Administration Training Centre for their all sort of logistic support and friendly cooperation.

Md. Jahurul Islam
October 2009

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.

INTRODUCTION

Without women's participation, all development efforts would be ineffective, because a woman in a family is the key person. Effective empowerment with the women could greatly contribute to the total development of the rural society as well as the whole society. In Bangladesh, women constitute almost half of the total population. Various indicators reveal that the status of women is much lower than that of men. Women's empowerment has gradually improved in the last couple of years though the number of beneficiaries is not satisfactory. So the effective empowerment of women in the Union Parishad level should be ensured which will ultimately ensure the empowerment of women throughout the country.

Local Government is widely used as a method of decentralization in most of the countries of the world to fulfill both objectives of political and administrative decentralization. Bangladesh has a long tradition in local self government starting from the later part of the British colonial rule of India. Since then, major changes occurred in their structure, power and functions with new legislation during different regimes. Only one local government body, the Union Parishad is functioning in the rural areas. Under the Local Government (Union Parishad) (Second Amendment) Act, 1997, three seats have been exclusively reserved for women members who are elected by the voters of the concerned three wards which is definitely a step forward regarding the issue mentioned above, but this reservation has not equipped the Union Parishad properly with the equal representation of women. All the efforts undertaken by the government at various regimes to ensure women's equal participation and effective women's empowerment in the local level have not achieved the ultimate goal of empowerment of women throughout the country. The reasons behind this failure are - there inadequate representation, non-participation and non-involvement in the preparation and execution of plans. The provision of direct election in the reserved seats has been made but the elected women members' roles and relationships with other members of the Union Parishad are still unclear. The role of female members in the regular activities of the Union Parishad has not been defined by

the legal framework which eventually leads to segregation of women from mainstream UP activities (Aminuzzaman, 2008:16).

Background

The Governments participating in the Fourth World Conference on Women (Beijing Declaration) were convinced that “Women’s empowerment and their full participation on the basis of equality in all spheres of society, including participation in the decision-making process and access to power, are fundamental for the achievement of equality, development and peace”. Throughout the world, women continue to face inequality and as a result are deprived of social rewards such as money, power and prestige. Unless women are effectively empowered and are involved in the decision and policy making processes at all levels of the state, changes in women’s political and to some extent social and economic status will continue to remain marginal. CEDAW (Convention of Elimination of All Discrimination against Women) charter of the United Nations has also emphasized on women’s empowerment to eliminate the discriminations faced by women throughout the world. According to the clause-2 of the charter, approved by the United Nations:

- Women will enjoy the right to become voters and to stand for election.
- They will have the opportunity to work every layer Governments’ office, to make state policy and policy implementation programme.
- All countries will make sure women’s involvement with all Governments’ and non-Governments’ organizations, which are concerned with country’s social and political life.

As a signatory of the charter Bangladesh has also shown its commitment to fulfill the conditions or decisions taken by the convention of the United Nations. In fact, women’s equal right to participate in governance is the constitutionally entrenched fundamental right and is repeatedly affirmed in a series of legislation in Bangladesh. Bangladesh also agreed to undertake positive obligations to respect and ensure this right through ratifying over a dozen international human rights instruments.

The Constitution of the People's Republic of Bangladesh recognizes basic and fundamental rights of the citizens irrespective of gender, creed, cast, religion and race. It also makes provision for promoting causes of the backward sections of the population. Related articles of the constitution regarding women's participation and empowerment may be seen in the following sentences.

Article 9: The State shall encourage local government institutions composed of representatives of the areas concerned and in such institutions special representation shall be given, as far as possible, to peasants, workers and women.

Article 10: Steps shall be taken to ensure participation of women in all spheres of national life.

Article 19(1): The State shall endeavor to ensure equality of opportunity to all citizens.

Article 28(1): The State shall not discriminate against any citizen on grounds only of religion, race, caste, sex or place of birth.

(2): Women shall have equal rights with men in all spheres of the State and of public life.

(4): Nothing in this article shall prevent the State from making special provision in favor of women or children or for the advancement of any backward section of citizens (GOB, 1993: 9, 13, 19).

So the Constitution of the country gives special attention to women in democracy and local government. The nation puts no legislative barrier in the way of promoting women's empowerment in the sphere of social, political, and economic activities. But the question is how these provisions have been replicated in reality.

The constitutional provisions and some other Local Government Acts and Ordinance have created a legitimate space for women to come to the power. It began for the first time in Bangladesh in 1976. The provisions of selection of two women members for every Union Parishad was introduced for the first time with a view to ensure women's participation in local level (Ahmed, 2001:3). The Local Government (Union Parishad) Ordinance, 1983 increased the number from 2 women members to 3. But as a matter of

fact, the Local Government (Union Parishad) (Amendment) Act, 1997 introduced the most important event in the history of women's participation in UP. This act introduced the provision of direct election in the reserved seats where 3 women members can get elected for the respective 3 wards of the Union Parishad. It brought the scope for women to come out from their previous coerced condition. Women members got the opportunity to become active representative in the Union Parishad which was inactive due to their previous selection procedure as women member in it. But the reality is a bit contrary to expectation. The elected women members are still facing various discriminations as well as problems in pursuing their responsibilities. The goal of women's effective empowerment through their effective representation in local level has not achieved yet (MMC, 2002).

Problem Statement

A strong, participatory and effective local government is one of the most indispensable prerequisites for ensuring good governance in the present development discourse. This reality cannot be ignored at any case in the present context. Basically, Good Governance includes participation, accountability, predictability and transparency which logically call for an equal participation in political decision-making. As women comprise half of the total population in the country their thoughts, ideas, experiences and values of governance are very much necessary to enhance, enrich and make effective the entire decision making process. It has been focused at the international level as well. The Fourth World Conference on Women, 1995, in Beijing set out one of the significant goals regarding women's participation in every stage of development process. The goal was ensuring adequate representation of women in all decision-making bodies. The conference also suggested that there should be a logical balance of men and women to deal with the concerned issues of the whole society (Beijing Platform for Action, 1996). This sort of initiatives taken by various international development agencies regarding women's participation and leadership has influenced the state to realize the importance of women's political empowerment at the national level in Bangladesh.

In line with the above mentioned realization, there are a few number of initiatives and steps have been taken so far to improve the level of participation of women but there is no such major initiatives have been taken so far to eliminate the discrimination faced by the women in the country (Haque and Mohiuddin, 2000). The greater part of the initiatives that have undertaken so far in Bangladesh to encourage women's political participation have focused mainly on women's leadership in the central level government. But as it is widely believed that women have always been an integral part of their communities and they should have an active role in both rural and urban life. Union Parishad is that tier of local government in Bangladesh in which rural representatives are involved in the decision making process. So this tier of Local Government, the Union Parishad, should be structured in such a way where women can equally participate in all the decision making approach of the concern locality.

The experiences in this field show that women have limited scope to exercise their rights, lack of control over resources and have a limited choice in decision making process of the Union Parishad. The elected women members could not achieve a desirable position in the existing structure of the Union Parishad so far (MMC, 2002). According to the present structure of the Union Parishad, three seats are reserved for women for nine wards in a Union but at the same time these nine wards are represented by nine male members. So it cannot ensure equal participation and empowerment of women for the entire Union. Moreover, these three members of the reserved seats cannot take part effectively in the decision making level which hampers the goal of empowerment of women. For that reason, the present structure of Union Parishad should be reformed in such a way so that the grassroots level women can take part in the decision making process and can raise their voices regarding their rights and effective participation. Considering the above impediments on effective empowerment of women through Union Parishad, this study has dealt with the following research questions:

- What are the most critical impediments with the present structure of Union Parishad relating to the empowerment of women?
- What new structural reforms are necessary for the empowerment of women in the Union Parishad?

Literature Review

In order to conceptualize the idea of empowerment and to review the present state of women members' participation as well as empowerment in the Union Parishad some good number of available publications and relevant websites has been consulted in this study. The publications mainly include various development organization's report and some others scholar's publications. In order to look into the history of the Union Parishads some relevant publications have also been consulted. Moreover, the researcher's own observation from the collected primary data has been applied to prepare this study.

SIDA Study No. 3, 2001 titled as '*Resources, Agency, Achievements: Reflections on the Measurement of Women's Empowerment*' by Naila Kabeer has set out from the understanding that empowerment is a process by which those who have been denied power gain power, in particular the ability to make strategic life choices. Three dimension of empowerment has been discussed in this study such as resources, agency and achievements. According to this study is both a process and an end result. This study does not reflect any empirical instances to show how women could be empowered through local government institution.

The research report conducted by Mass-Line Media Center titled as '*A gender perspective analysis on the role of elected representatives of Union Parishad*' has focused on the problems prevailing in the Union Parishad regarding the role of the male and women members. The study has analyzed the relationships of the representatives of the Union Parishad and tried to find out the problem faced by the elected women chairman and members of various Union Parishads in the coastal area of the country. This research report has not emphasized on the empowerment issues of the women members.

The book written by Mozammel Haque and K.M Mohiuddin titled as '*Women in the Union Parishad, A Changing Trend*' has focused only the changing pattern of involvement of the women in the Union Parishad. The writers has discussed about the

limitations and potential of the women representatives in the Union Parishad. The specific impediments in fulfilling the responsibility of women members has not addressed in this book.

Salahuddin M. Aminuzzaman in his research paper entitled '*Governance and Politics: Study on the Interface of Union Parishad, NGO and Local Actors*' attempted to analyze the institutional interactions between the Union Parishad and other government and non-governmental agencies and institutions including civil society. This study has clearly demonstrated that Union Parishad can play a significant role in economic management as well as local business development. This study has further argued that the major issues that affect local governance are - Institutional interaction between UP-NGO-GOB operatives at the local level, role of the community to strengthen Union Parishad and making the Union Parishad gender sensitive. This study has also observed that the issue of women's participation is one of the critical areas of concern of overall governance process of Union Parishad.

Just after the first ever direct election in the reserved seats for women members in the Union Parishad in 1998 (The election was held in 1997), a study was done by World Food Programme in Bangladesh. '*Elected Women Members of UP: A Socio-Economic Study*' was the title of the study. One of the findings of this study was about the socio-economic status of the elected women members. This study showed that the elected women members had a better socio-economic status than the average rural women. It focused on the power bases of the elected women members in Union Parishad and the general constraints of their effective involvement in UP. It has not addressed clearly the specific impeding factors prevailing in the structure of the Union Parishad faced by the women members and the issue of women's empowerment as well.

After reviewing the available literature it has been commonly observed that specific impediments prevailing in the functioning of women members in the Union Parishad and their approach toward empowerment has not been highlighted. In this context, the attempt made in the present study is to address the specific impediments faced by the women

members in the Union Parishad which is also the barrier of ensuring the overall empowerment process for women in the country.

Hypothesis

In line with the above research questions, this study proposes the following hypothesis:

- Effective empowerment of women in local government will increase women's participation at the national level which will bring women into the mainstream of development activities.

Objective of the Study

The state of women's representation in local government bodies is yet to achieve its goal of equal participation in Bangladesh. There is no such provision in the District level, down to Upazila and Union Parishad levels. There are reserved seats for women but they actually have no de-facto powers. They are rarely delegated with any authority so far as the development of their constituencies are concerned. So the broad objective of the study is to state the present situation of the status of women's participation prevailing in the Union Parishad level of the country and to recommend some reforms or initiatives that should be undertaken to ensure the effective participation of women in Union Parishad. The specific objectives are;

- ❖ To review the provisions and options regarding the empowerment of women depicted in the constitution of Bangladesh
- ❖ To discuss the existing provisions of the Union Parishad ordinance and rules that affect women's empowerment in the Union Parishad.
- ❖ To find out the impediments that hinders the effective empowerment of women in the Union Parishad, and
- ❖ To recommend some approaches or policy options to be undertaken to reform the present structure of Union Parishad for the effective empowerment of women.

Rationale of the Study

The most important precondition for achieving meaningful development in the rural areas is to keep women in the mainstream. This issue has also been recognized in different agenda of local government reforms in Bangladesh. Women's participation in the local bodies had surfaced intermittently and was highlighted in various legislation of local government. The Local Government (Union Parishad) Amendment Act, 1997 was promulgated as a substantial effect of such legislations. According to this act, three seats are reserved for women among nine wards in each Union Parishad. But it has not yet ensured equal participation in the decision making process of the Union Parishad. The discriminatory and uneven distribution of governance functions in UP resulted in ineffectiveness of the women representatives is gradually frustrating women's participation in local governance more specifically in the Union Parishad in Bangladesh. So, the state of women's effective participation at this level is crucial and deserves special attention to ensure women's empowerment.

Methodology

The methodological framework upon which the study has been conducted includes secondary and primary data sources. Interview of the key informant has been followed to collect primary data. The method of interview survey has been adopted in the study because it is the most appropriate one to collect data from the respondents. A combination of both structured and unstructured questionnaire has been used for getting the advantages of the two and for the best outcome. The sources of secondary data incorporated in this study are mainly periodicals, publications, journals, dailies, booklets reports from different offices. The relevant websites of national and international organizations has been searched to prepare the study. All the data has been collected to reach a relevant conclusion.

Study Areas and Sample Size: This study was limited to two small geographical areas of the country given the availability of time and resources. It has tried to cover only two districts of the country. A total number of 19 Union Parishads were selected to collect the primary data. Among these 19 Union Parishads, 4 Union Parishads from Kaharol Upazilla of Dinajpur district and 15 Union Parishads from Madaripur Sadar

Upazilla of Madaripur district. A sample of 55 elected women members was selected as respondents to collect information about the research. Among them 45 respondents were from Madaripur district and 10 respondents were from Dinajpur district.

Table 1: Study Areas and Sample Size

Name of the District	Name of Upazilla	Numbers of UP	Total Respondents
Madaripur	Madaripur Sadar	15	45
Dinajpur	Kaharol	04	10
Total		19	55

The Questionnaire in Brief: The questionnaire used to collect primary data in conducting this study was a combination of both structured and unstructured questionnaire. It contains a total number of 34 questions addressing 8 different relevant issues to satisfy the purpose of the study. The questionnaire has addressed the following issues:

- General overview about the respondents
- Prior experience in Social activities
- Involvement with the Political Party
- Knowledge about the responsibility
- Cooperation from male colleagues
- Participation in various committees of the UP
- Ability to solve local problems
- Impeding factors in election campaign and functioning as elected representative in UP

All the collected information through the aforesaid purposive questionnaire has been processed and analyzed to present the major findings of the study in the 4th chapter of the current paper.

Survey Method: The study is basically based on qualitative data collected from interviews with a small number of elected women members of the Union Parishad. The method of interview survey has been adopted in this study as it is the most appropriate method to collect data from the selected respondents. The researcher of this study has conducted the interviews with the selected 55 women members of the above mentioned 19 Union Parishads. All the questions were placed to every respondent through successive question by using the same word during the interview.

EVOLUTION OF UNION PARISHAD

Local Government can be identified as a highly viable mechanism through which democratic process and practices can be established and eventually participatory development is ensured. By definition, local government means an intra-sovereign governmental unit within the sovereign state dealing mainly with local affairs, administered by local authorities and subordinate to the state government (Jahan, 1997:92). In political terms, it is concerned with the governance of a specific local area, constituting a political sub-division of a nation, state or other major political unit. In the performance of its functions, it acts as the agent of the state. In other words, the local government is an integral part of the political mechanism for governance in a country. (Muttalib and Khan, 1983:2). According to the article 59(1) of the Constitution of the People's Republic of Bangladesh, "Local Government in every administrative unit of the Republic shall be entrusted to bodies, composed of persons elected in accordance with law". There are at present two types of local government institutions in Bangladesh: one is for rural areas and the other for urban areas. The local government in rural areas comprises Union Parishad, Upazilla Parishad and Zilla Parishad. On the other hand, local government in the urban areas consists of Pourashavas and City Corporations.

Evolution of Union Parishad in Bangladesh

The evolution of Union Parishad, the most important part of the Local Government, in Bangladesh is very much similar to that of India and Pakistan in many ways. The reason behind this similarity is that all these three countries are in the same sub-continent and share the same or common historical background. The Union Parishad has gone through various kinds of transformation and changes both during the British colonial rules for near about two hundred years and during the Pakistani quasi-colonial rules for almost twenty five years. The origin of Union Parishad can be traced back to the Village Panchayets introduced in the 1870s by the British to maintain law and order in the rural areas with the help of local people. Subsequently the Local Self-government Act, 1885

and the Village Self-government Act, 1919 are some principal instruments that led to the development of the present local government in Bangladesh. In the Pakistan period (1947-1971), the Act of 1959 introduced a new local government system called the Basic Democracy System in the East Pakistan (now Bangladesh). During the British and Pakistan period the local government at the Union level not only had changed its name several times but also its functional jurisdiction and financial powers were widened (Ahmed and Nabi, 2001:3). The President Order of 1973 changed the name of Union Panchayet to Union Parishad without any significant changes in its character. More than one hundred and thirty five years have been passed since the creation of the act and local government at Union level over the years have changed its name, area, functions and power from time to time. Still it is the only and oldest democratic institutions, named as Union Parishad, is acting as the lowest administrative unit of rural local government in Bangladesh.

Trends of Women's Participation in the Union Parishad

In order to ensure effective participation and empowerment of women in the grassroots level some institutional arrangements for women's involvement in the Union Parishad have been made so far. If the history of Union Parishad be analyzed it is found that during the British regime, local government in the Union remained an almost exclusive domain of males. Only male could vote in election for rural local bodies till 1956 when for the first time election was held on the basis of universal adult franchise (Alam, 1995:40). Voting power of women was established lawfully. Women never thought of participating in this system. In 1976, the government promulgated the Local Government Ordinance for a three-tier local government system. It was the ever first ordinance regarding the local government system in the history of independent Bangladesh. In this ordinance the structure of the local government system underwent changes and the provisions were made to select two women members in the Union Parishad. For the first time women were considered to be included in the Union Parishad In 1983, the changes were brought in the structure and composition of Union Parishad by promulgating the Local Government (Union Parishad) Ordinance. This ordinance increased the number of nominated women members to three and each of them represented one ward. In 1993,

Local Government (Union Parishad) (Amendment) Act was passed in the Parliament to secure the minimum representation of women in local government. This act divided each Union Parishad into 9 wards. Furthermore, three seats were kept reserved for women who would be selected by the votes of elected chairman and members of the Union Parishad rather than by the voters (Ahmed, 2001).

The Local Government (Union Parishad) (Second Amendment) Act, 1997 is a milestone in the history of political empowerment of women in Bangladesh. The government of Bangladesh enacted this law with the provision of direct election to reserve seats for women in local level elections. In this act the government reserved three seats for women in the Union Parishad where women members can be directly elected from each of the three wards. However, apart from the reserved seats women can also contest for any of the general seats.

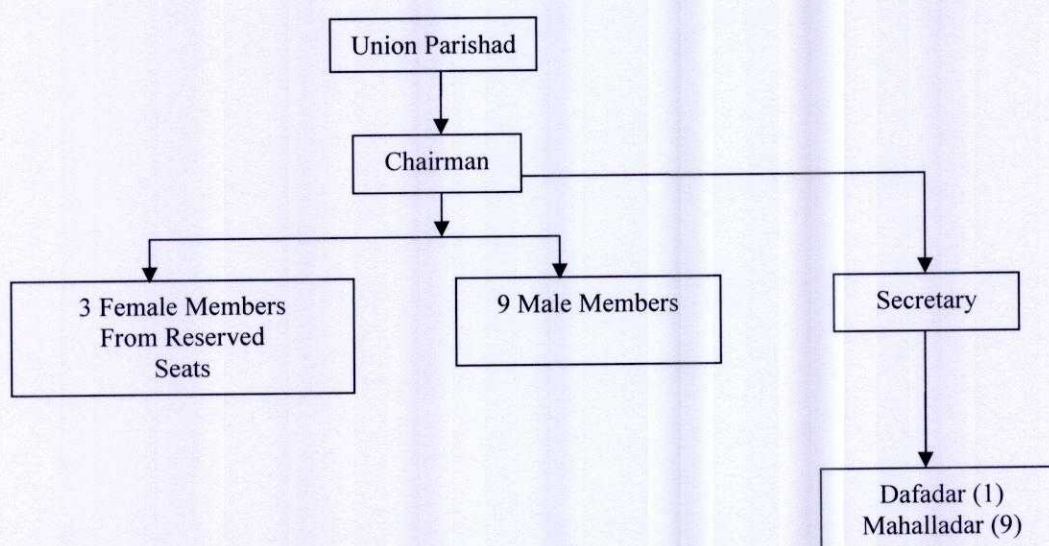
Structure of Union Parishad

Union Parishad has been functioning for more than hundred years for the rural development of the country. Union Parishad is run by the directly elected representatives. Its roles and representatives are guided by different levels, rules and circulars of the central government. According to the website of the Ministry of the Local Government, Rural Development and Cooperative of the People's Republic of Bangladesh the Union Parishad has been structured with the provision of the following illustrated positions.

- **Chairman:** There shall be a chairman of Union Parishad directly elected by the voters of the Union.
- **Members:** Nine members shall be directly elected from the nine wards constituting the Union.
- **Women members:** Three seats shall be reserved for women. Each of the women members shall be directly elected by the male and female voters of three wards within a Union.

According to the Local Government (Union Parishad) Amendment Act, 1997, the existing structural framework of the Union Parishad has been plotted in the following page.

Figure 1: Existing Structure of the Union Parishad



Functions of Union Parishad

Union Parishad is mainly responsible for economic, social and community development. That is, the implementation of development schemes in the field of agriculture, forestry, fisheries, education, health, irrigation and disaster management, family planning, protection and maintenance of infrastructure, sanitation, the registration of birth, marriage, death and so on. They are also supposed to maintain law and order and provide assistance to administration in the maintenance of law and order (Mallick, 2004). The World Food Programme also works through Union Parishad and distributes wheat through VGF (Vulnerable Groups Feeding) cards (World Food Programme, 1999). According to the Local Government (Union Parishad) Ordinance, 1983, the major functions of Union Parishad can be summarized in the following way;

- Preparation of a comprehensive Union Plan and inclusion of inter-ward development projects after identification and prioritization.

- Assist and cooperate for the development of primary schools, supervise their functioning and motivate people for spreading literacy.
- Ensure provision of health services at the Union Health Centres, supervise family planning related activities and services and monitor the same. Arrange for supply of safe drinking water and promote sanitation programme.
- Construction of inter-ward roads, maintenance of the same, management of small scale irrigation and water resources.
- Implementation of afforestation programme along the Union Parishad roads and all earthen embankments.
- Peaceful resolution and amicable settlement of inter ward disputes.
- Promote social resistance over violence against women, terrorism, all types of crimes and cooperate with administration for maintenance of law and order.
- Up-to-date registration of birth, death and marriage within the Union territory.
- Assist Upazilla Parishad in the preparation of inter ward agricultural and fisheries development projects and take necessary action.
- Cooperate with and advise all agencies within the Union having credit programmes and help rural poor to participate in the same.
- Increase awareness for women and child development and take concrete actions where necessary.
- Encourage people to undertake cottage industries with good potentials and facilitate the involvement of disadvantaged and poor people in various income generating activities.

Role of the Standing Committees of Union Parishad

Union Parishads are required to provide a particular set of services as decided by the Parliament or the government. Although the Union Parishad as a whole performs some of these functions, the greater part of it is routed through committees i.e. by groups into which the Parishad is split up for specific purposes. According to the Local Government (Union Parishads) Amendment Act, 1993 and 2001, each Union Parishad will constitute 13 Standing Committees, one for each of the following subjects:

- a) finance and establishment;

- b) education and mass education;
- c) health, family planning, epidemic control and sanitation;
- d) audit and accounts;
- e) agriculture and other development works;
- f) social welfare and community centres;
- g) cottage industries and co-operatives;
- h) law and order;
- i) welfare of women and children, sports and culture;
- j) fisheries and livestock;
- k) conservation of environment and tree plantation;
- l) union public works;
- m) rural water supply and sanitation.

According to the above mentioned acts, the Standing Committee consists of not more than one third of the total members of the Union Parishad and no member will be member of more than two committees. Each Standing Committee has to elect one of its members as its Chairman. The important criterion is that elected women members are to head one third of the Standing Committee and mandated to head the committee on women and children's welfare, culture and sports. Furthermore, a Union Parishad may co-opt a person of either sex who is not a member of the Parishad but who may, in the opinion of the Parishad, possess special qualifications for serving in any Standing Committee as a non voting member.

Social Development Committee in Union Parishad

According to the section 38A of the Local Government Union Parishad Ordinance, 1983, 'There shall be a committee to be called as the Samajik Unnayun Committee (Social Development Committee) in every ward for a reserved seat consisting of the member of that reserved seat, who shall also be its chairman and the members representing the wards of general seats'. This is of course a mentionable step towards women's empowerment in the grassroots level but functions and responsibilities of such committee have been described by the Government in a very brief manner.

Financing the Union Parishad

Although it is expected from the Union Parishad that they will meet their expenditure from their own revenue earnings, in most cases the Union Parishad have to depend on the central government for financing. The development works in Union Parishad is financed through the Annual Development Program (ADP) of the central government which is allocated through the Upazilla Parishad. The amount of funding is based on the size of the population, geographical area and level of poverty. The Union Parishad has also the authority to collect their own revenues through taxes, leasing fees and so on but the power with small territorial jurisdictions to collect indirect taxes is limited because the evasion of indirect taxes is easier in the case of Union Parishad than in the case of the central government. Furthermore, the ability of UP to collect its own revenues through taxes is limited since the people in the rural areas are very poor (Aminuzzaman, 2003).

Authority of Union Parishad

Although the Union Parishad is a very old democratic institution among all the local government institutions in Bangladesh, it seems to be a weak institution since all important decisions are made at the national level. In fact, Union Parishad cannot play important role when it comes to development planning of the concern Union. One of the problems is that Union Parishad does not have the proper authority to make important decisions regarding their Union. The responsibilities of the Union Parishad go beyond the legal, managerial and financial capacity of the body. They don't have any authority to take any substantive or policy decisions without the approval of the controlling authority. Instead the work is directed by laws and regulations from the government (Aminuzzaman, 2003:4-5).

Male-Female Ratio in the Structure of Union Parishad

The number of members in Union Parishad is fixed and does not depend on the size of the population in the Union. Though the Local Government (Union Parishad) (Second Amendment) Act, 1997, did not restrict women from contesting for the seats of general members as well as the chairman, the number of elected women chairman and members from the general seats are not mentionable so far the experience goes in the Union

Parishad election throughout the country. Kamal Siddiqui, (2005) in his book on local government, reports that in the 1992 UP elections, out of the 1115 women who contested for Chairmanship and 1135 who contested for membership, only 4 women candidates were elected overall. In contrast, the 1997 elections that followed the promulgation of reforms to the UP through reservation of seats for women showed hugely different results. In 1997, elections were held in 4,298 UPs where a total of 23 women Chairpersons were elected, while 12,894 women were elected for the reserved seats. In 2003, elections held in 4,228 UPs saw 22 women elected as Chairman (from 232 candidates), 85 women were elected for the general seats (out of 617 female candidates) and 12,684 women elected for the reserved seats (from 39,423 candidates). So, while a large number of women have contested and been elected to the reserved seats, women's contestation and election from general seats is not as widespread (Siddiqui, 2005).

A Union Parishad consists of one chairman, nine general members and three women members in reserved seats, for a total of 13 persons. Now, if the election result of Union Parishad, held in 2003, is analyzed the ratio of male and female representatives in the Union Parishad throughout the country can be easily found out. The analysis has been plotted in the following table:

Table 2: Male-Female Ratio in UP's Structure¹

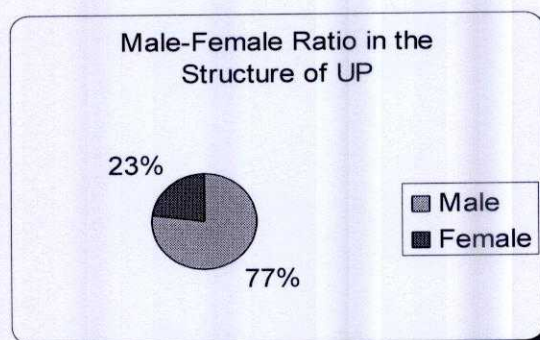
No. of UPs	Total Representatives	Female Representatives		Total male Representatives	
		Total No.	(%)	Total No.	(%)
4,228	4,228x13= 54,964	12,791 ²	23	42173	77

¹ Compiled by the researcher

² Sum of the elected female chairpersons, female members in the general seats and female members in their reserved seats in 4,228 UP.

So it is found from the above table that the percentage of women is only 23% in the structure of Union Parishad in the country. The male-female ratio in a typical Union Parishad is shown below:

Figure 2: Male-Female Ratio in the Union Parishad



Electoral Process of Union Parishad

As mentioned above, the number of members in Union Parishad is fixed and does not depend on the size of the population of the concerned UP. Union Parishad consists of one chairman, nine general members and three women members in reserved seats, for a total of 13 persons. All the positions, including the chairman, are directly elected in non-party based election. The chairman is elected from the whole UP; this office is open for both men and women to contest. The nine general members are directly elected from each of the UP's nine wards; these positions are also open to both men and women. The women in the reserved seats are not elected for any special ward but are elected from three of the general wards. In these wards (open for women only) women candidates contest against each other but are elected by votes from both men and women. So the electoral process of the rural people's representatives in the Union Parishad can be summarized in the following way;

- The chairman is elected from all the nine wards together open for both men and women.
- Each general member is elected from one of nine wards and open for both men and women

- Each woman to the reserved seats is elected from three of the nine wards open for women only.

In discussing the evolution of Union Parishad and the history of women's participation in the structure of UP, it has been observed that women have occupied a space in the decision-making process of the local bodies in Bangladesh through a series of legislation. The Local Government (Union Parishad) (Second Amendment) Act, 1997 has created the provision of direct election for women members to three reserved seats of the Union Parishad, each comprising three wards. But this provision has not improved the situation of huge gender imbalance in the existing structure of UP. The 1997 legislation theoretically guarantees the one-third representation of women at the electoral level as well as the functional level through the provision of their involvement in various development committees and programmes of the Union Parishad. In addition to that, there are 13 Standing Committees in the UP that undertake various development activities and women are to head one third of them. Moreover, Very less allocation of fund and the lack of proper authority is the barrier in the existing structure of the Union Parishad which impedes the elected women members in pursuing their responsibilities effectively.

WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT: A CONCEPTUAL REVIEW

Empowerment has become one of the most concerning issues in the recent development study throughout the world. This word 'empowerment' has been using largely in this challenging era of the globalized world. The concept of women's empowerment has become one of the leading issues in the development discourse through dialogues, discussions and debates by the development practitioner. In general, women's empowerment means to have or gain the ability of taking part effectively in the decision making process which can eventually enhance the worthy living capacity of the women. It has got an effective multidimensional approach that has brought the framework before women to realize and to discover their power and identify in every spheres of life. According to Batliwala, the word 'empowerment' may be termed as the process of challenging the existing power relations and of gaining greater control over the sources of power (Batliwala, 1995).

The Idea of Power

The idea of 'power' has been emerged as the basic or root of the term 'empowerment'. Oxaal and Baden has described power as operating in different ways. According to them these different ways can be described as follows:

Power over: This way of power involves the relationship of domination and subordination. This is basically based on socially sanctioned threats of violence and intimidation which requires constant vigilance to maintain, and it also invites active and passive resistance.

Power to: This is very much related to the authority of decision-making, power to solve problems and it also involves creativity and ability.

Power with: This power involves a group of people organized with a common purpose or common understanding to achieve collective goals.

Power within: This power refers to self confidence, self awareness and assertiveness. It relates to how can individuals can recognize through analyzing their experience, how power operates in their lives, and gain the confidence to act to influence and change this (Williams et al, 1994).

The above mentioned kinds of power described as power-to, power-with and power-within can be developed as alternative to power-over. After analyzing these different kinds of power and their relationship Oxaal and Baden has argued that-

Power must be understood as working at different levels, including the institutional, the household and the individual. For some theorists power is a zero-sum: one group's increase in power necessarily involves another's loss of power. The idea of a redistribution of power is therefore seen as necessarily involving conflict. In this perspective, women's empowerment would lead by implication to less power for men. Some feminist writers on power have challenged the idea that power must necessarily involve domination by some, and obedience or oppression of others. Men would also benefit from the result of women's empowerment with the chance to live in a more equitable society and explore new roles (Oxall and Baden, 1997:1-2).

Participation as the Roots of Empowerment

According to the Human Development Report 1993, participation means the close involvement of the people in the economic, social, cultural and political process that affects their lives (HDR, 1993:1). Participation has both a narrow and wider connotation. In a narrow sense participation means some specific action by which the citizen participates for a limited purpose. And in a wider sense participation refers to the role of members of the general public as distinguished from that of appointed officials, including civil servants, in influencing the activities of government or in providing directly for community needs (Rahman, 1991:14-15).

The Human Development Report 1995 again explained 'Empowerment' in a different dimension. This report emphasized on 'participation' in ensuring empowerment of women in all the field of development. According to this report, development must be by people, not only for them. People must participate fully in the decisions and processes that shape their lives (UN, 1995 b: 12). But at the same time it promotes a rather

instrumentalist view of empowerment; investing in women's capabilities and empowering them to exercise their choices is not only valuable in itself but also is the surest way to contribute to economic growth and overall development (UN, 1995b:iii). Women's participation in the decision making process has been emphasized in describing women's empowerment in the above mentioned report. Now if we consider the Union Parishad as an ancient and the most acceptable democratic institution in the rural area of the country, the level of participation of women representatives in the Union Parishad's decision making process should be taken into consideration. In describing the level of participation of the women's representative in the Union Parishad, the word 'participation' needs to be explained first. The development practitioner has described 'Participation' as a development approach, which recognizes the necessity of involving the backward section of the total population in adopting, designing and implementing policies to ensure their well-being. The history of development has shown that women's participation in all spheres of life has become a vital issue in the development discourse so far. It has also been proved that socio-economic development of a country cannot be fully achieved without the active participation of women at the decision making level of the concerned society. Participation has been defined in different ways by various development scholars.

Norman Uphoff (cited in Khan1993:111) identified four main kinds of participation, which are distinct but interrelated. They are as follows:

- a. Participation in decision making in identifying problems, formulating alternative planning activities, allocating resources etc;
- b. Participation in implementation in carrying out activities, managing and operating programs;
- c. Participation in economic, social, political or other benefits individually or collectively; and
- d. Participation in evaluation of the activity and its outcomes for feedback purposes.

Rahman (1991:3) has stated that all forms of actions through which citizen take part in the operation of administration may be termed as 'participation'. Here, 'taking part'

refers to any level from macro to micro region or it may be of any type e.g. advisory or in decision-making or in implementation etc. According to Mishra, "participation means collective and continuous efforts by the people themselves in setting goals, pooling resources together and taking actions which aim at improving their living conditions" Mishra (1984:88).

In summarizing the above explanation about participation it can be stated that 'Participation' has been used as the root of describing women's empowerment in development discourse. The present study has also focused on 'participation' as one of the roots of women's empowerment in the case of Bangladesh. The elected women members are the representatives of the rural women in the lowest tier of local government in the country. So the level of the elected women members' participation in the decision making process of the Union Parishad would be useful to ensure the overall empowerment of the women in Bangladesh.

Dimensions of Empowerment

In the study of recent development it has also been seen that 'Empowerment' has been applied to the disadvantaged groups of the society for bringing them to the equivalent level of the advanced section in real sense. But empowerment is usually used for improving women's condition as a whole. In fact, 'empowerment' is used in different contexts. To analyze the implication of women's participation or representation in the Union Parishad in Bangladesh in terms of women's empowerment, Naila Kabeer's³ definition of empowerment has an important and dynamic value. According to Kabeer, one way of understanding 'empowerment' is to see it in terms of ability to make choices: disempowerment means one is denied of making choices. Empowerment is the 'expansion in people's ability to make strategic life choices in a context where this ability was previously denied to them'. Empowerment also entails a process of changes where people who have been denied the ability to make choices acquire such ability (Kabeer, 2001:19). Kabeer has described three dimensions of empowerment, such as 'Resource' 'Agency' and 'Achievement'. These three dimensions of empowerment can

³ Dr. Naila Kabeer, Institute of Development Studies in Sussex, UK.

be used as a framework to describe the process of women's empowerment through the Union Parishad in Bangladesh.

Resources: Kabeer has explained 'resources' as material, social or human resources. Various human and social resources which serve to enhance the ability to exercise choice are essential along with the conventional economic resources, such as land, equipment, finance, working capital etc. According to Kabeer, human resources include individual's knowledge, skills, creativity, imagination and so on while social resources are composed of the claims, obligations and expectations. These resources inhere in the relationships, networks and connections which prevail in different spheres of life and which enable people to improve their existing situation and life chances beyond what would be possible only through their individual efforts. The provision of elected women members' participation in the structure of the Union Parishad as the representatives of the women of the constituency has got the scope to avail the resources which Kabeer described as one of the dimensions of empowerment.

Agency: The second dimension of empowerment is 'Agency' which constitutes actions for challenging power relations to show how choices put into effects. Kabeer stated about this dimension of empowerment as following:

The second dimension of power relates to agency, the ability to define one's goals and act upon them. Agency is about more than observable action; it also encompasses the meaning, motivation and purpose which individuals bring to their activity, their sense of agency, or 'the power within'. While agency often tends to be operationalised as 'individual decision-making', particularly in the mainstream economic literature, in reality, it encompasses a much wider range of purposive actions, including bargaining, negotiation, deception, manipulation, subversion, resistance and protest as well as the more intangible, cognitive processes of reflection and analysis. Agency also encompasses collective, as well as individual, reflection and action (Kabeer, 2001:21).

The elected women members' actions in functioning in the Union Parishad can fulfill the above mentioned aspects of 'Agency' as they have to engage themselves in raising their concerning issues all the time in the male domination structure of the Union Parishad.

Achievements: The third dimension of empowerment described by Kabeer is 'Achievement' which is constituted by resources and agency together. It creates the capabilities of the people to live on their own way of living. As mentioned above, resource is the medium through which power is exercised, and the medium through which agency is exercised to alter power relations while achievement is the outcomes of the actions of agency. Thus as Kabeer has observed, achievements of a particular moment are translated into enhanced resources or agency and hence capacity for making choices, at a later moment in time. Thus the functioning of the elected women members in the structure of Union Parishad can be a useful experiment or framework of Kabeer's three dimensions of empowerment.

Sharing Power and Responsibility

As far as women's empowerment is concerned, the ability to make choices can be established for women by sharing the power, duties and responsibilities with men in all sphere of life. This is also depicted in the UN Fourth World Conference of Women held in Beijing in 1995. According to the Beijing Declaration, Women's Empowerment and their full participation on the basis of equality in all spheres of society, including participation in the decision making process and access to power, are fundamental for the achievement of equality, development and peace (paragraph 13, Beijing Declaration). So, without equal participation of women this ability can not be established and thus women's empowerment would be hindered. This study will focus on sharing the duties and responsibilities between women and men in the Union Parishad, the most popular democratic institution at the grass roots level, with their effective participation which ultimately ensures women's empowerment indeed.

It can be concluded by saying that the concept of 'empowerment' has come to the present dimension through a historical background and a series of actions in this field. During the early years of international women's decade, 'status of women' was widely in use and it was meant for increasing the status of women in relation to that of men. The concept of 'status of women' implied the roles of women and the extent of her influence in decision making in family and community. It was argued that the status of women can be

enhanced through improvement in socio economic indicators such as income and employment, education, enhance decision making power and access to resources or assets. The concept of status of women gradually gave way to 'women's autonomy', when the former concept to capture the dimensions of women conceived as agents of changes in the perception of role of women in society and the term empowerment has got the new shape in this field. In general, these concepts describe more on making independent choices by women, enabling them to emerge from their subordinate position of passive recipients of development interventions as their right. The provision of direct election of the women member in the Union Parishad, the most appropriate local government institution in the rural area of the country, has created an opportunity to ensure the highest level of empowerment for the rural women as a whole. The main focus should be at present to strengthen the mechanism or the structure of the Union Parishad to achieve the ultimate goal of empowerment of the women throughout the country.

PRESENT STATE OF EMPOWERMENT OF WOMEN UP MEMBER'S: EMPIRICAL OBSERVATIONS

In order to find out the answer of the set research questions, data were collected from 55 elected women members of the Union Parishad in Dinajpur and Madaripur district. A combination of both structured and unstructured questionnaire was used and interview method was adopted during the collection of the data. There were 34 questions in the questionnaire. Apart from the general overview about the respondents, questions were set from 7 different perspectives. (See the Questionnaire in the Appendix). These perspectives were set basically to review the present state of empowerment of the women members of the Union Parishad. The perspectives are as follows:

- Prior experience in Social activities
- Involvement with the Political Party
- Knowledge about the responsibility
- Cooperation from male colleagues
- Participation in various committees of the UP
- Ability to solve local problems
- Impeding factors in election campaign and functioning as elected representative in UP

All the received information has been analyzed from the above mentioned 7 viewpoints and has been discussed elaborately in the following part of this chapter.

General Overview about the Respondents

The data were collected from 4 Union Parishads in Dinajpur District and 15 Union Parishads in Madaripur District. 55 elected women members of the reserved seats from 19 Union Parishads were interviewed in this study. At the very outset of the interview the respondents were asked about their age, level of education, marital status, number of times elected and some other basic information. No one of the 55 women members were from below 30 years of age though the eligibility of being a candidate in the Union

Parishad election is 18 years old. 50.91% were 30-40 years, 45.45% were 40-50 years and only 3.64% were 50⁺ years old among the 55 interviewed women members. So the majority of the women members are from the age group 30-50 years.

The overall literacy rate of the country is not satisfactory so far. This also implied in this study in terms of the level of education of the respondents. However, only 1 respondent were found to be a graduate and only 20% of the respondent have got the Secondary School and Higher Secondary Certificate. On the other hand, about 78.18% women members have not passed the Secondary School even. It reveals that the level of education of 55 women members was not satisfactory at all.

After the enactment of the Local Government (Union Parishad) (Amendment) Act, 1997 women members are directly elected for the reserved seats of the Union Parishad. Since then, the Union Parishad has got two elections so far. First election with the provision of direct election for the reserved seats was held in 1997 and second one was held in 2003. In interviewing the 55 women members in this study, it was found that 23.64% women members were elected in both elections. This 23.64% have got experience of 12 years in functioning as women members in the Union Parishad till now. 76.36% women members among them are newly elected and they have got the experience of 6 years functioning in the Union Parishad.

Prior Experience in Social Activities

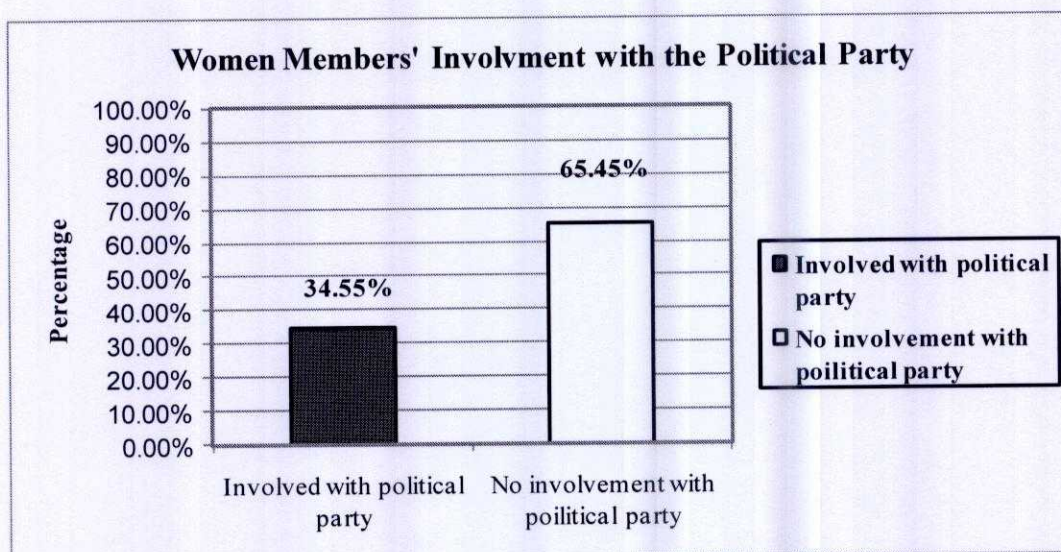
The questionnaire has started with asking the prior experience of the elected women members in social activities in their locality. The objective of this part of the questionnaire is to review their previous experience of dealing with the people of their constituency and to review the impact of such experience in getting elected as women members in the Union Parishad. In this study it was found that 56.36% women members had this sort of experiences while other 43.64% women members among the interviewed women members had no such experiences. Among those who have had the experience of such activities, 38.71% had the experience of engaging in various social activities, 29.03% had the experience in NGO activities and the remaining 32.25% had the

experience of participating in various awareness programmes run by the Government. It is better to make it clear that, social activities include helping the poor people of the locality, participating in the disaster management programmes, etc. NGO activities include working as a volunteer in various NGOs. Participating in immunization programme, participating in the adult literacy programme in the village, participating in the relief works etc are included in the Government awareness programme in this questionnaire.

Involvement with the Political Party

In reviewing the involvement of the elected women members with the political party, this study reveals that among 55 elected women members only 34.55% are involved with the political party and the rest of the women members have no political affiliation.

Figure 3: Women's Members Involvement with the Political Party



Besides these, among 55 interviewed women members 41.82% have family members who are engaged with the political party and 58.18% have no such engagement. The most important findings in this part was that only 43.48% women members of those 34.55% politically involved women members got support during the election campaign from their respective political party and 56.52% did not receive any assistance from their respective political party. The reason behind this scenario probably is for the nonpartisan election

procedure of the Union Parishad. So the women members had to work hard to compete in the electoral process with each other.

Knowledge about the Roles and Responsibilities

The elected women members were asked about their roles and responsibilities during the interview. Among 55 elected women members 30.90% women members told that they do not know what is their roles and responsibilities in the Union Parishad. 69.10% women members told that they have the knowledge about their roles in the Union Parishad. When these 60% women were asked to mention their responsibilities they began to fumble to give the answer. Finally it was found that they have similar understanding regarding their responsibilities. They told that their duties as women members are to distribute the VGD (Vulnerable Group Development) and VGF (Vulnerable Group Feeding) cards provided by the central government to the needy people of their constituency, to serve the people and to discharge other duties desired by the government. Surprisingly, their answers were moving around the same direction. Those who told that they don't have any knowledge about their responsibilities as women members in the Union Parishad, informed that they have just get elected to have a higher status in the society. So the knowledge about the roles and responsibilities of the women members is not remarkable. But this sort of knowledge is essential to pursue or to function as the representative of the rural women which was also described as resources or one of the dimension of empowerment by the development practitioner.

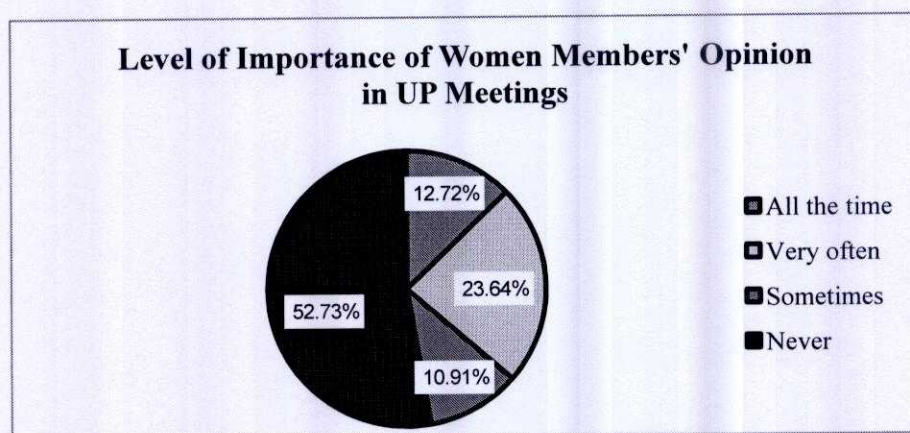
Cooperation from Male Colleagues

This part of the questionnaire has been set to find out the relationship or the level of cooperation prevailing among all the elected representatives in the Union Parishad. It is necessary to mention here that a typical Union Parishad in Bangladesh is composed of 10 male members (1 Chairman and 9 male members of the general seats) and 3 women members of the reserved seats. So the level of cooperation is important to function properly as the representative of the people in the Union Parishad. In case of participating in various meetings held in the Union Parishad building, 30.91% members always get informed to participate in the meeting, 47.27% women members get informed about the

meeting very often, 12.72% get informed sometimes but about 9.10% women members among the interviewed women members never be informed. When they were asked whether they attend the meeting regularly after being informed, 80% of them told that they always attend the meeting.

Again almost 47.27% women members (Among them, 12.72% can express their opinion all the time, 23.64% can do this very often and 10.91% can get this opportunity occasionally) can express their opinion in the meeting or can participate in the decision making process of the Union Parishad. On the other hand, 52.73% women members among the respondents told that they do not get opportunity to express their views or opinions in the meeting.

Figure 4: Level of Importance of Women Members' Opinion in UP Meetings



However, among those 47.27% women members who get the opportunity to express their opinion, almost 53% told that their opinion is not implied or taken in the decision making process. They also do not get proper attention from their colleagues to raise any issue of their concern in the meeting. Though the remaining 47% told that they can raise their issue of any concerning matter and get attention during the meeting, they do not get this opportunity in a regular basis. The elected women members were then asked about the reason of not getting proper cooperation in participating in the meeting of the Union Parishad. Among those 53% women members who don't get proper attention in the meeting told that the reasons behind these are male domination in the structure of the

Union Parishad (44.83%), authoritative attitude of the male members who usually occupy the majority seats in the meeting (27.59%), domination of the Chairman in the Union Parishad (24.14%). Only 1 respondent (3.44%) told that meeting of the Union Parishad is not held in a regular basis.

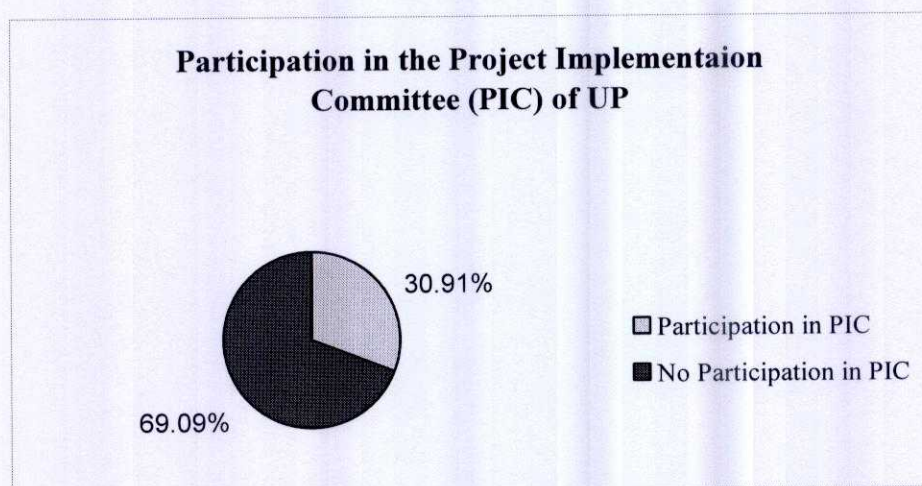
Participation in Various Committees of the UP

In order to provide some specific services to the people, Union Parishad have to have a number of committees. According to the Local Government (Union Parishad) (Amendment) Act, 1993 and 2001 there have to be 13 standing committees in each Union Parishad. But in this study, it is found that 65.45% women members among the interviewed respondents told that they have heard about the Standing Committee and they have such committee in their Union Parishad, 35.55 % told that they do not have any standing committee in their Union Parishad and they do not have any idea about the standing committee. However, among those 65.45% women members, only 44.44% told that they are participating in various Standing Committees such as welfare of women and children, sports and culture committee, cottage industries and co-operatives committee, health, family planning, epidemic control and sanitation committee. Among them 68.75% are involved in these committees as Chairman and other 31.25% are as members of the committee. But 19.45% women members told that they do not have any participation in the standing committee. Again, among those women members who are in the standing committee only 31.03% told that they can play effective role in the committee but 68.97% told that they are deprived to play their role in the committee. According to these women members the reasons behind this sort of ineffectiveness are - other members of the committee bear the tendency to dominate the meeting (20%), their (women members) opinion is not valued in the meeting properly (25%) and the meeting of the standing committee is not held regularly (55%).

Social Development Committee is the latest inclusion in the Union Parishad. But in this study, almost all the respondents (95.55%) told during the interview that they do not have any idea about social development committee. Only 3 respondents among 55 women members told that they have heard about this type of committee but they do not have any

such committee in their Union Parishad. Union Parishad is also involved in implementing various development projects in the rural areas. But only 30.91% of the interviewed women members told that they are involved in such project. On the other hand, 69.09% informed that they do not have any involvement in such development project.

Figure 5: Participation in the Project Implementation Committee of UP



It would be relevant to mention here that politically involved elected women members (34.55%) usually get the opportunity to become chairman in the Standing Committee and they can play effective role in the committee as well. Besides these, the elected women members who maintain good term with the chairman and have the involvement with the same political party get allowed to be involved in the Project Implementation Committee.

However, according to the interviewed women members, the reasons behind the non-involvement in the Project Implementation Committee of the UP are basically - male domination in the structure of the Union Parishad (76.32%) and unwillingness of the Chairman to allow them to get involved in these development projects (33.68%). So the elements of the process of empowerment like participation and sharing the responsibilities are not observed at a satisfactory level in the Union Parishad.

Ability to Solve Local Problems

Generally the people of the rural areas come to the elected representatives of their Union Parishad to get solved their various problems. Among 55 respondents of this study, 78.18% told that people of their constituency come to them to get solved their problems. Again among these respondents, 37.21% told that only the women come to them but at the same time 62.79% told that both men and women of their constituency come to them with various problems to get solved. However, among these 62.79% women members, 41.86% thought that they can meet the demand of the voters of their constituency but 58.14% told that they cannot meet their voters' demand. They argued that the reason why they can not do that are - lack of authority (68%), lack of acceptance 20% and some others reasons (12%) like people get feeling hesitate to come to a women to get solved their problem, lack of fund in dealing with the economic problems of the voters.

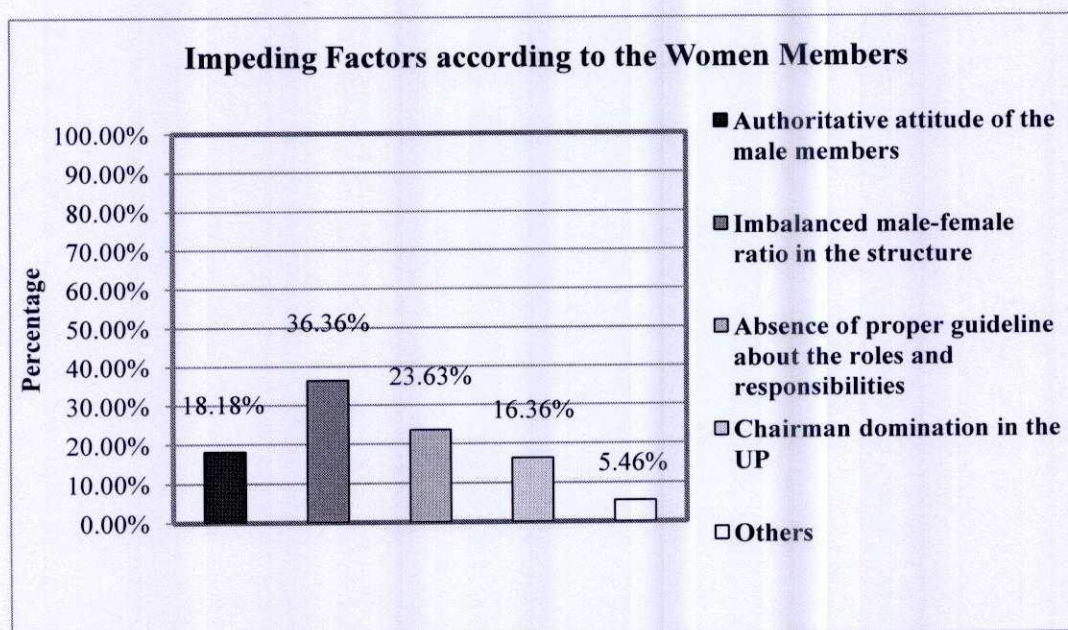
Impeding Factors in Election Campaign and Functioning as Elected Representative in UP

The women members have to face various problems during the election campaign and in functioning effectively in the Union Parishad in the context of Bangladesh. In this study, the respondents were asked to figure out the impeding factors during the election period they faced. According to them the impeding factors are – mobility constraint (50.91%) as each of them had to cover 3 wards comparatively 3 times larger than the male members of the general seats of the Union Parishad, society's patriarchal attitude (14.55%), lack of fund (12.72%), procedural complexities of the election (14.55%) as they had to submit a number of papers in submitting their nomination paper to the authority. However, 07.27% respondents told that they did not face any problem in election campaign.

According to the interviewed elected women members, the factors which impede them to play effective role as a member of the Union Parishad are- Imbalanced male-female ratio in the structure of the Union Parishad (36.36%), Absence of proper guideline about the roles and responsibilities of the women members (23.63%), Authoritative attitude of the male members in the Union Parishad (18.18%), Chairman domination in the Union

Parishad (16.37%) and some others factors (5.46%) like lack of economic resources, lack of authority, lack of training etc.

Figure 6: Impeding factors according to the Women members



In addition to that, one of the respondents told during the interview survey that the provision of 'reserved seat' is itself an impeding factors as because the male members usually ignored them as they are from the 'reserved seats'. These impeding factors have been elaborately discussed in the next chapter.

Assessment of the Empirical Findings in line Theoretical Framework

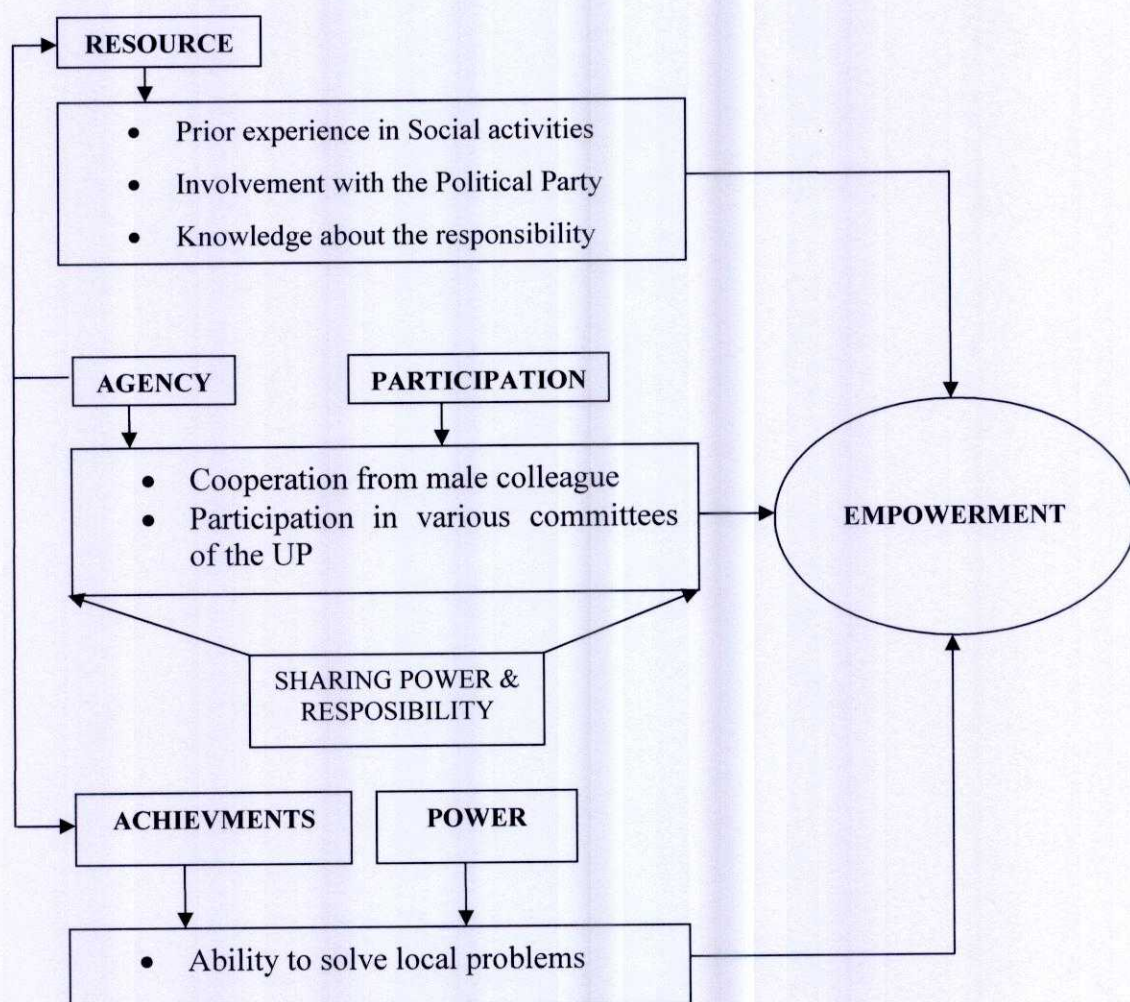
It has been mentioned in the previous chapter of this study that there are three dimensions of empowerment, such as 'Resources', 'Agency' and 'Achievements'. The very first perspective of the questionnaire, used in this study, such as women members' prior experience in social activities, involvement with the political party and knowledge about their responsibility is what Kabeer described as 'Resources', one of the three dimensions of empowerment. It has been discussed earlier that 'Agency' shows how choices are put into effect or the actions challenges for power relations. Thus, the functions of the women

members and their effective participation in various decision- making units of the Union Parishad constitute the aspect of 'Agency'. So the level of cooperation from male colleagues in functioning in the UP and participation in various committees of the Union Parishad enjoyed by the women members is related with the 'Agency' aspects.

Moreover, 'participation' as the roots of empowerment and the concept of sharing power and responsibility which has also been discussed in the theoretical framework of this study, can be easily analyzed by this two perspectives of the questionnaire. The ending perspective of the questionnaire (apart from the impeding factors part) is the 'ability to solve local problems. This perspective is dealt with the third dimensions of empowerment ('Achievements') which is constituted by 'Resources' and 'Agency' together. So, if the women members can have the practice of the above mentioned 'Resources' and 'Agency' aspects of empowerment, they can be able to solve the local problems. But the empirical research of this study shows that a major portion of elected women members have not achieved this sort of abilities to solve local problems. This is also related with the idea of 'power', another basic or roots of empowerment which has been described in the previous chapter of this study. The ability of the women members to solve problems can be the instance of challenging the existing power relations or gaining the control over resources.

On the basis of the above discussion, the following framework of empowerment has been drawn to show the relationship of the empirical findings of this study with its theoretical framework.

Figure 7: Framework of Women's Empowerment⁴



⁴ Developed by the present researcher

Impeding Factors of UP Member's Empowerment

As discussed or analyzed some of the empirical evidences regarding the empowerment issues of women members in Union Parishad in the previous section of this study, the story is not at all satisfactory. Women are still facing a glaring discrimination in exercising their legislative powers and are unjustifiably excluded from economically valued assignments such as the financial and developmental aspects of Union Parishad with its present structure, while these are exclusively reserved for male members. It has been found in some other studies that a series of discriminatory instances ranging from uneven distribution of responsibilities to lack of economic resources. These discriminations not only decline women's meaningful involvement in governance, but also incapacitate them to develop their necessary skills which are inevitable to move forward with their other contemporary rights in order to ensure their empowerment as well. The main impeding factors are discussed in the following part.

Imbalanced Male-Female Ratio

Though the Local Government (Union Parishad) (Second Amendment) Act, 1997, did not restrict women from contesting for the seats of general members as well as the chairman, the number of elected women members from the general seat can not be taken in to consideration. Therefore, the ratio of male-female members virtually remains almost 3:1. Relevant laws/rules provide that decision-making in the Union Parishad will stem from what the majority supports. Therefore, it leaves no doubt that in terms of numerical strength women members are three times weaker than the other (male) members that clearly shows that the women members can do a little to influence the decision taken in the Union Parishad. It had been widely noticed that the women members had been facing enormous problems to perform their roles in the Parishad, which virtually hampers the process of the effective empowerment of women in the country.

Authoritative Attitudes of the Male Members

Typical male attitude of the male members to the women members is a great challenge to the effective participation of the women member in the Union Parishad. During the interview of the elected women members it has been observed that female members perceived a lack of co-operation from the male members and that there was a communication gap between them. Male members have a tendency to oppose whatever female members propose even if they are the best ideas! Many of the male members argued that the women members could not plan, participate or perform their duties properly as the female members can't influence the decisions. Most male members also argued that the elected women should deal with women's issues like violence against women, dowry and divorce and discouraged them to participate in other development works. It has also been reflected in the activities of the Standing Committees of the Union Parishad (WFP, 1999)

UP - A 'Chairman-Dominated' Institution

The present structure of the Union Parishad has a centralized power structure where it is the chairman who usually makes the decision on his own. The powers of the UP are predominantly vested in the chairman, who is authorized to exercise such powers by himself/herself or through other persons authorized by him (Aminuzzaman, 2003). Instead of answering to the members, the chairman cooperates with the government officials and works with the members he likes – while others are ignored. The problem with the Union Parishad as a 'chairman-dominated' institution had resulted in disarming the elected women and their capacity to act. When the women members were asked why they are not involved in implementing the development projects of the Union Parishad, some of them argued that it depends on the relationship with the chairman. If chairman desires they can get involved in such projects. These instances have made the Union Parishad as 'a chairman dominated' institution.

Lack of Specification of Duty and Responsibility of the Women Members

The problem with a 'chairman-dominated' structure is closely related to another problem that is the lack of clear demarcation of what the roles and responsibilities of the members

in Union Parishad have. The Union Parishad charter only highlights the duties and functions of the chairperson. This creates a scope for not sharing functions, power and resources with female members (Siddiqui, 2002). However, the government, a few months before the Union Parishad election, 2003 presented a new circular where the roles and responsibilities for the different members were defined in a very brief manner.

Mobility Constraints

Underdeveloped infrastructure and transportation system prevailed in the rural areas of the country very often hampers mobility of women members to a greater extent. The location of polling booths and their relative distances from homes and workplace often deter women from exercising their right as voters. The demands of contestants right from filing nominations to canvassing for elections, requires them to be mobile. The inconvenient timings, location, distance and the lack of escort are impediments for women elected representatives to attend meetings. Along with these problems, family of women members is also an impediment to their mobility. Thus, it becomes very difficult for a woman to move out from house and involve herself in other activities. In order to protect women from taking part in the decision making process, some times emergency meetings are called in an inconvenient time. Besides, lack of access to transportation sometimes compelled women members to remain absent from attending an emergency meeting in the Union Parishad.

Structural Deficiencies

It is known that the Union Parishad is made up of nine wards and the electorate in each of these wards elects a general member-usually a man although women are not barred as candidates to general seats within each general seat and elects three women who are responsible for three wards each. Since each of the wards is also a constituency of another ward member, who is typically a man, each of the three women in Union Parishad usually has three male counterparts. This treats a situation where male members do not recognize the women as legitimate representatives of the Parishad. At the same time, a women member has a rather large constituency of three wards of the Union. This means that she will potentially face more demands which may be beyond their capacity or

power to fulfill. In fact, this is one of the most vital challenged in the present structure of Union Parishad to enable the empowerment of women.

Lack of Economic Resources

When it comes to the authority and resources of Union Parishad this seems to have an impact on the ability for both the members in the general seats (often men) and the members in the reserved seats. The central government control has consequences for what type of project they can develop and all the members are dependent on their relation to the chairman. But when it comes to the lack of resources women seem to be more vulnerable than the male members. The problem is that the chairman and the male members, compared to most of the women, have an income of their own and access to the family's income. A guess is that they can thus fulfill their commitments to their voters more easily than the women members - even if the funds of the Union are small – and then become influential in society. So this problem stands as a discouragement to the approaches of the empowerment of women.

Discrimination Faced by Women Members in the UP

The elected women members have to face a number of discrimination in working in the Union Parishad. According to the interviewed women members the discrimination they usually face are - almost all of the development and financial projects of Union Parishad are administered and controlled by the Chairman along with male members, in performing legislative functions in the Union Parishad and also when the meetings are held reservations are seen as lenience provision for women and this is not seen as the same as general seats, the family planning and social welfare are predominantly the assignments which women members are responsible to look after but in conducting these functions they are expected to deal with only women not with all the people of their constituency. Moreover, although the Local Government (Union Parishad) (Amendment) Act, 1993 and 2001 has empowered an elected women member to act as Chairperson in at least three Standing Committees of the Union Parishad, many of the Union Parishads are yet to form any such committee in the study area. Actually these are the powerful

impeding factors that still work to undermine women members' participation in the Union Parishad.

Less and Ineffective Participation in the Standing Committee

Among the 13 Standing Committees at Union Parishad level, 3 committees are supposed to be chaired by women members. However, in practice, these committees are not functional as the Chairman and male members are very reluctant to participate and take an active role in these committees. Secondly, due to lack of sufficient knowledge, women members are not able to conduct the business as Chairperson in an effective manner. Only 37% women members were given membership in special committees of Union Parishads which dealt with food for work, vulnerable group feeding, culvert, bridges, family planning and social welfare, destitute relief etc. A large majority had no membership in a committee. Even those women, who were on special committees, played a limited role. They did not involve themselves significantly in the actual work of the committees, nor did the Chairman or male colleagues encourage them to do so. (Siddiqui, 2005:313). In this study it has been observed that only 44.44% of the women members are performing in the Standing Committee.

Absence of Proper Guidelines in Functioning

The elected women member's participation in local government bodies remains generally insignificant, as they are not given any specific duties. The absence of operational guidelines and terms of reference for female elected representatives, the limited capacity of the female elected representatives to operate in public institutions of this nature, the lack of awareness over their roles and responsibilities, the systematic discrimination and biases by male elected colleagues- all these are seen as factors impeding women's meaningful participation in the Union Parishad. As mentioned earlier, the central government directed each Union Parishad to form Social Development Committee (Samajik Unnoyon Committee) in each of the three reserved wards to be chaired by the women member concerned but terms of reference and operational guidelines for such committee has not been specified yet. This study has also shown that the Union Parishad

interviewed has not formed any Social Development Committee so far and the elected women members hardly know about the name of this committee.

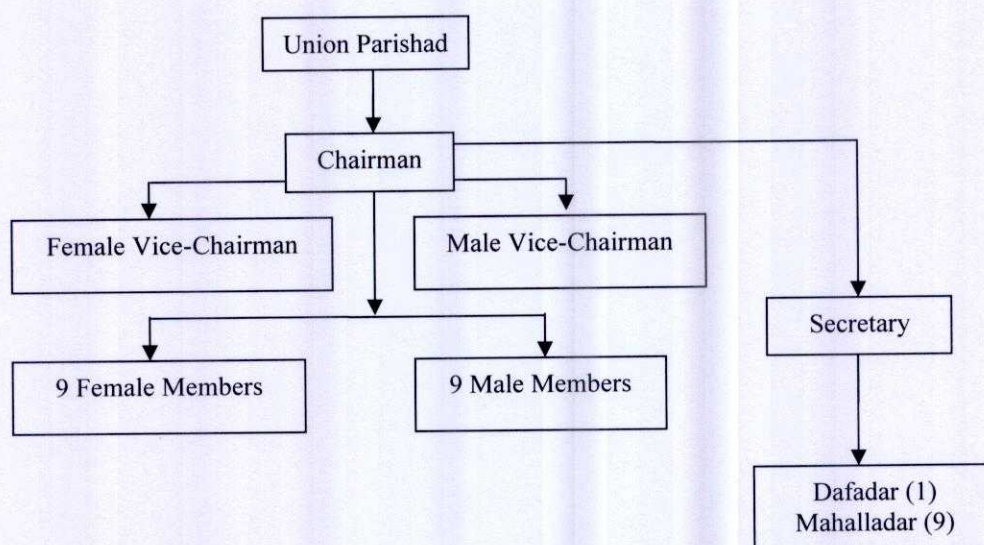
On the basis of the above mentioned analysis, it can be said that the existing impeding factors have made the elected women members ineffective and meaningless in functioning in the Union Parishad. The objective of ensuring women's empowerment in the grass-roots level is becoming unobtainable due to these impeding factors. As a representative of the rural women in the Union Parishad, the elected women members are still facing a number of discriminations from their male colleagues. As a result, the existing structure of the Union Parishad with an uneven ratio of male and female is becoming ineffective day by day. The empirical findings of this study also shows that the absence of operational guidelines and terms of reference for the elected women members, their limited capacity to operate in the Union Parishad, lack of awareness over their roles and responsibilities, the systematic discrimination and biasness attitude of their male colleagues has become the most crucial impeding factors in the present structure of UP relating to the empowerment of women.

These impeding factors can also be seen as the barrier in 'sharing the power and responsibilities' and 'effective participation as the roots of empowerment'. Kabeer's three dimensions of empowerment ('Resources', 'Agency' and 'Achievements') are also not feasible in the context of the above mentioned impeding factors. Again, the framework of empowerment, described in the previous chapter (see figure: 7), clearly indicates the condition of ensuring empowerment which has been drawn on the basis of the theoretical framework of this study. But the empirical findings of the study which has clearly identified the most crucial impediments with the existing structure of Union Parishad show that the route of empowerment, as shown in the framework of empowerment, is not smooth enough in the only democratic institution at the grass-roots level of the country.

Policy Options, Recommendations and Conclusions

It has been mentioned earlier that the Local Government (Union Parishad) (Second Amendment) Act, 1997 has made the provision for the direct election of three women in reserved seats and this three elected women members each represented three wards to ensure full representation of nine wards of the Union Parishad. In addition, women can contest in the position of chairman and in the nine general seats as well. But the numbers of women, contesting in these mentioned positions is not remarkable. So the representation or participation of women is to be considered in the reserved seats only. But the elected women members are not able to make their effective participation due to a number of challenges prevailed in the existing structure of the Union Parishad. So repositioning of the women members is needed to reform the existing structure of the Union Parishad. To address this sort of problem, the existing structure of Union Parishad may be reformed in the following way.

Figure 8: Proposed Structure of Union Parishad⁵



⁵ Developed by the present researcher.

According to the proposed structure, along with the chairman there would be two posts vice chairman with specific duties and responsibilities. These very two posts will be fulfilled from men and women equally and they will be elected directly. The vice chairmen would be given such authority so that the Union Parishad could be able to come out from 'a chairman dominated institution.' In addition, each ward will have the provision of directly electing a women member with equal duties and responsibilities, along side a male counterpart. Thus, there will be greater gender balance at each ward. At the same time, each woman will have to manage just one ward, instead of three wards in the present system. One may argue that this structure will make the Union Parishad extremely large regarding the number of members and at the same time ambitious in the context of Bangladesh. But as empowerment of women is concerned, there should be an equal participation of women in the process and the proposed structure will definitely ensure the equal participation of women in the Union Parishad and the male domination could be reduced or minimized for this equal participation of women.

The elected women members in the reserved seats are exclusively committed to the integration of empowerment issues in the participatory planning and implementation process of the development schemes at Union Parishad level. Experience shows that women members have less involvement in the planning and implementation process of the schemes. They are denied a voice in the selection of development schemes of their Union Parishad. Although women members attend the Union Parishad meeting regularly most of them are not getting enough opportunity to be vocal to press forward their opinion on different issues regarding various discriminations against women at the grassroots level. So, in this regard, the standing committee and the latest introduction in the Union Parishad, the Social Development Committee should be made effectively functional and equally participatory by women. The modus operandi of these committees should be specified at the very beginning to make these effective. The means and the processes of empowerment of the rural women can be flourished through the proposed structure of the Union Parishad.

Specific Recommendations

Women's adequate participation in the decision process is a precondition for bringing women in the mainstream of development process which eventually empowers them. The theories studied in this study reveal that women's empowerment can be ensured through the effective participation of the disempowered section of the society in the decision making process, equal sharing of power and responsibilities between male and female and the achievements of resources and agency action of the disempowered group, the women. There is no doubt that as a step of women empowerment, the elected reserve seats for women helps to promote participation and women access to the decision-making process numerically, though not practically much ensured. To ensure a meaningful participation of the elected women members as an essential step to empower them, the following policy recommendations may be taken into consideration:

- **Equal Representation of women members in the structure of Union Parishad:** At the Union Parishad level, planning and decision-making committees should be comprised of equal participation of male and female. In this regard, the male member and the female member ratio should be the same in each ward of the Union Parishad. The introduction of the post of vice chairmen could make the structure balance.
- **Smooth Election procedures :** Election procedures should be made smooth in the light of facilitating women's participation, such as right to choose their representatives, freedom to express their views and opinions, freely allowed to cast their precious vote, limits on expenditure and its strict implementation and removing mobility constraint in electing campaign.
- **Participation of women in all activities:** To ensure an active participation of women in all activities of Union Parishad, government should monitor so that women representatives are given their due respect and equal participation scope in development works.
- **Ensuring participation in different committees of Union Parishad:** In order to ensure proper participation in various committees of the Union Parishad, the government should monitor and play a vital role to ensure equal participation of

women members in the different committees, such as the Standing Committee, Social Development Committee. A viable mechanism can be developed to ensure regular attendance of the women members at the meetings.

- **Specification of roles and responsibilities:** Roles and responsibilities of the women members should be clearly defined in the manuals and orders of local government. Work should be fairly distributed among the male and female members in such a way so that women member can meaningfully participate in all type of functions.
- **Knowledge about the functions of Union Parishads:** Most of the women members had lower levels of education. Their training may be conducted by the relevant training institutes or by the respective district authority with the financial support of the government or assistance from the donor agencies/development partners. A training handbook on women's power, rights, functions and management of the Union Parishad should be provided to them after being elected as women members of the Union Parishad.
- **Information and training to women members of Union Parishad:** The government along with the NGOs imparting training should provide information and training to women members of Union Parishad to increase their knowledge of local government, responsibilities and functions. This could be through information manuals, mobile training program and through audio-visual mediums. Women should be given various opportunities for leadership training and education in order to encourage them to take up political and leadership position in all fields. Supportive services should be provided to allow women to participate in local bodies.
- **Special training on women's issues:** Rural women do not have a clear apprehension and adequate awareness of the issues faced by the women. Women members should be recognized as leaders at the grassroots level by the government and by the local community. They should, therefore, be given adequate training and exposure to the issues, which stand in the way of the integration of women with the socio-economic life of society.

- **Involvement of NGOs:** NGO should consciously make an effort to emphasize the issues of gender equity and women's empowerment in its right perspective. Both men and women leaders at the grassroots and national levels must be sensitized to women's issues, and form pressure and advocacy groups for the realization of gender equity. Women should be made aware of their potential political power and their contribution to the political process as voters.
- **Role of Mass Media:** Mass Media should be used to educate and mobilize public opinion in such a way that the realization about the benefits of women's empowerment in the national development efforts is created among people.
- **Monitoring and advocacy:** Priority must be given on monitoring the status, conditions, attitude of the male colleague in the Union Parishad, rights and authorities of women member of the Union Parishad. There must be a sustained campaign for women mobilization, regular monitoring, public information and advocacy in this realm.
- **Training on leadership:** Women should be given various opportunities for leadership training, training regarding the activities of Union Parishad and education in order to encourage them to take up political and leadership position. Supportive services should be provided to allow women participate in these training courses.
- **Measures to improve quality participation:** Finally, in increasing the number of women in decision-making positions does not in itself translate in to greater empowerment for women. Measures to increase the quantity of women representatives need to be accompanied by measures to improve the quality of participation.

Conclusion

The finding and analysis of this study clearly demonstrate that 'imbalance representation of male and female in the existing structure of UP', 'authoritative attitude of the male colleagues to their counterpart', 'power of Chair', 'absence of proper guideline in functioning', 'less and ineffective participation in various activities of UP', 'limited revenue base' and 'existing structural deficiencies' are the most critical impediments with the present structure of Union Parishad relating to the empowerment of women in Bangladesh. The empirical observations of this study strongly suggest that restructuring of the Union Parishad with the provision of equal participation of male and female can make the approach of women's empowerment smooth in the country. To find out the answer of the research questions set in this study it has also been found through the empirical evidence that the existing impediments with the present structure of UP has truly become one of the crucial obstacle in the empowerment approach.

The empirical findings of this study have also revealed that 'Participation', 'Sharing the Power and Responsibilities and other dimensions of empowerment framework has not been able to ensure women's empowerment throughout the country. In this context it can be said that the hypothesis set in this study were partly true. During the interview with the elected women members, they have made some valuable recommendations to improve the situation of discrimination prevailing in this field. One of the important recommendations was to restructure the Union Parishad since the present structure has got an uneven male-female ratio. They argued that it will ensure equal participation in the decision-making process. So it is the time for the policy makers to pay attention in this point to have an effective and participatory local government institution which can virtually ensure the effective empowerment of women. According to the theoretical framework of the study, effective empowerment of women can be ensured by eliminating the impediments existing in the structure of the Union Parishad.

In fact, the spirit of good governance lies on the equal participation of women and men in every stage of development process in the present world. Moreover, Equality between women and men is a fundamental prerequisite for development and peace for every

society. Without women's needs and interests being taken into account and without creating proper opportunity for them to participate in decision-making, development interventions and planning sustainable results cannot be achieved. In this context of reality, the United Nations has rightly given emphasis on the equal participation of women in the decision making process in its various conferences on women. The charter of CEDAW has also focused on women's equal rights to participate in the development planning.

In order to show its commitment on fulfilling the conditions or initiatives undertaken by the International Communities, Bangladesh has also given a legitimate space in rural and urban political institutions to the women. The constitution of the country has got the provision of special attention to women in democracy and local bodies. The arrangement of the direct election in the reserved seats of the Union Parishad has created the opportunity for women to get involved in the decision-making process. But the empirical evidences have failed to show a meaningful progress in this field. There are a number of impeding factors exist in the present structure of the Union Parishad which have hampered the overall empowerment process in the grass-roots level.

The battle for women's active participation in the rural political institution in Bangladesh has started which is a step forward to ensure their empowerment gradually. They still have a long way to go. To make governance more streamlined, empowering and development oriented the journey towards the effective empowerment of women requires more carefulness and attention.

Appendix

Questionnaire for the Elected Women Member of Union Parishad (Analysis Part)

A. General Information of the Respondent

Age:

Total Res.	Below 30 Yrs		30-40 yrs		40-50 yrs		50+ yrs	
55	0		28	50.91%	25	45.45%	02	3.64%

Level of Education:

Total Res.	Below SSC		HSC		Bachelor		Masters	
55	43	78.18%	11	20%	01	1.81%	0	

Number of times Elected:

Total Res.	1 time		2 times	
55	42	76.36%	13	23.64%

B. Specific information regarding the Empowerment issues

1. Prior Experience in Social Activities

1.1. Did you have previous experience in any social activities before get elected in UP?

☐ Yes ☐ No

Total	Yes		No	
55	31	56.36%	24	43.64%

1.2. If yes, in what kind of activities you were involved?

- ☐ Social activities ☐ NGO activities ☐ Religious activities
☐ Government awareness programs ☐ Others (be specific)

Item	No of Res.	Total Res.	%
Social activities	12	31	38.72
NGO activities	09	31	29.03
Religious activities	0	31	0
Government awareness programs	10	31	32.25
Others (be specific)	0	31	0

2. Involvement with the Political Party

2.1. Were you involved with any political party before get elected in UP?

- ☐ Yes ☐ No

Total	Yes		No	
55	19	34.55%	36	65.45%

2.2. Is anyone of your family involved in the political party?

- ☐ Yes ☐ No

Total	Yes		No	
55	23	41.82%	32	58.18%

2.3. If yes (Q-4 or Q-5), did you get any support from that party in your election campaign?

- ☐ Yes ☐ No

Total	Yes		No	
23	10	43.48%	13	56.52%

3. Knowledge about the Roles and Responsibilities

3.1. Do you know the roles and responsibilities of the elected women member?

☐ Yes ☐ No

Total	Yes		No	
55	38	69.10%	17	30.90%

3.2. If yes, what are the specific roles of the women member?

☐ Distribute the VGD and VGF card, to serve the people, what Govt. desire

4. Cooperation from Male Colleagues

4.1. Do you get informed to participate in the meetings of the Union Parishad?

☐ All the time ☐ very often ☐ sometimes ☐ Never

Item	No of Res.	Total Res.	%
All the time	17	55	30.91
very often	26	55	47.27
sometimes	07	55	12.72
Never	05	55	09.10

4.2. If informed, do you attend the meeting regularly?

☐ All the time ☐ very often ☐ sometimes ☐ Never

Item	No of Res.	Total Res.	%
All the time	40	50	80
very often	06	50	12
sometimes	04	50	08
Never	0	50	00

4.3. If informed, why you don't attend the meeting regularly? (more than 1 option can be chosen)

- ☐ Long distance of the meeting place from your household
- ☐ Inconvenient timing of the meeting
- ☐ Non-cooperation of the family member
- ☐ Your opinion is not valued generally
- ☐ Others (be specific)

Item	No of Res.	Total Res.	%
Long distance of the meeting place from your household	-	-	-
Inconvenient timing of the meeting	-	-	-
Lack of fund	-	-	-
Non-cooperation of the family member	-	-	-
Your opinion is not valued generally	-	-	-
Others (be specific)	-	-	-

4.4. Do you get opportunity to express your opinion in the UP meetings?

- ☐ Yes ☐ No

Total	Yes		No	
55	26	47.27%	29	52.73%

4.5. Do you get proper attention to raise any issue of your concern in the UP meeting?

- ☐ All the time ☐ very often ☐ sometimes ☐ Never

Item	No of Res.	Total Res.	%
All the time	07	55	12.72
very often	13	55	23.64
sometimes	06	55	10.91
Never	29	55	52.73

4.6. Does your opinion get importance in the decision making process of the UP?

☐ All the time ☐ very often ☐ sometimes ☐ Never

Item	No of Res.	Total Res.	%
All the time	07	55	12.72
very often	13	55	23.64
sometimes	06	55	10.91
Never	29	55	52.73

4.7. If you don't get proper attention in the meeting, what are the reasons behind that?

(more than 1 option can be chosen)

- ☐ Authoritative attitude of the male members'
☐ Male domination in the UP structure
☐ Chairman domination in the UP ☐ Lack of proper guideline on the UP meeting
☐ Others (be specific)

Item	No of Res.	Total Res.	%
Authoritative attitude of the male members	08	29	27.59
Male domination in the UP structure	13	29	44.83
Chairman domination in the UP	07	29	24.14
Lack of proper guideline on the UP meeting	0	29	0
Others (be specific)	01	29	3.44

5. Participation in Various Committees of the UP

5.1. Have you heard about the Standing Committee of the UP?

☐ Yes ☐ No

Total	Yes		No	
55	36	65.45%	19	34.55%

5.2. If yes, do you have any Standing Committee in your UP?

☐ Yes ☐ No

Total	Yes		No	
36	36	100%	0	

5.3. If yes, do you have any participation in the Standing committee?

☐ Yes ☐ No

Total	Yes		No	
36	16	44.44%	20	55.56%

5.4. If yes, what are the committees you are participating?

☐ welfare of women and children, sports and culture committee, cottage industries and co-operatives committee, health, family planning, epidemic control and sanitation committee

5.5. What is your position in the committee?

☐ Chairman ☐ Members

Item	No of Res.	Total Res.	%
Chairman	11	16	68.75%
Members	5	16	31.25%

5.6. Can you play effective role in the Standing Committees meeting?

☐ Yes ☐ No

Total	Yes		No	
29	09	31.03%	20	68.97%

5.7. If not, what are the reasons behind that? (more than 1 option can be chosen)

- ☐ You do not feel confident enough
- ☐ You don't get opportunity to raise your voice
- ☐ The other members have the tendency to dominate the meeting
- ☐ Your opinion is not valued in the meeting
- ☐ Others (be specific)

Item	No of Res.	Total Res.	%
You do not feel confident enough	0	20	0
You don't get opportunity to raise your voice	0	20	0
The other members have the tendency to dominate the meeting	04	20	20
Your opinion is not valued in the meeting	05	20	25
Others (be specific) (Meeting is not held regularly)	11	20	55

5.8. Have you heard about Social Development Committee of the UP?

- ☐ Yes ☐ No

Total	Yes		No	
55	03	5.45%	52	94.55%

5.9. If yes, do you have any Social Development Committee in your UP?

- ☐ Yes ☐ No

Total	Yes		No	
03	0	--	03	100%

5.10. Can you play effective role in the Social Development Committee meeting?

☐ Yes ☐ No

Total	Yes		No	
--	--	--	--	--

5.11. If not, what are the reasons behind that? (more than 1 option can be chosen)

- ☐ You do not feel confident enough
- ☐ You don't get opportunity to raise your voice
- ☐ The other members have the tendency to dominate the meeting
- ☐ Your opinion is not valued in the meeting
- ☐ Others (be specific)

Item	No of Res.	Total Res.	%
You do not feel confident enough	-	-	-
You don't get opportunity to raise your voice	-	-	-
The other members have the tendency to dominate the meeting	-	-	-
Your opinion is not valued in the meeting	-	-	-
Others (be specific)	-	-	-

5.12. Do you get involved in the development project implementing in the UP?

☐ Yes ☐ No

Total	Yes		No	
55	17	30.91%	38	69.09%

5.13. If no, why don't you get involved? (more than 1 option can be chosen)

- ☐ Lack of confidence
- ☐ UP Chairman don't allow you to get involved
- ☐ Male domination in the UP
- ☐ Others (be specific)

Item	No of Res.	Total Res.	%
Lack of confidence	0	38	0
UP Chairman don't allow you to get involved	09	38	23.68
Male domination in the UP	29	38	76.32
Others (be specific)	0	38	0

6. Ability to Solve Local Problems

6.1. Do the people of your constituency come to you to get solved their various problems?

- ☐ Yes ☐ No

Total	Yes		No	
55	43	78.18%	12	21.82%

6.2. If yes, who comes to you generally?

- ☐ Male ☐ Female ☐ Both

Item	No of Res.	Total Res.	%
Male	0	43	0
Female	16	43	37.21
Both	27	43	62.79

6.3. Can you solve their problems or meet their demand?

☐ Yes ☐ No

Total	Yes		No	
43	18	41.86%	25	58.14%

6.4. If no, why you can not solve the problem? (more than 1 option can be chosen)

- ☐ Lack of authority
☐ Lack of confidence
☐ Lack of acceptance
☐ Others (be specific)

Item	No of Res.	Total Res.	%
Lack of authority	17	25	68
Lack of confidence	0	25	0
Lack of acceptance	05	25	20
Others (be specific)	03	25	12

7. Impeding Factors in Election Campaign and Functioning as Elected Representative in UP

7.1. What problem(s) you faced during the election campaign? (more than 1 option can be chosen)

- ☐ Society's patriarchal attitude ☐ Mobility constraint ☐ Lack of fund
☐ Non-cooperation of the family member ☐ Procedural complexities of the UP election
☐ Others (be specific)

Item	No of Res.	Total Res.	%
Society's patriarchal attitude	08	55	14.55
Mobility constraint	28	55	50.91
Lack of fund	07	55	12.72
Non-cooperation of the family member	0	55	0
Procedural complexities of the UP election	08	55	14.55
Others (be specific)	04	55	07.27

7.2. What are the problems do you think impede to play your role as a member in the UP?

(more than 1 option can be chosen)

- ☐ Authoritative attitude of the male members
- ☐ Male-female ratio in the structure
- ☐ Absence of proper guideline about the roles and responsibilities
- ☐ Chairman domination in the UP
- ☐ Non-cooperation of the family member
- ☐ Others (be specific)

Item	No of Res.	Total Res.	%
Authoritative attitude of the male members	10	55	18.18
Male-female ratio in the structure	20	55	36.36
Absence of proper guideline about the roles and responsibilities	13	55	23.63
Chairman domination in the UP	09	55	16.37
Non-cooperation of the family member	0	55	0
Others (be specific)	03	55	5.46

Reference:

- Ahmed, Kamal Uddin, 2005, Women and Politics in Bangladesh, Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bangladesh (the Golden Jubilee Volume), Dhaka. Accessed on 25 Feb. 2009 at www.asiaticsociety.org.bd/journal/goldenjubilee_vol/article/H_kamal_uddin_hm.
- Ahmed, Shafi and Nabi, Bela, 2001, One Decade of Bangladesh Under Women Leadership, Alochana Magazine, Accessed on 01 Feb. 2009 at www.magazinealochana.org.
- Ahmed, Tofail et. al. (2003), Gender Dimensions in Local Government Institutions, Nari Uddug Kendra., Dhaka.
- Alam, Bilquis Ara (1995), "Women in Local Government: Profiles of Six Chairmen of Union Parishads" in Women in Politics and Bureaucracy, Dhaka: Women for Women, pp: 39-50.
- Alam, Muhammad Mustafa et. al., 1984, Development through Decentralization in Bangladesh: Evidence and Perspective, University Press Limited, Dhaka.
- Aminuzzaman, Salahuddin M, 2003, Strengthening the UP: Problems and Prospects, Paper presented in a workshop on Local Government and Reforms: Issues and Prospects, at Bangladesh Public Administration Training Centre, Dhaka. 19 April, 2003.
- Aminuzzaman, Salahuddin M, 2004, Regulatory framework of Union Parishad, UNDP, Dhaka, 2004
- Aminuzzaman, Salahuddin M, 2008, Governance and Politics: Study on the Interface of Union Parishad, NGO and Local Actors, Institute for Environment & Development (IED), Dhaka.
- Batliwala, S, 1994, the Meaning of Women's empowerment: New Concepts from Action, Harvard University Press, Boston.
- Begum, Afroza, 2007, Local Governance in Bangladesh: Towards a "Critical Mass" to Combat Discrimination against Women with Special Reference to India, Accessed on 15 Jan. 2009 at www.krepublishers.com/02-journal/jss/....pdf
- Chowdhury et al. (ed), 1994b, Women and Politics. Women for Women. Dhaka.
- ESCAP, 2002, Report on the State of Women in Urban Local Government, Bangladesh. Accessed on 20 Feb. 2009 at www.unescap.org/huset/women/index.html.

- Fourth World Conference on Women (FWCW) Platform For Action, 1995, Women in Power and Decision –Making, Accessed on 22 Feb. 2009 at www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/beijing/platform/decision/htm
- Frankl, Emma, 2004, Quota as Empowerment, The Use of Reserved Seats in Union Parishad as an Instrument for Women's Political Empowerment in Bangladesh. Accessed on 25 Feb. 2009 at www.statsvet.su.se/qoutas/emma_frankl_wps_2004_3.pdf.
- Haque, Mozammel and Mohiuddin, K.M., 2000, Women in the Union Parishad, A Changing Trend, Bangladesh Nari Progati Sangstha, Dhaka.
- Human Development Report, 1993, United Nations Development Programs. UNDP New York
- Human Development Report, 1995, United Nations Development Programs. UNDP, New York
- Jahan, Momtaz (1997). "The Changing Structure of Local Government in Bangladesh: An Overview" in Administration, Communication and Society, Vol. 1, No. 1, January- June, Dhaka: Shiskha O Shanskriti Charcha Kendra.pp.91-105.
- Kabeer, N., 2001, Resources, agency, Achievements: Reflections on the Measurement of Women's Empowerment, In Discussing Women's Empowerment – Theory and Practice, Sida studies no. 3. Shockholm.
- Khan, Md.Mostafuzur Rahman, and Ara, Fardaus, 2006, Women, Participation and Empowerment in Local Government: Bangladesh Union Parishad Perspective, CDRB Publication, Dhaka, Accessed on 20 Jan. 2009 at www.cdrb.org/journal/current/1/3.pdf.
- Mallick, Bishawjit, 2004, Local Government: Local People's Institution; A compilation on Local Government issue, A H Development Publishing House.
- Mass-line Media Centre, 2002, A gender perspective analysis on the role of elected representatives of Union Parishad, Dhaka.
- Misra, S.N., 1984, Participation and Development, India: NBO Publishers.
- Muttalib, M. A. and Khan, Mohd. Akbar Ali (1983), Theory of Local Government, New Delhi: Sterling Publishers Private Limited.

- Oxaal, Zoe and Baden, Sally, 1997, Gender and Development: definitions, approaches and implications for policy, Breifing prepared for SIDA, BRIDGE, Institute of Development Studies, University of Sussex, Report no. 40.
- Qadir, S. R. & M. Islam, 1987, Women Representatives at the Local Level as Change Agent of Development, Women for Women, Dhaka.
- Rahman, M. Shamsur (1991), People's Participation at the Upazilla Level: Problems and Prospects (A Study of Twelve Upazillas in Bangladesh), Rajshahi University.
- Shamim, I & Nasreen, M, 2002, Gender and Local Governance: A New Discourse in Development, the Journal of Social Studies. New Delhi, India, Accessed on 01 Jan. 2009 at [www.saninetwork.net/pdf/](http://www.saninetwork.net/pdf/SANEI-II) SANEI-II
- Siddiqui, Kamal, (ed) 2005, Local Government of Bangladesh, University Press Ltd., Dhaka.
- Siddiqui, Tanseem, 2002, Effective Participation of Women and Strengthening of Local Government in Bangladesh, Paper presented at a Seminar on Good Governance and Local Government: Changes and Challenged, 21 December 2002, Dhaka, Organized by Odhikar.
- Sohel, Mostafa, (undated), The Status of Women member of Union Parishad in Bangladesh, Accessed on 25 March 2009 at www.dwatch-bd.org/prc/html/up..pdf
- Sultana, Abeda, 2000, The role of Training in the Empowerment of women in Union Parishad: An analysis, Lok Prosashan Samoyke, No.-17, December, Dhaka.
- The Constitution of the Peoples' Republic of Bangladesh, 1972, Ministry of Law, Justice and Parliamentary Affairs, Government of Bangladesh.
- The Local Government (Union Parishads) Amendment Act, 1997, Ministry of Law, Justice and Parliamentary Affairs, Government of Bangladesh.
- The Local Government (Union Parishads) Ordinance, 1983, Ministry of Law, Justice and Parliamentary Affairs, Government of Bangladesh.
- Williams et al, 1994, The Oxfam Gender Training Manual, Oxfam, Oxford.
- World Food Programme, 1999, Elected Women Members of UP, A Socio Economic Study.