

Women's Representation in the Union Parishad

Local Governance Programme Sharique-III

Maheen Sultan, Md. Bayazid Hasan, Sahida Islam Khondaker,
Ahmed Asif Enam, Towhid Iqram Mahmood, Sohela Nazneen

Women's Representation in the Union Parishad

Local Governance Programme Sharique-III

Maheen Sultan, Md. Bayazid Hasan, Sahida Islam Khondaker
Ahmed Asif Enam, Towhid Iqram Mahmood, Sohela Nazneen

BRAC Institute of Governance and Development (BIGD)
BRAC University, Dhaka

Special Publication Series

No. 04, July 2016

**Women's Representation in the Union Parishad
Local Governance Programme Sharique-III**

By

Maheen Sultan, Md. Bayazid Hasan, Sahida Islam Khondaker, Ahmed Asif Enam,
Towhid Iqram Mahmood, Sohela Nazneen

© 2016 BIGD, BRAC University

Terms of use

“All rights reserved. This book or any portion thereof may not be reproduced or used in any manner whatsoever without the expressed written permission of the publisher except for the use of brief quotations in a book review.”

Cover : Md. Parvej

Published by

BRAC Institute of Governance and Development (BIGD)

BRAC University

SK Centre (3rd - 7th & 9th Floor), GP, JA-4, TB Gate

Mohakhali, Dhaka-1212, Bangladesh

Tel : +88 02 5881 0306, 5881 0326, 5881 0320, 883 5303

Fax : +88 02 883 2542

Email : info@bigd.bracu.ac.bd

Website : <http://bigd.bracu.ac.bd>

Table of Contents

Acronyms	v
Executive Summary	vii
Part I Overview	1
1. Why this research and what is different about it	1
Study Objectives	2
Research questions	3
Structure of the Report	4
2. Methodology	4
3. Literature review	5
History of Women's Participation in Politics	5
Legal and Policy Framework	6
Women's Participation as Citizens	7
Constraints/Barriers to women's participation and representation	7
Reserved seats versus general seats	9
Developing Voice and Representation (Influence)	10
Penetration of political parties	11
Relations with Civil Society	11
Public Opinion on Women's Political Participation	12
4. Views of Key Informants	12
Part II Research Findings	15
5. Respondent Profiles	15
6. Entering Politics: Opportunities to gain political apprenticeship and contest elections/re-elections	17
Learning to do politics and deciding to contest elections	17
Contesting general seats or reserved seats?	19
Male views on women's participation in general versus reserved seats	20
Perception of reserved seats to be a barrier or not before elections	21
What they aspire to do once in office	22
Reasons for contesting or not for a second term	23
7. Building Relationships and Influence	24
Relationship with Government Officials at UZP Level	25
Relationship with UNO	26
Relation with Local Journalists and Local Mastaans:	26
Relationship with citizens	26
How the community perceives women candidates and members of the UP	27
Networking though Women's Development Forum, NGOs and projects	28

8. Influence and decision-making within the UP	28
Relationship between female members and Chairman	28
Relationship with Secretary	30
Relationship with male members	30
Participation in Decision making process:	31
9. Others Perceptions of Women's Representatives Role and Leadership in the	
Local Government	31
Perception about women's participation in election or politics	31
Negotiating work and projects in the UP	32
Social Norms Restricting Interactions between women and men	33
Differences in leadership styles/expectations/performance	33
Work that female members can or cannot do	34
10. What is the influence of political parties and civil society organisations	35
Political Parties and Women's Experience	35
Perspectives of the Political Parties About UP Women Members	37
Political Party Influence in the functioning of the UP	38
Civil society organizations and Women's Experience	41
11. Policy and Programmatic Implication of the findings	42
Policy Implications	42
Programmatic Implications	43

List of Figures

Figure 1 Hindrances to Women's Participation.	8
Figure 2 Types of Respondents by Age Group	15
Figure 3 Level of Education by Type of Respondents	15
Figure 4 Percentage of Female Elected Respondents by Profession/Previous Profession	16
Figure 5 Profession/ Previous Profession by Types of Male Respondents	16
Figure 6 Party allegiance of elected women members	36
Figure 7 Political Affiliation of Different Types of Respondents	36

List of Tables

Table 1 Role of Women Members in UP Deliberations.	10
Table 2 Participation of Women UP members in UP Standing Committees	10

List of References 45

Acronyms

ACD	Association for Community Development
ADB	Asian Development Bank
AL	Awami League
BNP	Bangladesh Nationalist Party
CEP	Community Empowerment Programme
CSO	Civil Society Organization
DASCOH	Development Association for self Reliance Communication and Health
FGD	Focus Group Discussion
KII	Key Informant Interview
LGED	Local Government Engineering Department
LGSP	Local Government Support Programme
MP	Member of Parliament
NGO	Non-governmental Organization
NILG	National Institute of Local Government
OC	Officer In Charge
PIO	Project Implementation Officer
RPO	Representation of the People Order
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNO	Upazila Nirbahi Officer
UP	Union Parishad
UZP	Upazila Parishad
VGD	Vulnerable Group Development
VGf	Vulnerable Group Feeding



Executive Summary

There is a need for an in-depth analysis of women's experience in local government and their ability to exercise political agency (i.e. what women do, how they exercise power) to negotiate local level politics and various barriers. Despite the wealth of literature on the impact of quotas and direct elections on women's representation at the local level (Panday, 2013; Khan and Mohsin; 2008; Frankel; 2004) and various program evaluation studies (Aparajita 2013), there is a lack of nuanced and context - grounded scholarship on what are the different pathways through which women gain access to political power at the local level and what enhances women's political agency (i.e. being effective representatives). This means that while there is an understanding of the barriers women face and the limitations of how they are able to exercise leadership, less is known about how, when and in which areas they do exercise agency and can influence structures, processes and people to bring about change or make decisions in their favour. The study aims to address this gap.

The study focused on a few key questions: a) how, where and when women receive support for their accession and practice of political leadership at the local level; b) how women engage with opposition (from the family, community, political parties, from the rest of the UP members) in such a process; c) the kinds of coalitions women representatives form as they try to promote their political agenda once they are in power and the strategies they follow and negotiations they make to further their objectives; d) what is women's experience in negotiating local bureaucracy and political power structures; e) how people perceive women's leadership at the local level (citizens, local administration, NGOs, political actors). The study investigated experiences of women who have been elected in the UPs at least once and also women who have decided not to run for elections. It also explored the relationships between women in local government bodies, with local political parties, local level UP representatives (UP Chair, members) and other civil society groups such as NGOs and women's organisations.

The fieldwork was conducted in the period between September to October 2015 in 6 unions in 2 upazilas in Rajshahi and the analysis and report writing done between October 2015 and January 2016. Twenty-two elected women representatives were interviewed of whom six were re-elected and four did not seek re-election after a first term. Six UP chairs, six UP male members and six local level political leaders were also interviewed. Community opinions were elicited through a total of twelve focus groups discussions with women and men.

A number of legal and policy provisions have been made to enable women to participate in greater numbers as people's representatives at national, regional and local levels. The recent Local Government Acts have enabled women to be first selected and then elected to reserved positions, as UP members and as upazila vice chair. These have had the result of enabling women to be elected in large numbers which would not have been possible otherwise. These have also made it possible for women to be elected without having to compete with men for votes. The various constraints and barriers to women's participation have been well studied. These include individual characteristics such as lack of experience and lack of confidence; family constraints such as women's family roles and family expectations; social constraints such as expectations of limited mobility/seclusion and social roles; economic constraints such as women lacking the income and assets to finance their political activities.

However more recent research has shown that the quality and processes of women's engagement in the local level bodies have changed, their awareness and knowledge about political and community affairs as well as about their rights and entitlements have increased and they are increasingly independent actors in their own right (Hossain and Akhter 2011). Women are coming into the local government bodies with their own experiences of social work, community relations, and family networks including family traditions of politics (Nazneen et al 2013). There is also increasing recognition that women are developing voice and influence in their elected roles (Panday 2008 and 2013, Khan and Mohsin 2008 and Nazneen et al. 2013). The extent of influence is limited by the context and the framework of the local government structure and laws. However they are voicing their opinions and raising various demands, on their own behalf and on behalf of their voters.

Among the issues more recently debated has been the increasing penetration of political parties at the local level and in local government bodies and whether this would have a disincentive effect on women wanting to enter into politics, as they have traditionally not been involved in party politics.

The results of our study showed that most of the research participants had not been directly involved in politics before their election and most of them did not have a clear idea about what it would mean to be a local representative. However, among the factors that encouraged them to contest the elections were their family background; political affiliation of their family; kinship ties in the community; request by family member or community members; and their own community level engagement and reputation. "Serving society" was the key motivation female members mentioned to compete in the UP level elections and "expectations of monetary benefit" was another consideration according to community members. In order to take a firm decision the women would discuss the matter with family members, relatives and friends and sound out local political and community leaders if they would be supportive. The women did not seem to be able to take the decision on their own but needed the encouragement and/or endorsement of others. Family consent and support is essential - in the case of widows the extended family consent is needed. Where there is opposition in the family it has to be countered by various means. This is in contrast with men who also need the support of others to succeed but their initial decision might be taken more autonomously or independently than that by women.

Women UP members stated that they preferred to contest for reserved seats because they would then not have to campaign against men but only women, thus reducing competition and also reducing election expenses. Of the 22 women interviewed, only 2 were elected to general seats, one of whom was replacing her husband. Community members and local politicians felt that local voters would not choose women over men for a seat but if there were special seats for women they would be willing to vote for them. However, once elected, the women on reserved seats felt at a disadvantage compared to men in general seats because they felt they did not have access to resources to distribute to voters or to implementation of projects, in proportion to their constituency (three wards).

A concern by observers is that many women who have been elected once do not seek re-election a second time whereas the hope was that they would in fact want to contest for general seats in a second round. Among the reasons women mentioned for not contesting a second term were that they felt they had not been able to deliver on their commitments and promises

made at the time of elections which is why their voters had lost faith in them (they had not been able to carry out development work or distribute safety net allocations as demanded by their constituency). Family level responsibilities and pressures were also a reason, especially if the family felt that the woman member had not gained as much benefit as they had hoped for (either financially or otherwise). In a few cases the reason was not having a good relationship with the UP Chair and feeling that they had no influence in the UP. However, in general the women did not dismiss the possibility of ever coming back as a public representative - in case their popularity increased and voters had enough confidence in them to back them, they would be willing to try again. There are also cases where the women felt that they had benefitted from their engagement socially and/or economically and also where some women felt a sense of vocation in being a public representative.

The study sought to understand women representatives' experiences in the UP, their ability to exercise political agency and how they negotiate local level political and various other barriers. They have had to learn to deal with local level administration and government agencies from whom they seek services and projects for their constituents and also benefits from themselves. Visits to the police station are common as the women members deal with cases of family conflicts but they also visit Local Government Engineering Division (LGED), Project Implementation Officer (PIO), Department of Women's Affairs (DWA) and Social Welfare offices. To get their work done they pay for tea and snacks or even bribes. Even though the UNO can be an arbitrator in dealing with conflicts with the UP chair, in the long-run this was not found to be effective. Although they are often faced with misbehaviour and have to deal with men from "lower social classes", women members have also learned to work with male members and make compromises if necessary so that that they can share resources and benefits.

The relation of voters with women members is different from that with male members. The women are seen as more approachable and available for advice and help on family matters and disputes as well as for safety net allocations. Female and male voters feel it is important to have women representatives to deal with women's and family issues. Women too, seek rent from people wanting safety net allocations. Their greatest limitation compared to male members is their limited mobility which is why they are not asked for their help or intervention as often as male members. Social norms still constrain the interactions between women and men and a common way of casting doubts on a woman representative is to raise questions about her character and morality.

Women's influence and decision-making in UPs depends on having good relationships with the Chairman, male members and Secretary of UPs. Some factors which can increase their influence include having strong political connections, ties with administration (central and local) and having "high" family and social status. In general women try and avoid disputes with the Chairman and most of the examples of dispute between the Chairman and women members result in "victory" for the Chairman and "defeat" for the woman member. However there are also examples of the use of political pressure, social standing, using of government circulars, seeking information from various sources and also using of emotions such as anger or tears to convince the Chairman. Also, some of the women members are able to extract advantages from their cooperation with the Chair. In a few of the unions where the women members were united they also had a stronger voice in the UP than if they were isolated from each other.

Although the community and other UP members feel that women's leadership is not the same as that of male members who are more confident, aggressive, outspoken, and comfortable with public speaking, they are seen as approachable, sincere and hard working. It is acknowledged

that they do play a role in decision-making in the UP, ward meetings, standing committees and the various UP structures and processes have allowed women to play a leadership role and gain management skills. NGO interventions in capacity building are also acknowledged.

Although most female members were not involved directly in party politics before being elected, after becoming a UP member most of them become "strategically" involved in the belief that it would give them bargaining power in the UP and provide a means of communication with higher level political leaders, which in turn will help them in two ways: a) getting importance or priority for allocations from Upazila level and b) using this influence to get more importance and allocations in the UP itself. While in some cases it was found that they got advantage, importance and more allocations if they were involved in party politics, other factors such as education level, awareness and relationship with the UP chairman also played a role.

Regarding the choice of which party to join - some of the female members tried to involve themselves with the "Chairman party" to get the favour of the Chairman mainly for allocating resources and incentives. It is also seen that if any female member or their family were not affiliated with any political party previously, many of them tried to involve themselves with the party in power. In some cases they even left their previous party and joined another party. However the dominant trend is that the women UP members are loyal to the political party that their family is affiliated with. While the local political parties give the most importance to the post of UP Chairman, party support for a particular woman candidate may reduce the number of candidates for that post as other party supporters will not contest the seat out of party loyalty. The political parties play a role in encouraging women to enter elections, seek re-elections, and, if they have good connections and relations with the party, also give them backing for what they say or do in the UP. The research found a perception that there is an increasing influence by the political parties and the MPs in the UPs, whether the Chair is a party supporter or not, in terms of nominating party supporters as various committee members, influencing various allocations for the UP, taking a share in the allocations received by the UP, recommending beneficiaries for various schemes and also influencing the outcome of various shalish and village courts. All the UP members, the women included, have to negotiate with this situation as best as they can. There are examples of cross-party collaboration and support as well.

The conclusions of the study are that reserved seats are necessary to ensure women's participation as both the women candidates and the voters are not willing to consider general seats for them. While capacity development is important, it is insufficient for women to contest local elections and play an effective role in the local government bodies. Credibility and reputation in the community, family support, community support and the encouragement of the "opinion makers" such as village influentials and political figures are essential. While various UP structures and processes allow women to play a leadership role and develop management skills they have to learn strategy, political skills, negotiation skills and leadership on the job. Having political or family backing enables the women to be in a stronger negotiating position and forming alliances with other women members helps to strengthen their position. Women's coalitions allow women to gain strength, voice and influence. Negotiations and compromises with male UP members and the Chair help them seek out some benefits for themselves and their voters. Corruption and politicization are major constraints which the women are not able to challenge, but women are playing by the rules of the game, for instance both seeking and giving bribes. The women public representatives are strategic actors making decisions based on the context, history and presence and strength of their allies and opponents.

1 *Part I: Overview*

1. Why this research and what is different about it

Recent study findings indicate a declining participation of women in local level elections in both reserved and general seats (Khondaker et al, 2013: 82). These studies largely refer to gender discriminatory practices in the way Union Parishads operate¹ and the gender biased culture² at the local level as reasons behind women's declining participation in politics. Women's decision to enter politics and their ability to act as effective representatives at the local level are mediated by various factors, including their experience of political apprenticeship, ability to forge network and coalitions, existence of facilitative mechanisms and structures, and how power is decentralized at the local level. Decentralization that devolves power to the local level may not necessarily mean women and men have equal access to power.

By political apprenticeship we mean gaining political skills (ability to negotiate, understand the interests of various groups, develop links with the powerful groups etc). Conventionally when one is a member of a political party one learns how to participate in politics and one is also mentored by those who are in the leadership positions. However for women in Bangladesh, very few at the local level are card carrying members of the political parties. Where women learn about politics (the different interests of various social/economic groups, processes of negotiations and engagement with different groups) is different from men. The family plays a big role in this process. The traditional routes of learning politics e.g. trade unions, student politics, local level associations may not be the appropriate routes for women given the level of political violence, money and muscle power needed. For women at the local level, participation in welfare activities, membership of grassroots groups and professions where they provide services in the community (such as teaching, health services, birth attendance) may be arenas where women learn about the society, people's needs and also ability to present one's ideas etc. It is important to know where women learn to analyze different group interests and also how to engage with the local public as these experience creates the basis for being effective leaders.

By ability to forge networks and coalitions we mean creating relations with various social and political groups such as local level associations, community groups, NGOs etc and constituency building is broadly defined to include gaining support from various groups to promote one's agenda.

By facilitative mechanisms and structures we mean the kind of structures that are present and the processes that are followed at the union level and the opportunities and barriers these may create. For example, the government circulars that stipulate women have to be included in development committees of the union creates an opportunity for inclusion of women in these committees.

There has been discussion and research around the system of reserved seats for women in the UP, whether it has merely increased the number of women present in the local government bodies or whether it is allowing women to take on greater responsibilities and gain power

¹ For example, meetings called at times when women are unable to attend.

² Biased perception about what women can or should do held by male members of UP. Social norms about how men and women should interact.

(Panday, 2013; 2008; Khan and Mohsin, 2008; Frankel, 2004; Chowdhury, 1994; Nazneen and Tasneem, 2010). There are limitations in the law and procedures which discriminate against the incumbents of the reserved seats in terms of geographic coverage (women represent three wards, a larger constituency geographically compared to men), allocation of resources³ and authority. In general, the incumbents in the general seats have minimal power and authority compared to the post of Chair.

The pros and cons of reservation have been studied and debated and there is not much to add to this. The Sharique stocktaking report on women's political participation in local government (2014) provides enough material to carry on discussions on this with a view to suggesting alternatives. The issue of reserved seats and their formal limitations are only one part of the story of why women are less interested in contesting elections. The women who have been elected to reserved seats are different from selected ones (before the nomination system was removed in 1997). The recent studies on elected women have shown that their profile and aspirations are different from earlier periods (Nazneen et al., 2013; Khan and Mohsin, 2008).

Although various alternatives to the present reservation system are being discussed, there is no consensus yet on what the best alternative would be. The Indian formula of having a rotational system of reservations for women and scheduled castes to general seats is not likely to work in Bangladesh as the context is different. Also it is not strategic to suggest abolishing the reservation system because the number of women representatives in local government will go down drastically.

There is a need for a nuanced analysis of women's experience in local government and their ability to exercise political agency (i.e. what women do, how do they exercise power) to negotiate local level politics and various barriers. Despite the wealth of literature on the impact of quotas and direct elections on women's representation at the local level (Panday, 2013; Khan and Mohsin, 2008; Frankel, 2004) and various program evaluation studies (Aparajita, 2013), there is a paucity of nuanced and context-grounded scholarship on what are the different pathways through which women gain access to political power at the local level and what enhances women's political agency (i.e. being effective representatives). This means that while there is an understanding of the barriers women face and the limitations of how they are able to exercise leadership, less is known about how, when and in which areas they do exercise agency and can influence structures, processes and people to bring about change or make decisions in their favour. The study aims to address this gap.

Study Objectives

The study focused on:

- a) how, where and when women receive support for their accession and practice of political leadership at the local level;
- b) how women engage with opposition (from the family, community, political parties, from the rest of the UP members) in such a process;
- c) the kinds of relationships and coalitions women representatives form as they try to promote their political agenda once they are in power and the strategies they follow and negotiations they make to further their objectives;

³ In terms of women accessing development budgets.

- d) what is women's experience in negotiating local bureaucracy and political power structures;
- e) how people perceive women's leadership at the local level (citizens, local administration, NGOs, political actors).

The study investigated experiences of women who have been elected in the UPs at least once and also women who have decided not to run for elections. It also explored the relationships between women in local government bodies, with local political parties, local level UP representatives (UP Chair, members) and other civil society groups such as NGOs and women's organisations.

Research questions

The more detailed research questions were as follows:

- a) What enhances opportunities for women to gain political apprenticeship and to contest elections/re-elections? How does women's political apprenticeship influence how they exercise political agency?

Why and when do women learn the ropes of doing politics and decide to contest elections? Do they perceive reserved seats to be a barrier or not before elections? What do they aspire to do once in office; Why do they decide to run or not?

- b) How do women representatives engage in coalition building processes⁴ and negotiate various political and bureaucratic processes and power relations at the local level? What kind of coalitions and networks do women form for enhancing political power? How do they engage with the newly created participatory spaces (e.g. ward shobha etc)? How do they relate to their voters and their community i.e. their constituency?

Women's experience of dealing with bureaucracy which will capture how women are seen by all these different actors-and not just what the various actors say but actually how they behave. [The UNOs, other UP members were interviewed for triangulating findings]

How do women influence decision-making within the UP?

Strategies women use and negotiations made to further their objectives (what did the women want, who did they talk to, how did they bargain, what was the outcome, who opposed them and why, who supported them and why etc);

Are women's leadership styles different from men's - what are the differences and the similarities?

- c) What is the influence of political parties and civil society organisations (including women's organisations) on women's representation in local government bodies?

Women's experience of dealing with the various organisations for being effective; other actors for their perceptions about what facilitates women's leadership.

- d) How do the Chairs and male elected members of the UP perceive women's representative's role and leadership in local government?

Perceptions by male colleagues, Chair, and citizens.

³ 4 Coalition building is broadly defined to include forging coalitions to 'gather up people' to support one's agenda.

⁵ This is based on the stocktaking of literature and project experience on women's political participation carried out by Maheen Sultan, BIGD for the Sharique project.

Structure of the Report

Under Part One the report discusses the rationale, objectives and research questions, followed by the methodology used and the respondent profiles. This is followed by a literature review of the key aspects of women's representation and participation in local government⁵ as well as a discussion of the national level key informant interviews on the same subject.

Part Two of the report based on primary research findings is presented according to the key research questions and covers the entry into politics; coalition and constituency building; influence and decision making within the UP; and the influence of political parties and NGOs.

Part Three presents conclusions and both policy and programmatic implications.

2. Methodology

The methodology used for the research consisted of desk review and primary data collection. Field research included key informant interviews (KIIs) at both national and local levels.

Document analysis: Secondary data was collected through review of existing literature and is available as the Stocktaking Report on Women's Participation in Local Government. Secondary sources have included academic and policy literature on local governance, relevant government documents and consultancy reports.

National level interviews: Interviews of national level experts included academics and civil society members.

As the purpose of this study was to explore in depth the experience of women in local government and not to generalize the study findings, we conducted fieldwork in six (6) unions in two consecutive Upazilas in one division. The decision to conduct fieldwork in one Upazila under one division is to control the context (i.e., socioeconomic condition) as much as possible. We selected unions that have re-elected women members.

Primary Research Site: Local level research site was in the Sharique program sites of Rajshahi (Mohonpur and Tanor Upazilla) where some unions have re-elected women representatives. Sharique has been working in Rajshahi from the beginning and it was expected that the programme would have had the strongest influence there. The unions were as follows:

1. Mohonpur Upazila

- a. Dhuroil Union
 - b. Jahanabad Union
 - c. Ghashigram Union
- ### 2. Tanor Upazila
- a. Talondo Union
 - b. Saronjai Union
 - c. Pachondor Union

Numbers:

In each union we interviewed: incumbent women members (which included re-elected members); one woman who was elected once and not currently a serving member; the UP chair;

one male member; and one CSO member and one political leader. We also interviewed one UNO. In total we had 47 interviews from six unions.

Methods	Respondents	Area	Number
In-depth interviews	Women in local level politics	Local level	18 (incumbent; includes re-elected woman representative)
			4 women who were elected before but have decided not to run
KII	Civil Society	National level	2
	Academics	National level	2
	Civil Society	Local level	6 (one in each union)
	Politicians	Local level	6 (one in each union)
	UP Chairs	UP level	6 (one in each union)
	One male member	UP level	6 (one in each union)
	UNO	UZP	1

Team Composition

The team was composed of the following persons:

1. Maheen Sultan, Team Leader
2. Dr. Sohela Nazneen, Lead Researcher, BIGD
3. Bayazid Hasan, Senior Research Associate, BIGD
4. Sahida Khondaker, Research Associate, BIGD
5. Ahmed Asif Enam, Research Assistant, BIGD
6. Towhid Iqram Mahmood, Research Assistant, BIGD

Among the limitations of the study was that the research did not include in-depth interviews with the UP secretaries.

3. Literature review

History of Women's Participation in Politics

The importance of having women represented in political processes so that they could voice their own demands and also take a full part in national and political decision making has been emphasized by the Bangladesh women's movement since the Independence of the country in 1971. The roots of women's political participation go back to the times of the Language Movement, the anti-Pakistan movement and even earlier to the anti-British movement. Under the regime of the late President Ziaur Rahman in 1976, reserved seats were created for women in local government. The successive local government reforms have enabled the various provisions for reserved seats to be strengthened and their role to be gradually developed.

Each of the set of actors working to promote women's empowerment have different visions of process, accountability and goals for this. For example the women's movement emphasizes accountability to women for the establishment of women's rights, and the importance of women

having a voice and say in decision making and political processes. Political parties have seen the creation of women's political leadership and participation as a resource and capital for them and they emphasize accountability of women to the party leadership for the strengthening of the party's position and strength. However an analysis of the constitutions of the five major parties reveals that women's political empowerment or gender equity receives little attention in these documents.⁶ Various development actors have stressed the strengthening of democracy in Bangladesh which would include more broad based, participatory and inclusive processes.

As Mahmud and Nazneen (2014) have pointed out in their working paper on "Gendered Politics of Securing Inclusive Development", "the support for and various other measures taken to increase women's presence and (...) elected bodies are themselves the result of negotiations between different social and political actors (political parties, their leadership, women within the parties, other influential party factions, women's movement, etc). What influences the action taken by the actors are: the actual and perceived interests these actors have in promoting women's representation; the context within which opportunities for promoting women's representation arises; the strength i.e. resource of these actors to negotiate and influence other actors and the gender discourses that influence actions of these actors" (2014: 17).

Legal and Policy Framework

Article 11 of the Constitution of Bangladesh confirms that the 'Republic shall be a democracy in which effective participation by the people through their elected representatives in administration at all levels shall be ensured.' The Constitution is quite unique in including detailed provisions for local government (Chapter 111, part IV Articles 59 and 60) ensuring that 'every administrative unit shall be entrusted to bodies composed of persons elected in accordance with law' (Article 59) and outlining their functions and conferring power to collect taxes, prepare budgets and maintain funds. Women's rights are guaranteed in the Constitution and women have equal rights in all spheres of the State and public life (Article 28(2)). Article 9 further advances the principle of special representation of women in all local self governing bodies.

The 1997 National Policy for Women's Advancement (revised 2011) set the goal of eliminating all forms of discrimination against women by empowering them with the ability to be equal partners in development. The policy includes equal rights to politics and aims to facilitate the participation of women in all national and international bodies and forums. The National Plan of Action for Implementation of the Beijing Platform for action (1998) transformed this policy into action measures and emphasised the inclusion of gender specific programmes, special resource allocation for gender responsive programmes towards achieving parity between men and women. Subsequent Five Year Plans of the Government have continued to emphasise the issue of gender and the current Fifth Plan (2016-21) includes an objective 'to promote equality between women and men in sharing of power'. The Perspective Plan confirms the current Government's commitment to decentralisation and local government providing an important window of opportunity for this programme.

⁶ Nazneen and Akhter, 2014: 87

for general seats.⁷ The Act is considered a milestone towards increasing women's participation in politics and promoting their political skills through direct elections. Nevertheless, the Act was not able to address the confusions regarding the role and responsibilities of Women Members. The quotas were introduced in a way that women's seats were added on so that they do not disturb existing competition for electoral wards or constituencies. However by having direct elections to these reserved seats as was introduced in 1997, their legitimacy as representatives is enhanced. This has been documented by various pieces of research (Khan and Mohsin 2008, Nazneen and Tasneem, 2010).

Women's Participation as Citizens

Although women's political participation is not of the same nature and extent as men's, various programmes and research have observed that there is an increasing awareness of rights and entitlements as citizens and voters. A finding in the study by Hussain and Akhter (2011) "confirms what other research has already identified (Hossain 2010), which is that despite their apparent powerlessness, many (not all) poor women citizens feel a degree of entitlement and empowerment to state their claims in invited spaces, perhaps particularly where these relate to vital matters of livelihood and survival" (2011: 28). Women's participation as voters has increased over the years and there is also a trend for them to vote independently and not at the direction of other family members.

In a baseline study done for the UNDP Upazila Governance Programme in 2011 by Naomi Hussain and Salma Akhter it was pointed out that "While even poor women citizens feel empowered to make claims and voice demands of their UZP representatives (...) the main mode of citizen-representative interaction among women remains that of claims for patronage. (...)The idea that the mandate for local government action might come from the constituency seemed unfamiliar to the UZP representatives or other actors in the system" (2011: 3).

Constraints/Barriers to women's participation and representation

Although the laws, the RPO and the Women's Advancement Policy provisions are aimed at the promotion of women's full and equal participation in decision-making in all areas of public, political and professional life, progress is slow. Lack of family support, women's lack of political orientation and traditional gender roles are barriers. Formerly lack of education, religious barriers and mobility were considered as significant barriers. "Inconvenient timings, location, distance and the lack of an escort are impediments for women elected as representatives to attend meetings" (Panday 2008) but the importance of these as constraints is now reduced (Nazneen et al. 2013; Khan and Mohsin 2008). While at the UP level women's education levels seem to be falling, at the municipality and Upazila level their educational qualifications are increasing. (Naripokkho 2009, Nazneen et al. 2013) Women are coping with and managing the religious and cultural constraints which have not completely disappeared but which are not as limiting as before. The family is now often supportive of the women entering politics or local government bodies and sees this as a source of prestige and advantage for the family (Panday 2013, Nazneen et al. 2013; Khan and Mohsin 2008).

The study carried out by Panday in 2013 in Sharique areas with 126 respondents (21 UPs and 21

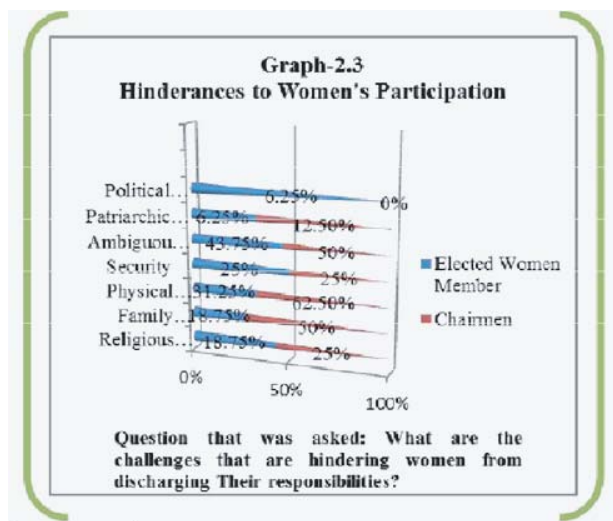
⁷ The Local Government Ordinance 1976 was the first legal initiative in Bangladesh that endorsed provisions for reserved seats (two) for WMs in UP. The Union Parishad Ordinance 1987 has endorsed women reserved from two to three. Later on, this Ordinance was replaced by the Local Government (Union Parishad) Act of 2009.

respondents of each category) asked the various respondents about what were the constraints for participation. Interestingly the importance/weight given to each type of constraint varied between the elected women and the UP Chair. Although 62.5% of the Chairmen felt that physical mobility and 50% of the Chairs felt that the family were barriers, only 31.25% of the women felt that physical mobility was a barrier and 18.75% of the elected women felt that family were barriers. More of the Chairs also felt that religious constraints and patriarchal mentality were problems than the women representatives. What the women saw as the biggest constraint was ambiguous legislation regarding the role of women and they mentioned political problems which the UP Chairs did not mention at all.

It is also necessary to differentiate between representation and participation (Panday 2013 and Goetz and Hassim 2003). The Bangladesh Government is proud to cite the figures of the number of women who are now in local government bodies⁸. Thanks to the reservations made for women representatives the numbers are quite impressive. But how effective are the women in their roles as public representatives, whose interests are they representing and how much voice and influence they have are issues that need further analysis/review.

There is a lack of awareness and capacity among first time incumbents of the rules, regulations and the overall culture and functioning of the local government bodies. This is even more so for women compared to men. A study by ADB in 2004 suggested that more than 70% of councillors interviewed in Bangladesh were not aware of their rights and responsibilities as representatives. An even greater percentage (more than 80) expressed a lack of confidence in their ability to conduct meetings. (ADB 2004 in Panday 2008). In recognition of this, various organisations and programmes have arranged for a series of training and capacity building programmes through courses, peer learning, networking, study tours, distribution of learning materials etc. Organisations such as the Khan Foundation and Democracy Watch have arranged such training for years and there has been an increase in capacity that has been documented in many reports and studies (e.g. Panday 2013). However with the turnover of representatives in the elections there are always new members who need training.

Figure 1: Hindrances to Women's Participation



Source Panday 2013

⁸ MGD report, Beijing Plus Twenty Report

Capacity building should not be thought of only in terms of imparting knowledge and information through training. Building the skills, capacity, experience, assets and capital to do politics is a complex process. Both Nazneen 2013 and Panday 2013 have tried to analyse the various aspects of this. The study by Nazneen et al on women municipal councillors has pointed out the "learning [how to do politics] is a complex process, important aspects of which are political apprenticeship; constituency building and the creation of support networks ; and development negotiating skills based on the critical analysis of specific contexts" (2013:79).

Although it is often said that women have less exposure than men to politics and therefore less experience and skills in this area a few studies have highlighted that they may have experience and skills which are relevant to their roles and responsibilities as public representatives and they too have various personal, family, professional and political networks that they can put to use. Some have experience of "how to do politics" through voluntary and welfare work and in other informal spaces. Some women have used their families to build their constituencies and political networks and also to address the needs of their constituents. (Nazneen et al., 2013).

The authors show that political apprenticeship starts at home and in informal spaces. Their family members had been involved in politics or social activities and/or the women have been involved in student politics and/or professional work. They actively build relationships and constituencies, using their family connections, social networks and also relationships with development agencies and women's organisations.

Panday 2013 has also broken up the process whereby capacity development happens once women have greater knowledge which would lead to greater economic power in terms of material and non-material assets. This would bring about positive changes in self-perception and self-confidence i.e. their "will power". "When their will power would be strong, capacity of women would be increased, Once capacity of women would be increased, they would be able to influence decision-making processes" (Panday 2013: 14).

Reserved seats versus general seats

There is continuing debate about quotas; on the one hand there is a perception that rather than creating political empowerment, quotas can create a situation of tokenism while on the other hand, they are perceived as essential means to mitigate the structural barriers to equitable participation by women. Women elected to reserved seat themselves say that they are often regarded as 'second class' representatives, feel they have limited power and that reserved seats are not viewed as credible positions. However, there is a big difference between reserved seats which are elected and those which are nominated.

Thus the concerns about quotas are particularly acute at parliamentary level as the reserved seat women members are selected by the political parties and have no electoral constituency, although they do get allocated constituencies.⁹ This tends to skew allocations towards inclusion of those from political dynasties, popular personalities and higher socio-economic groups. Without an electorate based constituency they are not required to be accountable and have consequently less weight in political debate.

⁹ This allocation is not required by law but is a practice adopted by the parties. As many as 7 constituencies may be allocated per reserved seat MP with which they have no residential or associational ties.

At local government levels women are required to contest reserved seats and this has been shown to confer greater legitimacy and stronger voice as they 'legitimise their rights to act on behalf of other women' (Nazneen and Tasneem, 2010). Chowdhury (2002) noted that direct election 'has brought about qualitative change in their role perception. On the whole they have claimed a space within the local bodies and have raised spirited calls to have their terms of reference and spheres of activity defined'. Khan and Mohsin (2008) report in their study of over 600 UP members that 78% said they had been involved in budget discussions and 58% had made suggestions to reverse UP decisions and felt able to do this as a result of their constituency backing.

Contesting open seats remains limited as women often lack party support (particularly financial resources), lack networks and contacts which guarantee votes, self exclude (as they lack confidence and regard party politics as a 'dirty game') and may lack family and social support (Democracy Watch, 2003). However some of the older hindrance factors such as limited mobility or lower educational attainment are rarely considered as obstacles nowadays.

Developing Voice and Representation (Influence)

A study was carried out in 2007-08 by Khan and Mohsin with a survey of 641 women councillors and in-depth interviews of women (50), male councillors (25) and chairs (25). The survey data indicated that women were raising their voices in important UP functions; 87% participated in budget discussion, 52% suggested changes and about 73% claimed acceptance of their suggestions. The study found that nearly 90% of respondents confirmed that they always attend meetings but importantly only 24% reported that their decision was always considered. Only 4.37% could have their notes of dissent recorded (Table 6). 88% are aware of the formation of Standing Committees, 68% are involved in the formation process and 65% are aware of their roles and functions in them (Table1).

Table 1: Role of Women Members in UP Deliberations¹⁰

	Attended meetings	UP Participated debates/discussions	in Opinions accepted
Always	89.7%	43.53%	24.02%
Sometimes	10.3%	38.07%	40.09%
Rarely		13.88%	25.43%
Never		4.52%	10.45%

Table 2: Participation of Women UP members in UP Standing Committees

	Awareness formation	about Involvement in formation process	the Awareness about role and functions
YES	88.14%	67.71%	65.21%
	11.86%	32.29%	34.79%

¹⁰ Source Khan and Mohsin 2008

Another finding was that over 62% women chair more than three committees, 92% propose projects in the UP, the proposals of 16% are always and of 47% are sometimes accepted.

Contrary to Panday's findings on the shalish participation, Khan and Mohsin (2008) found that 57% are members of Gram Adalat, 91% participate in ward level shalish, 44% preside over shalish and decisions of 51% were always accepted.

That women elected representatives have a special role in representing women's interests and responding to their needs, which is acknowledged by their constituents and themselves, is highlighted by Panday (2008 and 2013), Nazneen et al. (2014) and Khan and Mohsin (2008). Members maintain that women come to them because they are approachable and women feel more comfortable with them. In conflict resolution women members are more active in women's issues. And women members are more involved in preparing VGD, VGF, old age pension and widow lists. They claim that issues of the marginalized are better understood by women. Similarly the research done with women municipal councillors found "they all indicated that they saw women as a key constituency and that, as councillors, their responsibility was to address women's issues and promote women's rights. They stressed that their electorates perceived them, particularly in the cases of violence against women, and marriage and divorce issues ...as an adjudicator who would be able to understand the women's situation and intervene" (Nazneen et al. 2014: 92).

Penetration of political parties

With the increasing politicisation of local government along party lines, both male and female candidates need political party backing in order to succeed in the elections. This has also resulted in a smaller number of women standing for elections (i.e. as they do not get a party endorsement). "Though less evident at UP level, the power of political parties to influence the UP cannot be ignored. They could work through the elected representatives, influencers or even through NGOs. Unlike in higher tiers, rather than political parties dictating terms to their members who have become elected representatives, at the Union level it is the obligation of the latter to their party and its representatives which influences the decisions. Here too, the status of the elected representative within his/her party hierarchy decides the power" (Helvetas: 11).

As mentioned above, political parties are also bound to take in increasing numbers of women and place them in greater positions of responsibility. They are supposed to have up to 33% women in party membership and in committee membership by 2020. If the parties want to attract women, and women are also interested in becoming core members, then working with the parties and political mentoring of interested women by the political parties might be seen as a strategy of political empowerment.

Relations with Civil Society

The 2011 study by Hussain and Akhter found that all of the UZP vice-chairs they met had some prior involvement with NGOs and other civil society organisations. "However, the scope for involving civil society more fully in their new roles as UZP representatives had not generally been considered. These connections with both small local community groups and large national organisations were a potential source of power for these representatives that they did not appear to have recognised. Such connections could enable representatives to engage with organised groups of citizens, both men and women, to create platforms around particular local

and national issues, and to play a more significant supportive role in coordinating resources for development distributed by NGOs.

Public Opinion on Women's Political Participation.

Public opinion on women's political participation seems to be becoming more positive. While the media has on the whole portrayed the significance of women's participation positively, the role played by the leaders of the two national political parties and the visibility and nation-wide presence of elected women representatives at the local level has led the general population to accept that they have a representational role and their participation is needed.

The Khan Foundation national survey¹¹ of the national electorate on women's political participation and reserved seats carried out in 2013 found that half of the respondents thought that there is a favourable political environment for women's political participation in Bangladesh and 80% felt that it is necessary to ensure women's political participation for institutionalisation of democracy and empowerment of women. On the question of "What is your opinion about participation of women in politics" 37% said that women should participate at greater rates in all elections; 29% said that women are not yet politically and economically/financially powerful to contest; 18% said that political parties do not evaluate/consider women in candidate selection and 25% answered all of the above. Also interestingly 80% of the respondents felt that women should contest from general seats¹².

In the Panday study of 2013 in the Sharique working areas, all the categories of respondents felt that women's participation in UPs was important and they should take an active part in the activities of the UPs. While there was some opposition from religious leaders for women's increased political participation, "It was noticed that men perceived that women should take part in community activities in order to ensure 'equality' of the decision making process and also because they know the needs of women better". However categories of people, like school teachers, were more positive than religious leaders. The majority of religious leaders felt that women should participate because they know the needs of women better (and not because of grounds of equality) (2013: 5-6).

4. Views of Key Informants

We collected, collated and analyzed views and perceptions from the perspective of experts in relation to representation and participation of women in local councils, particularly UPs. We interviewed the following persons

1. Dr. Badiul Alam Mazumder, Founder Secretary SUJON
2. Mr. Faisal Mustafijur Rahman, Coordinator, Women's Empowerment, Democracy Watch,
3. Dr. Zarina Rahman Khan, Professor, Public Administration, Dhaka University
4. Dr. Pranab Kumar Pandey, Professor, Public Administration, Rajshahi University.

The major objective of interviewing experts was to gain information in specific areas where they are likely to have specialized knowledge in such issues as women's attitudes toward their participation in local council elections, the challenges that women facing in the case of participation in local council elections and opportunities that are available for enhancing

¹¹ 11 3565 respondents

¹² Khondaker et al, 2014: 58-61

women's representation and participation in local council elections. A number of issues that the local government experts raised of particular importance to them are summarized and discussed below.

Women's representation and women's effective participation are related as well as distinct issues. Representation is not a sufficient condition for effective participation. Institutional and social conditions are important to enable women able to participate effectively in local government. According to Dr. Pandey, representation can be ensured by introducing quotas but not participation, meaning the extent of women's influence in the decision making process.

In the Bangladesh context, the most critical institutional constraint remains the inadequate devolution of powers and finances to the local bodies, rendering them powerless and ineffectual. The geographic area for which a woman representative is responsible is three times the area which a man represents. The budget allocations for men and women do not take this into account. Dr. Badiul Alam Mazumder felt that the system is itself a barrier. The women members of UP actually have no power, no specific responsibility, no constituency and no rights. The role of committees is only to recommend. If the UP is ineffective and not functioning, then committees will be ineffective.

Dr. Pandey and Dr. Khan also felt that the core problem lies in the structure of local government. If we look at the composition of Union Parishad we see that there are nine general members who are generally male, three female members and one chairman, also mainly male. As decisions are taken on the basis of majority, women's views do not prevail. Therefore the composition of the UP in itself can become a barrier for women's participation.

Getting elected to local councils is only the first challenge faced by women in local government. There are other social constraints and institutional challenges that they encounter in the way in which these institutions actually work. While mechanisms can be devised to address institutional constraints, social constraints are clearly harder to legislate away. Patriarchal practices are the most serious social constraints on women's participation. The factors commonly identified as barriers to women's participation include political violence, gender stereotypes and outright discrimination, personal obstacles such as lack of confidence, culturally prescribed domestic roles, lack of education, lack of financial and socio-economic capital, and balancing family and public life.

According to Dr. Zarina Rahman Khan, in the case of general seats women have to compete with males. In this case women face problems such as lack of money, lack of support from their own families, local people etc. It is generally felt that women are only eligible to contest reserved seats. Dr. Pandey also emphasized the same issue. Both Dr. Pandey and Dr. Khan observed that in the case of local government we have not yet reached the level in which a woman can contest against a man for a general seat and win the election. Another major problem is that women do not want to take the risks related to contesting and winning (or losing). According to Dr. Pandey, women think that as reserved seats are for them these seats are safe for them to contest. If one looks at the last three elections one can see that the number of women contestants was almost the same in these elections. Fourteen thousand women contested for twelve thousand seats. According to Democracy Watch, the word "reserved" itself acts as a barrier in the way of their functioning in the UP.

According to Dr. Mazumder, women are victims of various types of discrimination and violence.

In Union Parishads many women representatives face harassment from their male counterparts. Most male members are uneducated and lack experience or knowledge of acceptable behaviour towards women counterparts. Social barriers exist, such as considering politics to be a male domain, not for women. People are often reluctant to accept a woman as a representative and question their participation in elections. According to him these barriers are a reflection of our patriarchal attitudes.

With regard to re-elections, Mr Faisal Khan observed that two factors were at work. One is the experience that is gathered through working in the UP and the other is people's perceptions of the candidate. People generally thought experienced candidates would be more efficient in managing the Union Parishad. An important barrier to re-elections is costs. It is not easy for a woman to bear election costs. In this case she has to depend on her husband and family members. Moreover, access of males to local people and the local area is easier and greater than of females. This leads to there being less confidence in the women being able to contest and win. Those women who try to contest and seek re-election in the general seats are those with family and/or political support and have their own financial means.

According to Mr Faisal Khan's observations, participation of women in elections is decreasing gradually. The main reason for this is that after being elected women did not get proper recognition and treatment from the UP. The majority of the existing women members (more than 90%) failed in the elections. The reason for this was that although they are more dependent on the UP for allocations, they do not have enough information about their entitlements, which is why they get fewer allocations. Therefore they cannot meet the demands of the local citizens who say 'you do not do anything for us, you have no scope to work'.

From the key informant interviews it is emphasized that women members elected for the first-time lack confidence, relevant council experience and basic knowledge and skills in council work. Similarly, they lack sufficient understanding on how to represent women's interests. They also lack advocacy skills to promote women-specific issues. As a result of all this, they are not able to make effective alliances, networks and linkages within and outside councils with other stakeholders.

What are the ways of enhancing women's representation and participation in councils? Dr. Mazumder and Dr. Pandey suggested that like India a rotational system can be introduced. Dr. Pandey also suggested that the number of reserve seats could be increased. According to Democracy Watch, in the context of Bangladesh reserve seats may be continued. While laws and institutions can create conditions for representation, political parties, civil society organization, women's organizations and NGOs have an important role to play in creating the conditions for effective participation.

2 Part II: Research Findings

We have presented the findings of the primary research structured according to the research questions.

5. Respondent Profiles

The majority of the women members were aged between 40 to 49 and almost all of them were below 49. The elected men's ages ranged between 30 and 60 and above (Figure 1). About half of the women members had less than 5 years of education and another half had between 6 to 12 years of education. The elected men were more educated with more than half having schooling between 10 to 12 years (Figure 2). When asked about current and previous occupations, about half of the women members claimed to be housewives but the rest had varied professions such as NGO worker, birth attendant, insurance worker, health worker and domestic worker (Figure 3). For the men, seven out of the 12 elected male representatives said that their profession was politics. For others the professions mentioned were farmer, NGO worker, businessman, teacher and writer (figure 4).

Figure 2: Types of Respondents by Age Group

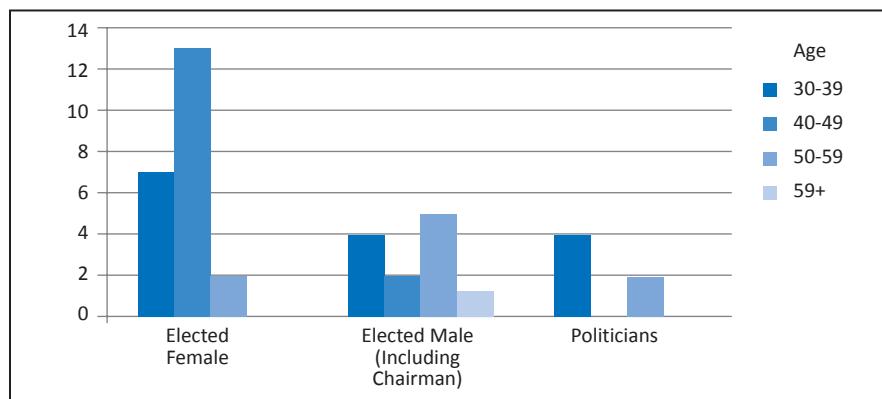


Figure 3: Level of Education by Type of Respondents

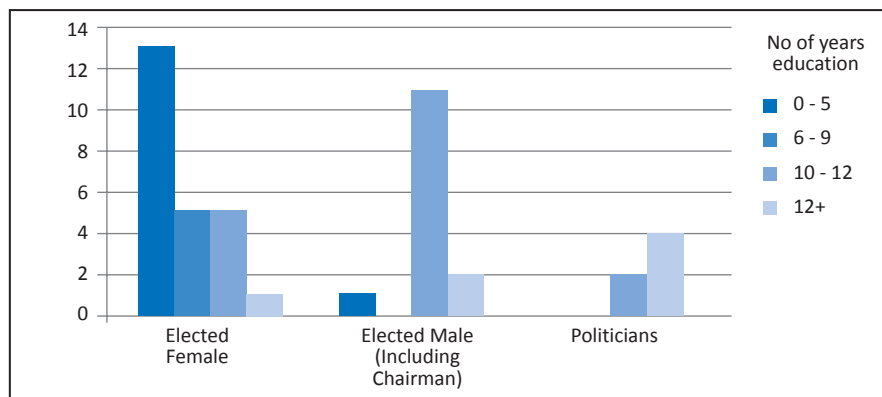


Figure 4: Percentage of Female Elected Respondents by Profession/Previous Profession

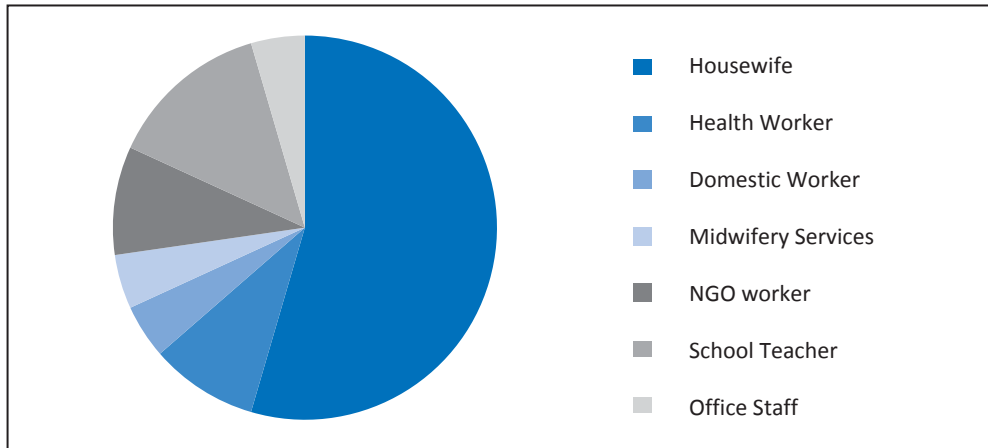
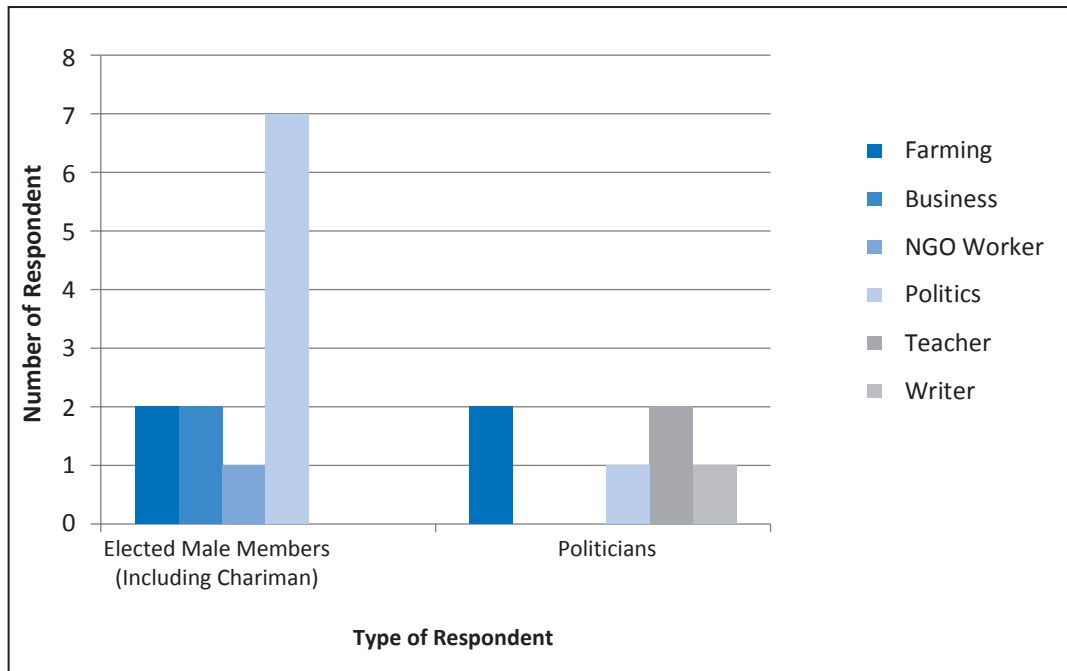


Figure 5: Profession/ Previous Profession by Types of Male Respondents



6. Entering Politics: Opportunities to gain political apprenticeship and contest elections/re-elections

In this section of the report we examine the research question on what enhances opportunity for women to gain political apprenticeship and to contest elections/re-elections, and how do women's political apprenticeship influence how they exercise political agency.

Learning to do politics and deciding to contest elections

A total of 22 women representatives, of which 18 were current UP members and 4 were ex-female UP members were interviewed for the study. "Serving society" was the key motivation they mentioned to compete in the UP level elections. The reasons they mentioned included having the opportunity to serve the community; people's love and respect and people would always remember her as a member and treat her with respect. Although expectations of monetary benefit from the post were not mentioned explicitly it became clear in the course of the interviews that all of them do a cost benefit analysis and complain about their earnings and allowances being inadequate, which might indicate financial considerations being a hidden reason for contesting elections.

The community perception is that the expectation of monetary benefits is more important than respect of the community as the main motivation for standing for elections (FGDs). This was also believed by the UP chairman and male members. One of the local politicians interviewed stated "When their family's financial conditions are not good, they think of coming into UP level politics. Because, UP membership is a regular source of income." [Local political leader 0201PO]. However the NGO staff interviewed felt that both factors influenced the women's decisions to stand for elections.

As a general practice it was found that before elections, interested people discuss the matter with family members, relatives and friends to assess their views on their prospects and the level of support from the community. Those affiliated with party politics would try to get support from their own party. Even those potential candidates who are not directly involved with party politics would try and meet different local political party leaders to ask for their support in the elections. These practices are similar for all interested candidates, both male and female. Where we found the difference was in the extent to which the decision to stand for elections could be taken independently. Our findings were that women members were not able to take such an important decision on their own but needed encouragement and/or endorsement of others. Family consent and support is essential, without which various complications arise and barriers appear. Male members would also need support of others to succeed but their initial decision might be taken more autonomously or independently than that by women.

Some common factors which encouraged women to contest in UP elections were as follows:

Family background: Family background plays a significant role for women to be involved in elections with family members like a husband, father, brother, in-laws being known to the community by serving as community leaders or teachers etc.

Request by family member or community members: Husband, other family members' or community members' requests could play a pivotal role;

Kinship ties: if the woman's in-laws and father's family live in the same constituency it is easier for her to contest elections

Political affiliation of family: Prior political affiliation of family members also encouraged women to contest elections.

Social engagement and reputation: Having social engagements, respect of the community, influence and a social profile encouraged some women to contest elections. Such social interactions also serve as a training ground for political activities.

A case below illustrates the decision making process of female candidates and reasons behind the decision to contest in UP election.

Fayzunnahar's brothers are actively involved in politics. Her brother is the Thana Awami League chairman and two times elected member in UP. In the election of 1997 the people in her community suggested her name as a female member candidate. Fayzunnahar was always a people's person. Though she was not involved in politics she always led the women in her community. She was involved in solving family conflicts, match making, wedding shopping etc., which is why people liked her a lot. So they wanted her to stand for elections to the reserved seat. She was not sure at the beginning but when people assured her of their support she was persuaded. Her family was well respected in the community. At that time political identity was not important for UP elections. Fayzunnahar always prefers to be identified as a female UP member instead of as a party member because people elected her as their representative.

Although we found that in most cases women had not been involved in politics before their election and most did not have a clear idea about wanting to be a political or social leader, in a few significant cases women were different from the majority and had a vision of what they wanted to do.

Case 1- Involvement with politics before elections: Puspa Rani had a job as an agent in an insurance company which gave her an opportunity to work outside the home and be in touch with people. She became a known face in the locality. She and her family belonged to a minority religious community and became victims of extortion, which motivated her to join politics. She joined politics before becoming a candidate for UP member. When people wanted her to take part in the elections she thought it would be wiser to do so under the banner of a political party. Her case may be seen as one where she received apprenticeship in politics before standing for UP elections.

Case 2- Own decision and dream: Shabana Akhter's school was situated in front of the local Union Parishad office and from her school days she planned to be a member of the UP. Later her connection with an NGO called DASCO led her to be interested in contesting elections. As she had to work with several NGOs she developed relations with local people, and also developed confidence that she would be elected if she contested for the position of a UP member. She did not take the decision regarding participation in the election alone. A field worker invited her to participate in the elections. Though she and her husband agreed, her in-laws opposed her decision. At last her husband's family agreed but not her mother-in-law. Due to this she had to leave her father-in-law's house.

Case 3- Community demand: Sohagi Kisku is from the minority Santal community. She was mainly influenced by her brother-in-law to enter politics. The area she lives in is inhabited by both Muslims and Santals. Since the previous female candidate was aged and was not strong

enough to counter Muslim candidates, Sohagi was instantly selected by the influential people of the community as she is intelligent, vocal and educated up to class 10. Her previous job as a teacher for BRAC school contributed to her standing among local citizens.

Case 4- Own decision and sympathy of community: After being abandoned by her husband Rubina Begum used to work outside her home as a labourer. She lived hand to mouth with her two children. In 1997 when the Government set up reserved seats for women in UP some of her well-wishers encouraged her to contest the elections as she had experience in working outside the home. She also thought that as she was poor it would help her to live a solvent life. So she decided to compete in the elections. Some of her family members did not like her decision but later they supported her. She approached both local AL and BNP leaders to seek their support and got it. She also went to voters and told them that she was a poor woman with two children and no means of supporting them. She asked for their votes as 'zakat' so that she could live a more solvent life with her children. As a result Rubina received sympathy votes and was elected as a UP member. Once in the UP she learned on-the-job and was able to return to the UP for a second time.

Contesting general seats or reserved seats?

Female members were asked whether they wanted to contest elections for the general seat or for the reserved seat. Most of them preferred to contest elections for reserved seat, for the following reasons:

Mobility constraints: The male members can campaign all the time, day and night; which is not possible for a woman candidate.

Lack of political skills: Men are more politically aware than women and men can think critically and set strategy for election campaign. One of the local politicians said of women representatives, "They have the interest to participate in politics but lack leadership quality. They are not getting the opportunity to develop their leadership skills and none of the political parties are preparing the platform for them."

Expenses of election: Election expenses are higher for competing in general seats and female candidates do not have large amounts to spend. They are afraid that if they fail all the money spent would be wasted.

More competition for general seats: More candidates compete for general seats than reserved seats and women do not feel confident enough to compete against men.

Other respondents of the study also corroborated the reasons given by female members. Male members of the UP and CSO personnel also spoke about community attitude: "it's not certain whether people will vote for them or not. Society also doesn't take this positively. Even, people don't vote at all. They only cast their vote to the male candidates for general seats. So female do not want to run for the general seats since they are scared to compete against a male mostly because of society." (NGO staff 0102CSO). A male member said that women are less interested in the general seats because they lack political knowledge needed to work from that seat: "a person whether educated or not must know the techniques of politics. Since men attend the processions, visit different places as political apprentice and meet different political leaders, they have more knowledge about politics than women. Thus women lag behind in the knowledge and are not instantly selected by parties as primary choice for the general seats." According to FGDs,

respondents there have deep rooted religious prejudices and social norms about political leadership being male and of "not choosing female over male" which leads citizens to vote for the male candidates. For this, political parties do not want to take a risk of supporting women candidates for general seats.

Two exceptional cases (Karimon Bibi and Atia Bagum) had contested from general seats. Karimon Bibi had been elected to the UP thrice and the first time she competed for a general seat and won, at the encouragement of the community people. But in the subsequent elections she didn't compete for the general seat.

Another case is found where women are 'replacements' after death of their husbands

Atia Bagum's husband was elected as a member in general seat in the UP election of 2003. He died 3 months after the election. Then the local people decided that they want Atia to be member in her husband's position because they had sympathy for her and her children. She needed this financial support. So she won the elections and became a member in a general seat. After that in 2011 she was elected as a member in reserved seat for women. After being a member in general seat for eight years she decided to compete for reserved seat because everyone told her that reserved seats for women are a higher post than general seats. Also the expenses are higher for competing in general seats.

Atia's case also illustrates the compromises within families about candidatures:

The younger brother of Atia's husband wanted to contest for the general seat in her ward. That was another reason she didn't want to run for the general seat. Atia's father-in-law was two times member. One of her cousins was also a UP member. She competed in the election for the second time because she thought she could do something for her family and her sons by being elected. In 2003 when she participated in the election the first time it was not her decision at all. Her family members, local influential people, village leaders and local people wanted her to be a member because they had sympathy for her and her children. She needed this for financial support.

Aita said the decision of her competing in general seat or reserved seat is not entirely up to her. She had to take the opinion of her voters before she ran for election. It is really important to know whether they are with her or not. But in fact it would seem that the decision is also taken by her in-laws.

Male views on women's participation in general versus reserved seats

Community members, male members and male politicians were asked about women's participation in general seats. Most of the respondents feel that reserved seats are essential to make ensure the representation of women in UP. People are aware of the fact that women can compete in general seats if they want to, but they think women prefer to compete in reserved seats because it is for the women only. There are many reasons why women don't compete in general seats. The first thing is, they have to compete against men and the number of competitors in general seats is higher. As the competition is high the probability of winning is low. Moreover the candidates in general seats spend a lot of money for election campaigns. Women are afraid to invest such big amounts with a high risk of losing. People think reserved seats are more suitable for women.

"Suppose two men are sitting beside in a bus. Two women also travelling by that bus are standing. Those two men left the seat for the women. People think that reserved seats are like that. If it was not reserved, then women would have never won." (Political leader 0201PO)

There are different views about reserved seats. Some of the male members and citizens don't consider it as a post at all: *"Reserved seat for women is not a seat at all if you ask my personal opinion."* (Male member 0202MM)

Respondents pointed out the structural difference between reserved seats and general seats. Each Member of reserved seats is elected from 3 wards. As a result general people felt that their position in the council is right after the chairman and members of reserved seats hold a higher post than the members of general seats. However, they also observed that members from reserved seats have limited power.

Election expenses of female member candidates are very low compared to the Chairman or male member candidates. When male member candidates go to a tea stall they have to spend money for all the people sitting there. Female member candidates don't have to do that. They run the election campaign in a different way. They go from door to door and ask for votes from the people. Some male candidates give money to the voters. The number of voters in a ward is not that high, so they can win an election by buying votes. On the other hand, the number of voters for female member candidates is three times higher than them.

"I don't differentiate. I think both are same, both can perform any kinds of tasks. Basically, capability of performing any task depends on willingness and confidence. I think, all of my members are highly skilled and confident." (Chairman 0203CH)

Perception of reserved seats being a barrier or not before elections

Women members have mixed opinions about reserved seats. Most of the female members perceive reserved seats to be barriers because each female member is elected from 3 wards, whereas male members are elected from one ward. The women members felt that they should get more funds than a male member since their constituency is thrice that of general members. But they are getting equal or in some cases less allocation than members in general seats. Most of the funds are grabbed by their male colleagues.

According to UP manual and different circulars, female members should chair at least one third of standing committees and other UP project committees. But in practice it is seen that this is a formality only.

The community also perceived reserved seats to be a barrier for women. FGD participants said that "we couldn't count female members of reserved seats as a member of UP because we didn't see them implement any project or be involved with other activities as male member." They also said that female member not get equal opportunity and allocation from UP.

However some female members don't think that reserved seats are the barrier. They felt that the UP itself is a problem. The UP doesn't get enough allocation according to the needs. As a result, Chairman and members have to balance between limited allocations and huge demands. Some Chairmen and male members' opinions also support this view.

What they aspire to do once in office

Local level elected representatives were not aware about their roles, responsibilities, mandate and functions of UP before competing and being elected as a member. There are no differences between men and women members in this regard.

Female members used to think of people's wellbeing. They said that they thought that people considered the position with respect and honour, but they found that in order to achieve people's love and respect, they had to work for community development, which was not so easy. Once in office women tried to work as well as they can, but sometimes their efforts are affected by the barriers from the male colleagues. For example, a female member said, "my allocation was given to my male colleague and I told him to implement the project and tell the community that this project is implemented by both of us but the male member did not do this and presented the project as his own work."

Female members expressed their individual aspirations in different ways. These included the following:

To contest in Upazila elections: A female member considered this post as a strength and participated in the Upazila Female Vice-Chairman election as an independent candidate in the previous Upazila Parishad election. The Upazilla based position is considered as lucrative and beneficial. Puspita Rani said that, "it has both dignity and money. That's why people spend a lot of money. I also spent a lot of money. Earning money is very easy at Upazila level. There is also scope for exercising power." (0102FM2)

To develop the community: A female member said that from the very beginning of her membership to the UP, she aspired relentlessly to do local development. All the goals that she set and promises that she made before elections were mostly met within this term. Champa Begum mentioned that,

"Female members think of people's wellbeing. People will love and respect her, but things are not so easy. In order to achieve people's love and respect, they have to work for improvement of the community, which is not so easy, because the UP is not independent. Besides, UP doesn't get enough allocation according to the needs." (0101FM1)

To learn to perform as a leader: An ex- female member Fahima Begum said that she didn't know anything about the duties of the Union Parishad before going into office. When she started working she realized that it is quite tough to work in a male centric environment. She was unable to take decisions and she had nothing to do. She also said that "reserve seats paved a way for women to participate in practicing leadership." (0202EFM2) At the beginning Jarina Begum didn't have any idea about her duties as a female member. But as she kept going through the process she learned new things and that increased her interest even more.

To serve women: Since women can't go to men that easily and there are a lot of issues that women can't discuss with men frankly, female members are the best for them.

To do infrastructural development: Khairun Begum said that from the very beginning she wanted to win hearts with her work and services. She wanted to help local poor women and improve sanitation services and roads of the UP. She said that she is successful to achieve the first two,

but lack of funding is still delaying the improvement of roads. She said, "I dream of doing massive development of my community. But, unfortunately we don't have enough funds here." (0201FM1)

To get respect of people: Josna Begum liked being amidst people, and that is why she decided to become a member. Another thing that inspired her was that people would always remember her as a member and treat her with respect. She said that, "people consider female members just after Chairman. Female members get special respect and dignity from the community." (0102FM3)

To do social welfare: Shabana likes to introduce herself as UP member because there is great scope of doing social welfare related work. For example, as UP member there is scope to give widow allowance, old age allowance, disability allowance, maternity allowance etc. There is verall greater opportunity of serving the local people. She said that, "I always wanted to do good to the people. During my childhood, if I ever saw any old person crossing the road, I used to help her/him crossing. After a while, helping people became my passion." (0101FM3)

To do something for the minority: A female member said that the first thing every member in UP was concerned about after they got elected was to recover the money they spent for election campaign. Other than that for Puspa Rani it was a responsibility to do something for the minority groups from where she came. She tried to take actions that would lessen their sufferings. Puspa Rani said, "Hindus are been abused in every step of their lives. Even I became a victim once. I came to politics thinking of changing the situation. I have been trying my best. But, still Hindu women are being abused in many ways." (0102FM2)

To have a solvent life: A female member thought that the position could improve her livelihood and economic status. Being a female member in the UP could be a fixed source for income. Rubina Begum wanted a solvent life for her children as a single mother. It was her first aspiration. She said that, "My life is over. I just want to make my children's life easy and solvent. Basically I came to politics for this."

Reasons for contesting or not for a second term

The study sought to understand why female members decide whether or not to run for a second time. This was explored with those who had completed one term previously. It was found that the decision whether to contest or not for a second time, in UP elections, depends on various factors. Some **reasons for deciding not to run** are given below:

Breaking of commitments and promises: Women members often fail to keep their promises and could not serve the community properly due to a lack of resources. Firstly they believed that they should get more funds than a male member since they cover three wards, whereas male members cover one ward. However the majority of the funds and resources are appropriated by the male members. One of the male members said that, "serving the community properly is not as easy as it sounds. Every one shouts for the betterment of the community. But, in reality things are not so easy." (0102MM) One of the CSO members also supported this. He said that, "female members cannot keep their promise to develop the area. Breaking of promise is also responsible for less participation by women." (0201CSO)

Family level responsibilities and pressures: Family level responsibilities and pressures were a reason for their leaving UP level politics. Female members have to balance between their designated tasks and household chores. Those who could not, have to give up politics.

Election financing: Financial constraints were also a reason not to contest a second time. In the election before 2016 it required an average of 2-3 lakhs taka to complete an UP election as a female member candidate. Family members who financed the last elections felt that the investment had not been worth it.

Decline in popularity: Due to various limitations female members failed to meet the expectations of local people. As a consequence their popularity with the community declined. If a woman member understands that her popularity is going down then she would decide not to contest the next elections.

Bad relationship with chairman as well as with UP: Some female members had quarreled with the UP chair and relations were strained. It is very important for a female member to have good relations with the Chair and male members, otherwise they would campaign against her causing her to lose her popularity. On the other hand, during elections an informal panel is developed with the Chairman and female member as well as male member for campaigning that will help to get support and votes.

Lack of influence: Another reason was mentioned by the husband of one of the elected UP members from a reserved seat (Woman Upazila Vice Chairman) of Mohanpur. He stated that his wife would not compete in the upcoming election: "Why shouldn't women lose interest in election? My wife doesn't have any influence over the council or doesn't hold any power. Government has made them powerless. The council doesn't even need her signature." (Jahanabad Male FGD)

Although there are a lot of obstacles to work in UP as a member of a reserved seat, most of the current female members are still interested to run and compete in the next elections. When asked **why they decide to contest for a second time**, the reasons mentioned are as given below:

Confidence: Female members have increased confidence and said that they now understood the process of work in the UP, so they decided to compete again. Ratna Begum said that, "confidence is a great thing. Confidence comes through intensive interaction with the community people. At one stage, I started believing that people love me a lot. If I appear in elections, I wouldn't fail." (0103FM3)

Popularity: If women members feel that they are popular then they decide to stand for elections.

Cost benefit: Some female members mentioned that they had received more money than they spent for election campaigns. If being a UP member could improve her livelihood and economic status then a woman member would decide to contest again.

Passion: A female member mentioned that people loved her and she has to do more work for them. And also she is not happy unless she participates in elections because it is her passion. She said that, "I don't have any party or group. I am dedicated to everybody in my community. If anyone drinks poison, then I will definitely go there without considering his/her political affiliation. If police came, I go there to inquire what happened. I think it is my responsibility."

7. Building Relationships and Influence

When women are elected to the Union Parishad they have to work in a male dominated environment. The interpersonal relationships affect not only individual performance but also the performance of the UP in terms of policy formulation, implementation, coordination etc. The

relationships elected representatives form include those with male members, female members, the Chairman and also other external stakeholders of the UP.

There are legal, functional, gender and attitudinal dimensions. Education, economic status, cultural expectations, etc impact the relationship between the male and female members of the UP.

To make participation effective a congenial and working relationship is necessary between the UP chairman and members. On the other hand, to make UPs effective and functioning, effective participation is necessary. Participation means not only take part in decision making, but also the extent of influence on the decision making process.

Relationship with Government Officials at UZP Level

From all of our interviews we found that UP female representatives have to work with as well as visit various government offices like LGED Office, PIO Office, Social Welfare office, Department of Women's Affairs, projects like "Ekti Bari Ekti Khamar", etc. UZP is mainly related with the Chairman, but they have to go to UZP office for work related to Social Welfare and Youth development offices for Old Allowance, where they get good treatment from the social welfare officer. They also get good support from Women's Development office; female members also have good and cooperative relations with the government departments related to the Standing Committees. Most of the female members mentioned that they face problems when they deal with bodies like PIO and LGED where nothing happens without money and they have fixed rates.

Champa Begum (0101FM1) mentioned the difficulties with carrying out projects, such as construction which involves dealing with engineers at the upazila level. She said that Upazila level officials also don't cooperate with the female members. They ask for bribes continuously. Nothing can be done without giving them bribes. To overcome this challenge, good relations with engineer and LGED office personnel are necessary. Besides, maintaining good relations with Chairman is a must.

Khairun Begum (0201FM1), a re-elected member, described how when she visits the upazila the PIO office and the engineer seek rent at a high rate for each project. She said that they have to pay 5% of the ADP project budget, 20% of the LGSP project budget and 10% of the TR/FFW project budget, to the PI office. Tips for the staff over there are separately paid.

Women members also try to maintain good relations with the local police station or thana. Puspa Rani uses her political power to keep good relations with the local thana (0102FM2) and according to Fahima Begum, she maintained good relations with the local thana by treating them to tea and snacks from time to time (0202EFM2) as they have to go to the thana regarding violence in their own constituency (0102FM2, 0202EFM2).

There was also an example of elected women proactively challenging a government staff: Konokchapa mentioned the case of an officer in charge of the Directorate for Women Affairs, Rajshahi office who didn't behave well with the female members. All the female members united and complained against her and she was transferred to another district. (0202FM1)

However, a few UP members did not have any experience of working with any government agencies. For example Josna Begum (0102FM3) said that she does not have any experience of dealing with government agencies as everything she was supposed to do was done by the Chairman.

Relationship with UNO

There is very little interaction between the women members of the UP and the UNO. They sometimes need to go to UNO Office for administrative purposes such as Women's Development Forum meeting. The UNO does not meet the female members frequently. When they do meet they share their problems with the UNO. Josna Begum (0102FM3) complained to the UNO against the Chairman and the UNO asked the Chairman not to do such things again. As a result, the Chairman misbehaved with the female member. Once this case became known other women members decided not to go to the UNO to complain against any Chairman.

Josna Begum (0102FM3) and the UP Chair were from the same political party. She agreed to whatever he said and signed all the papers not even knowing what it was. The funds for all the projects and programs that were supposed to be done by her went to the Chairman. He used to give her a lump sum amount and she was happy with it. But things deteriorated as the Chairman took a large amount of money from her and didn't give it back. In one meeting she claimed to UNO that she did not receive her share of one third of the projects. Then UNO asked the Chairman about the matter

Relation with Local Journalists and Local Mastaans

In the case of implementation of projects women members have to maintain good relations with journalists as well as local mastaans to keep them happy so that they do not create trouble. Puspa Rani recounted the following experience: 'when I was working on a project a journalist from a leading news paper came and threatened me that if I don't give them a share they will write against me, so I had to take out money from labour costs to give them some. I also had to do the same for the local mastaan.' (0102 FM2)

Relationship with citizens

All the female representatives claimed that they have good relations with women, men, poor people, landless, minority group etc. Females of their constituency come in large numbers to visit them, as they feel more comfortable sharing their problems with a woman. The male citizens who lived near the woman representative's home also went to them for their problems. The citizens of a constituency went to female member with their family crisis, but in the case of land related disputes people went to male members. One of the biggest problems for a woman member in maintaining relations with her constituency is the size of the constituency as it is made up of three wards, which makes it difficult to maintain regular contact. Also, she cannot meet all their demands for social protection benefits. As a result, people became dissatisfied with their activities.

Citizens in all the FGDs mentioned that they approach women members because they pay more attention to their problems and also the tendency to seek rent among women is low. Women members also play a role in stopping child marriage by having meetings with the citizens of their constituencies (0101FM3; 0102FM3). They also work against school dropouts. Shabana Akhter mentioned that the headmaster of the local school told her that one of his students had dropped out from school and her parents were arranging her marriage. After hearing this, she went to the girl's house along with school headmaster and Management Committee members, and after a long conversation she managed to stop the marriage (Interview 0101FM3). Another case mentioned was how Puspa Rani took action against sexual harassment with the help of police (0102 FM2).

A group of boys often teased a beautiful married girl. Among these boys, one had a computer and internet business. The girl met with me and lodged a complaint to me against these boys. Then I arranged a salish and punished them. After the salish, the boys became more desperate to take revenge. Some days later the boys pasted a photo of the girl's face on to a naked photo and spread the photo through cell phone. By showing this photo they tried to prove that the girl was not of good character. . This created a lot of problems in her personal and family life. Hearing this from the girl, I called one of the six boys and talked to him in a friendly manner to know the actual facts. Without his knowing, I recorded the conversation. Then I went to UP office to inform the Chairman. But I changed my mind because among the six boys two were very close to the Chairman. I decided to call the OC and a local Awami League leader. I told them that I do not want to file any case against these boys because this will hamper the prestige of the girl's family. The OC raided the shop and seized the computer and other relevant appliances. After the raid, the boys came to the police station to settle the allegations against them. They admitted their misdeeds and sought pardon. They also had to pay a penalty of TK 25,000. After that no further occurrence like the above was happened with the girl. (Female Member 0102FM3)

One of the re-elected women members felt that the constituency building process is different for male and female candidates Male members rely on tea, snacks, cigarettes, drugs and most importantly, money to convince voters. Female members run their campaign with a more personal touch, working hard and going door to door asking for votes. But she felt that now some of the female members are giving money as the competition has increased. (0203FM2).

Although Muslim female members said that they have 'good relations' with the Santal people living in their area there are prejudices. Although they give them allowances, they do not attend any Santal programmes. Even when Santals visit their homes, they do not offer food or drinks which they do with Muslim visitors. One of the female members mentioned how once she had given food to a Santal child

who came to visit her using a plate that she used for her regular use. Her neighbour later forced her to throw away the plate and glass.

How the community perceives women candidates and members of the UP

Some characteristics are identified by the community as important for someone who would wish to be a public representative, which are as follows:

- Mobility and familiarity in the community which would give her the opportunity to work with people and serve them as needed i.e. NGO worker, teacher, health worker, insurance worker.
- Known as a social worker who provides services such as birth attendant, match making etc.
- Good natured and helpful e.g. can mix with people and provide advice, helps with dispute resolution etc.
- Engaged with the community and its activities.

According to our FGD respondents and other key informants there are mixed feelings about women candidates and elected representatives in UPs. Firstly, as mentioned above, mobility is seen as an important attribute. However they are perceived to be less mobile than men. Secondly they are seen to be socially and economically disadvantaged. UP chairman, members, local political leader and CSO said that most of the female candidates came from comparatively

lower class of the society who wanted to get respect and monetary benefit from the post. They also acknowledged that better off or educated families did not like the idea of their daughters or wives working with common people for a minimum honorarium, no respect and insignificant tasks. Men in the community even went so far as to say that women candidates and elected members have questionable moral characters, since they "mix" with male members and the general public. Women community members did not mention this issue but they stressed that they felt that they were better represented in the UP by a woman.

Networking through Women's Development Forum, NGOs and projects

The female members meet once a month at Women's Development network where they discuss about their problems at Union Parishad (according to the members, when we asked them about this forum). They have found good networking through NGO and projects like Shushilon, Prip Trust, and Sharique. The latter two had provided them some training.

8. Influence and decision-making within the UP

Relationship between female members and Chairman

The Chairman is the chief executive of a Union Parishad. He decides on all matters. He assigns work, approves sanctions of development works and presides over all meetings, committees. Without his support and favour nothing is possible and both male and female members have to maintain good working relations with the Chairman. Most of the female members of our study area said that they have good relations with the Chairman but an exploration of their experiences often show that the reality is different. However, as women members have signatory authority the chairman tries to maintain good relations with them. If a female member has strong political connections, ties with administration, high family status etc, then it is easier for her to get the Chairman's support, cooperation and favour. For example Puspa Rani has a strong connection with the ruling party and she is the Secretary of Krishok League at district level (Interview 0102FM2). The Chairman uses her political influence to get clearance of bills from government offices and obtain allocations from MP's personal fund. As the Chairman is not from the political party in power he needs her assistance in these issues. She gets her share of money for making his work easy. Puspa Rani is in a strong position to be able to negotiate with the UP Chair.

Social status is also a factor in gaining favour from the Chairman; for example, Fayzunnahar (0102 FM1) who is the wife of Pramanik (village head), said that 'I use my social power to influence chairman's decision'. Other interviewees mentioned that other members and the UP Secretary respected her as wife of Pramanik (village head). She was not willing to come to every meeting. She said that 'if they need my consent or signature, the chairman will send the papers by choukidar or Secretary will bring them and I will sign them'. This was done as a sign of respect for her and acknowledgement of her influence and position. Fayzunnahar also feels capable of pressurizing the UP chair which she does through other political leaders. Also if she does not agree with the UP council she refuses to sign the papers. (This is in the same union as Puspa Rani above).

Other experiences mentioned by the women members were of not receiving the expected support from the chairman. In the case of Champa Begum (0101FM1), she had had an argument with the chairman about the distribution of cards. She wanted to know why she was getting an equal amount compared with male members as she is elected from 3 wards but the Chairman allegedly misbehaved with her and thus the dispute started and the chairman told her to never set foot in

the Union Parishad again. The Chairman did not allow her to come attend meetings. We were told about the case of Kajolrekha (ex-member), who had had a dispute with the Chairman and due to this the Chairman misbehaved with her and she left UP and never came back in her life time. In the case of Josna Begum (0102FM3), who was the most favourite female member of the Chairman (according to the other members), when she asked for more information about some project and denied to sign any resolution without checking it, the Chairman misbehaved with her and she was un-officially barred from the Union Parishad. There is another example of Raihala Begum (0202EFM1) where she went against the Chairman's decision of selling UP's land and due to this she was expelled from Union Parishad. She did not get her honorarium for four years and when she appeared for re-election the Chairman asked another candidate from her neighbourhood to contest, at the last moment; as a result, she failed in the elections by a few votes.

Khairun Begum (0201FM1), a re-elected member, described how she relentlessly fought for her rights in the UP. Although she was elected with the support of BNP and the Chairman and 6 male members are supporters of BNP as well, it was not easy to get what she deserves. Most of the time the Chairman provides false information about the allowance cards and even tries to avoid including female members in the projects and programs like LGSP. Since she was active and gathered information from different sources, she could confront him and take the sanction for her share.

However there are others who choose not to be confrontational

Raihana Begum (0202FM3) described how she does not bother about the Chairman's wrong doings. When asked why she doesn't complain against the Chairman, she said she doesn't want to be in bad terms with the Chairman. Since she is from a solvent family she doesn't seek money. Thus she is happy with whatever she gets from the programs that she runs. She said that the decision making processes are quite well conducted and Open Budget, Ward Meetings, Standing committee meetings are held regularly in the UP. Thus she gets the opportunity to share her ideas in those meetings. But most of the time she, along with the other members, keep quiet and does whatever the Chairman suggests.

Most of the examples of dispute between the Chairman and women members result in "victory" for the Chairman and "defeat" for the woman member. Therefore most of them do not opt for open confrontation or disputes. They choose alternative strategies. For example Shabana Akhter (0101FM3) keeps a manual on UP regulations with her. When she has any doubts about the Chairman's decisions she suggests that they consult the manual.

Although Champa Begum (0101FM1) later went entered into a confrontation with her UP Chair she mentioned another strategy of the women members coming together. She described how female members had started forming "syndicates" i.e. coalitions in order to establish their demands and opinions. There was time when female members had little or no opportunity to express their opinions as their male colleagues didn't value their opinions. But, now the scenario has been changed. They can have their say and give their suggestions and opinions.

Rahela Begum (0103FM3), in Ghasigram Union, also said that the women members had tried to unite to present their views and they were vocal in raising their points:

Male members and Chairman act as a team to serve their own benefits and always try their best to keep female members away from important work. More or less, important decisions are taken without consulting the female members. What Rahela realized is,

being silent will not pay off. So, she started resisting. But it has not helped that much. She showed several instances where her decisions were negated.

Another strategy is to use emotions and appeal to the men by showing that they were weaker and needed help. Sometimes female members cry in front of the Chairman and Secretary to get their favour (Interview 0101FM2). Some women showed their anger in front of Chairman and others sometime walked out from the meeting. As a result the Chairman called them back and tried to solve the problems.

Relationship with Secretary

Secretaries generally follow the relationship that exists between the Chairman and women members. If the Chairman does not cooperate with the female members, the Secretary also does not cooperate with the woman members. He does not inform women regularly about the tasks or sanctions, or roles or activities. He misguides them by not giving them the right information.

Relationship with male members

In general male members do not treat women members as their equals and do not want to include women members in day to day activities, so that they can get benefits without creating scope of involvement for female members. This came out clearly in both male and female UP members' interviews. Sometimes they create artificial crisis; for example Binu Begum an ex-member (0102EFM) explained:

'My uncle and I were from the same constituency. My uncle wanted to exercise all the power. When we got a project jointly he never involved me in the project and never gave my share. He always wanted to prove that I couldn't do anything without his help. To prove this he always created false crisis like when I try to solve any dispute he opposes me behind the scenes and creates another dispute.'

Kinship often hampers the working relationship (0102EFM) between male and female members. Male members try to dominate female members, which the female member may not like. Having male relatives interested in contesting elections has already been mentioned as a reason why women would choose to contest for reserved seats so as not to compete with male family members.

Women members try to motivate the male members to work together with them, but it does not work all the time. Female members have to keep good relations with male members of her three wards to be able to work together to distribute VGD, old age allowance etc. They try to work closely with their male counterparts to avoid complications. Women who can "manage" the male members can work freely and smoothly in the UP. Champa Begum (0101FM1), reflected that women members often face problems accomplishing their tasks. Then they convince the male members to work together. "Togetherness is a good thing to complete any task. But, it doesn't function properly all the time. Most of the male members form a 'syndicate'" or their own coalitions. However male members also recognized the cooperation between women and male members as an effective strategy." (0101MM)

The conflicts are over allocations and resources. Although Shabana Akhter (0101FM3) was an AL supporter and presiding over the committee for the distribution of widow allowances, when she selected a widow who was a BNP supporter, the male AL member refused to sign the card.

Participation in Decision making process:

In the decision making process the Chairman is the final authority. In regard to the issues like dowry, divorce, violence against women and other issues related to women, the opinion of female members gets due respect and value. In the case of land related disputes female members opinion do not get importance (Interview 0101FM3). In selecting the chairs of the UP standing committees the chairman's decision is final and no one can question this.

9. Others Perceptions of Women's Representatives Role and Leadership in the Local Government

This section is written based on the interviews with UP Chairs, male Members, CSO Representatives and FGDs with Citizens. The study explored whether the respondents felt the need of having women representatives in the UP, how much importance they give to the female members, how they see women members' roles and responsibilities and their views on differences between male and female leadership.

Perception about women's participation in election or politics

Women citizens were vocal about the need to have female members in the council. There are many things that women don't feel comfortable to discuss with male members but can discuss with female members. Thus female members are capable of giving better service to the women in their community. Female citizens prefer going to a female member with their problems. On the other hand male citizens prefer to go to a male member. They think male members are enough to solve their problems. There are some other issues here like ease of access. Male FGD participants mentioned that citizens prefer asking for help or advice from the member who will be available in the locality. However men also realise that women representatives do fulfil a function. "Women are needed everywhere. Time has come to realize that, women are equal to men. So, they are also supposed to take lead in UP. Female members are more knowledgeable and supportive than male members." (Male member 0203MM)

There are however many prejudices and resistances to women's participation in politics. Although it was acknowledged in the FGD discussions and interviews that social norms are changing in rural Bangladesh, the mobility of women and their education levels have increased over the years and their participation in income generating activities is increasing, at the same time these facts are not helping women much in gaining acceptance and importance on a public, representative platform. Male FGD Participants felt that society still does not approve of women participating in elections or politics. Some brought in the reference that Bangladesh is a Muslim country and women's activities in recent times do not reflect that. Some of the general people seem to have an unreasonable suspicion about the character of the female members without cause or evidence, but eventually admitted that they were not sure of those things. For others, the women representatives are not important or significant. "We don't give much thought about the female members. They are considered as the 4th subject" (Talondo Male FGD). [Here the respondent meant it as something optional and not mainstream].

The views of women FGD participants are a bit different. They appreciate the fact that women are playing the role of representatives at local level and they agreed that women's participation is very much needed there. They believe women representatives can play a significant role in raising issues regarding collective interest of women in the society. This also gives them a certain

kind of assurance that they have their own representatives in UP. However, none of them are interested to see themselves as the member of the UP.

Respondents readily brought in the reference that the prime minister, leader of the opposition party, the ex-prime minister and the speaker of the parliament are all women. They said this somehow inspires the women to do things for the greater good of the society.

Negotiating work and projects in the UP

All the citizens agreed that female members get less opportunity to work compared to male members or the Chairman, but male members and Chairmen claimed that they distribute work between themselves as per government rule. The information received from the citizens is different. There is an informal mechanism for distribution of work. All the projects under LGSP and 40 days program are done by either the Chairman or the male members. There are two possibilities here. One is that female members voluntarily choose to give it to the Chairman or the male members and the other is that those were taken from them by creating pressure. All the paperwork is done under the female members' names and they sign all the papers. But they receive an amount from the chairman or the male members for doing so. However this creates resentment among male members who complain about this: "Why should they work if they get their share without even working?" (Saronjai Male FGD)

Based on the information received from all respondents it is clear that female members take their work seriously if they get the chance to do it or choose to do it. However, some of the citizens added that they have never seen projects implemented under the supervision of a female member or any other development work in the area so they can't really compare the quality of work, but they agreed on the fact that female members lack experience. Compared to male members, female members don't have much experience regarding construction, negotiation, manpower management and handling the bureaucracy. All these factors put them in a weak position when it comes to working at the field level.

As representatives female members have to engage with the community people and they have to work in 3 wards. Some of the respondents complained that they rarely see the female member of their ward as she lives in a different ward. However female members have very good relations with women in their locality. Women come to them whenever they need assistance.

Respondents were asked about the services that female members provide to the citizens and how it is different from what male members do. They said female members are playing a significant role in the betterment of women in the society. Issues like child marriage, dowry, domestic violence, education are getting priority from the female members. There are many social issues that require the attention of a woman representative and female members are doing that job very well.

Normally people come to them for solving issues like family conflict, domestic violence, divorce etc. In most of the cases the things a female member handles involves women and that's what make them different from male members. Other than that they also select the beneficiaries for different cards and allowances. People call them for arbitrations. They also give services like birth registration, succession certificate, and indigenous certificate. They also do other things like setting up tube wells and sanitary latrines.

From the experiences that citizens shared, not much difference was found between male members or female members regarding their rent seeking tendency. It was quite clear that members regardless of their gender take money from the people in exchange of putting their name on the list of beneficiaries for different cards and allowances. Similar information was received from citizens of 6 different unions.

But citizens also said that female members are more sensitive about audits, inspections and damage to their reputation, and they try covering things up so that they don't get into any trouble.

An interesting finding that was common in every FGD was the importance of money. From winning an election to getting a VGF card, everything is possible if one has cash in his/her pocket. Chairmen and male members spend large sums of money for election campaigns. Almost each and everyone somehow related to the implementation of projects or scheme take their percentage. When female FGD participants of Ghashigram Union were asked about the services they get from male and female members they said it's impossible to get anything without spending money.

"Nowadays everything is done by money. You will get nothing if you don't spend some. Suppose you are in trouble and need help of a member, either a male member or a female he/she won't even look back at you if don't give them money". (Female FGD Ghashigram)

Social Norms Restricting Interactions between women and men

Some male citizens said that they try to maintain a distance from the female members. They prefer not going to a female member even if they need to. The reason is that if a male citizen is seen with a female member more than once people will start talking about them.

"I was going to the market on my bike and saw the female member of my area looking for transport. Her son was very sick and she was taking him to the hospital. I took them on my bike and gave them a lift to the hospital. After she got on my bike I felt like hiding my face and dropped her as soon as possible. For the next few days after that incident I was so embarrassed that I didn't even go to the market because people have seen us together on my bike." (Jahanabad Male FGD)

Differences in leadership styles/expectations/performance

Respondents pointed out some differences between the leadership of male and female members. The form of leadership commonly appreciated is the dominating, commanding and active form of leadership. Citizens think female members lack the ability to command people. Sometimes people do not obey their orders. Sometimes public representatives have to address crowds but most female members feel uncomfortable to do so. Male members can go and solve a conflict anytime and anywhere. But it is not that easy for a female member to go somewhere at midnight. A local politician said "We are only expecting votes from the women, not leadership." (0103PO)

Male members and chairmen interviewed said that female members are playing a significant role in the decision making process. The council takes their suggestions and opinions in every action. Women representatives are also playing an active role in standing committees, Ward Shobha, and union meetings. But local citizens are not very aware of these activities. According

to them the Chairman and male members don't consider female members' opinions to have any significance. Participants in the FGDs said that citizens are not interested to participate in activities like Ward Shobha, Ward Meetings etc. so they don't keep track of whether these meetings take place regularly or not. They don't give any importance to such activities or to whether UP members do participate or lead such meetings.

However female FGD respondents added that female members are always available whenever the citizens need them. If something urgent comes up they can go to the female member's house and ask for her help. On the other hand male members are not available at home and it's difficult for the female citizens to get his attention immediately.

Respondents said NGO's are constantly working with the women for their capacity building. Women representatives are becoming more aware of their rights. They are gradually learning how things work at the UP and raising their voices if they feel they are getting less than they should. NGO interventions are making sure that women representative are not just a part of the UP but they are also playing an active role. Different NGOs are working with citizens for creating awareness about different social issues. Thus people's perception about women is changing gradually which is helping the female members to perform better.

A local political leader, when asked why women contest, said he did not know why they did so and what benefits they received. But he assumed there must be some benefit for which they want to participate in the elections after all those barriers. Being a UP member might become a means of livelihoods as suggested by the UNO interviewed. He remarked

"existing female members are interested to participate in the next elections because they have taken this as a profession rather than service to the society. Whenever you talk with them they will always be complaining of not getting enough allowance or VDG/VGF card to distribute or not getting a project/program. But the fact is these are not the only tasks of a UP member. They have a lot of other tasks to do like creating social awareness on female education, early marriage etc. But they are less interested to do those works as money isn't involved there. Since monetary benefit is the sole interest of the members they intend to participate again."

A question that has emerged would be to explore is whether the same can be said of male UP members or other local politicians - whether politics or local elections are seen more as a means of livelihood rather than of community service and/or political leadership.

Work that female members can or cannot do

As per government rule women members of reserved seats should be made president of the project implementation committee for one third of the projects and schemes and one third of the standing committees. According to Chairmen and male members these rules are followed in their UP. Beneficiary selection for VGF, VGD cards, widow allowance, old age allowance, and maternity allowance should be done on the basis of the population in each ward. They also said female members get to choose the number of beneficiaries equally as male members. In some places they get the chance to provide more names than male members. But citizens informed that this is not the common practice. In Saronjai unions male FGD respondents said they have rarely seen female members selecting the beneficiaries for VGF/VGD cards, but the female FGD respondents of Saronjai informed that female members can select more beneficiaries than the

male members. Based on the information collected from the citizens of Mohanpur Upazila it can be said that female members face some discrepancies when it comes to beneficiary selection. But the picture is different in Tanor Upazila as female members get equal or more opportunities to select the beneficiaries in their respective areas.

There is a belief that women members cannot do all the things that male members can do: "Female members only work in the issue of domestic violence or complications. They cannot deal with the crime related issues. Male members and Chairman deal with these issues." (Chairman 0101CH)

Regarding perceptions about women representative's intellect, capability and overall performance, there is a perception of their capacity being weaker. FGD participants, regardless of their gender, said that women lack intelligence and skill. The respondents of other categories more or less agreed with this. Some reached this conclusion although they admitted that in most of the cases women do not get the opportunity to prove themselves.

The constraining factor for women representatives that all the respondents mentioned is mobility. Members of reserved seat have to work with three different wards instead of one. So they have a larger area with a greater population to cover and have less resources to do so.

10. What is the influence of political parties and civil society organisations

This section of the report will discuss how women's representation is influenced by existing political parties and civil society organizations(CSO) and how they deal with this (whether positive or negative) influence while participating in local government elections and bodies.

Political Parties and Women's Experience

Although most female members were not involved directly in party politics before being elected, but after becoming a UP member most of them become "strategically" involved. They believe that it will give them bargaining power in the UP and provide a means of communication with higher level political leaders, mainly at the Upazila level, which will help them in two ways: a) getting importance or priority for allocations from Upazila level and b) using this influence to get more importance and allocations in the UP itself. While in some cases it was found that they got advantage, importance and more allocations if they were involved in party politics, other factors such as education level, awareness and relationship with the UP chairman also played a role.

Regarding the choice of which party to join - some of the female members tried to involve themselves with the "chairman party" to get the favour of the chairman mainly for allocating resources and incentives. It is also seen that if any female member or their family were not affiliated with any political party previously, many of them tried to involve themselves with the party in power. In some cases they even left their previous party and joined another party. However the dominant trend is that the women UP members are loyal to the political party that their family affiliated with (see Figures 6 & 7). Even though they were not actively involved in politics before their elections, for some of them the political affiliation of other family members played a key role behind their victory in elections.

Figure 6: Party allegiance of elected women members

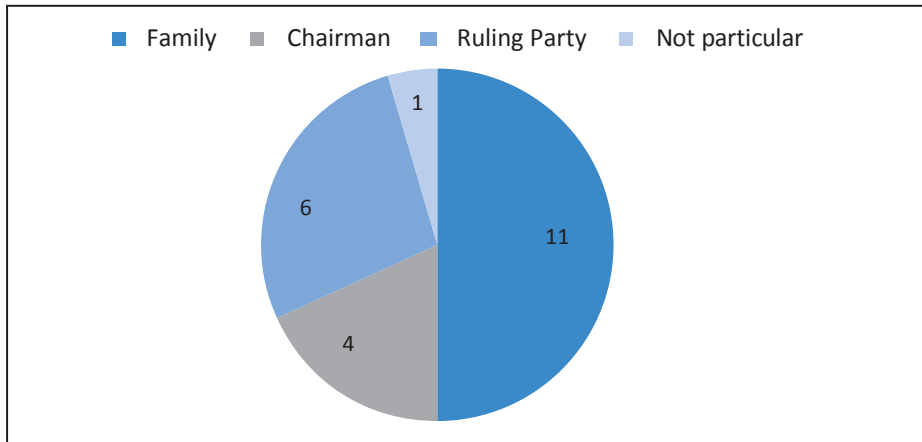
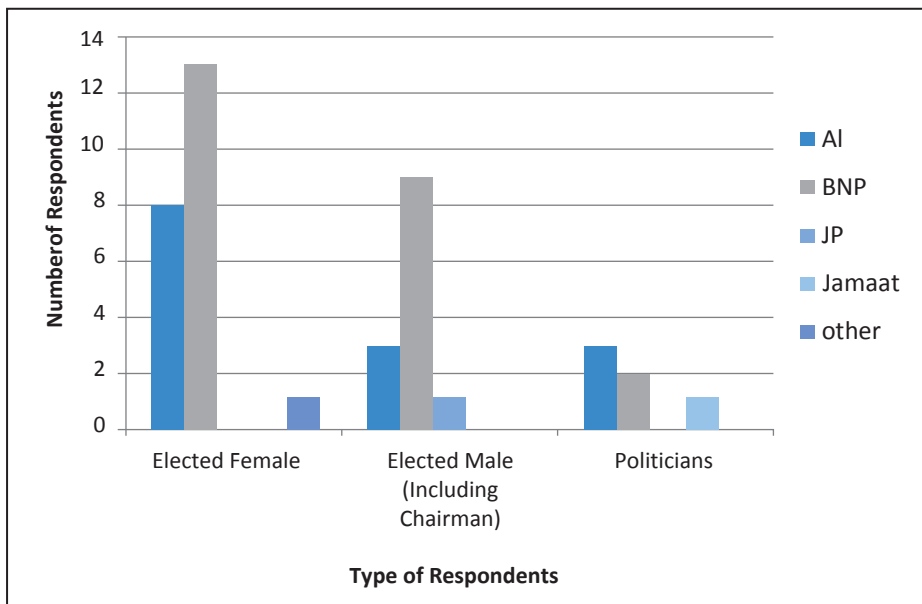


Figure 7: Political Affiliation of Different Types of Respondents



"My father's family used to support BNP and my husband used to support AL....I was never actively involved with politics before the elections. In the elections I didn't get support from any particular political party....After getting elected in 2003, the UP chairman approached me to join in Thana BNP as a member. And after I got elected once again in 2011, BNP selected me to be Chairperson of 'Thana Mohila Dol'." (Khairun Begum, 0201FM1)

For most of the women UP members interviewed it was found that that they did not have a long term vision of their involvement in party politics. They did not publicly disclose their political identity in their community or constituency. They are more comfortable in introducing themselves as a public representatives rather than as political leaders. A female member said that "I got vote from all party supporters and will also have to seek votes in future elections, so my identity as a UP member is more important other than as a political leader." (Fayzunnesa 0102FM1)

Only two female members showed interest in party politics and targeted to contest for Upazila Vice Chairman because they have strong network with political party at Upazila level and they are confident that the community will also support them.

Perspectives of the Political Parties About UP Women Members

Political parties do not consider reserve seats to be important. They may support female participants informally but this support is limited to identifying the candidate as their party representative in the ward(s). There was no evidence that any political party has provided a reserve seat candidate with financial support. However there is a very structured process for a chairman's campaign to assist him to win the election by any means necessary. When asked why this difference in support, local political leaders said that since women do not have that much political influence in the locality thus the parties do not consider it worthwhile to investing in representatives on reserve seats. "Women are not participating actively in politics. Thus parties have less interest in women who participate in UP elections." said one of the politicians (0101PO).

Atia Begum while explaining support from political parties said,

"Political parties work actively for chairman's campaign. They don't give much attention to male or female members. Although general and reserve seat candidates compete with the support of the political parties, they don't get any financial help." (Female member 0103FM1)

Only a few of the respondents said that if the participant has a direct relation with the central leaders, they can give instructions to allocate some funding for that particular female candidate. However some of the respondents including a political leader said that political party support towards a specific candidate has the effect of lessening the participation of women in the local level elections. Each party supports only one woman in the election, thus other women who are interested to participate and are supporters of the same party will not participate out of loyalty towards that particular political party. This results in a reduced number of candidates in each election.

As explained by Puspa Rani, "If more than one women express their interest for taking part in UP election, the party decides whom they are going to support and ask the others to withdraw their nomination." (Female member, 0102FM2)

A local politician and male UP member stated that the female wings of most political parties are not active at the UP level and the political parties are not raising awareness among women to join politics (0202 MM). Lack of mobility, family obligations, social constraints are some common reasons for women not being able to participate in local politics and are also reasons why the parties are not able to draw them in to develop their interest in politics and through this their leadership capabilities. Therefore the party activities remain mainly male dominated which discourages women from joining.

"There is not much social awareness raised by the political parties about politics for women. Women tend to join politics less because of social and financial reasons. Female members do not get much support from the political parties even if they are supporters of that particular group. Since women cannot work actively like men these parties are less interested in women joining politics." (NGO staff 0103CSO)

As a result of social conservatism women prefer discussing politics and community issues with women. Without active local female wing of political parties women are not likely to be active in local level politics. However, political party representatives said that they are taking initiatives to involve women more and more in politics and that is for the parties' own benefit. If a female representative of the party is present at the grassroots level, she can increase the number of female voters for the party. For this reason the party leaders take interested women to the party seminars at the Upazila level.

Another reason for local political party leaders to neglect women in spite of their being 50% of the electorate is that they feel that they have a different mechanism to capture their votes. There is a perception that women don't have the freedom to vote for their favourite candidates and their husband or head of the family decides who they are going to vote for. Politicians feel that if they can convince the husband or the head of the family, in most of the cases by giving them money, then all the votes from that family will go to them. *"I have voted for the candidate my husband told me to vote for"*. (Female FGD Saronjai). But whether this is true for all women voters is debatable.

Women becoming political activists, however rare, is still acknowledged. Some women manage to get out of their homes to go to political processions nowadays. This is becoming more common especially for female students who aspire for good jobs. According to a local politician a political identity is more important than good results to get a good job (0102 PO). In most cases they consider government jobs as good jobs. Women are therefore using the opportunity of joining politics as a means to a "comfortable" job. As expressed by a local politician:

"In the context of Bangladesh everybody needs political liaison to get any work done. If a man or woman wants a good job he/she definitely needs some political back up. And this can be considered as one of the major reasons for women to join in politics." (0102PO)

Political Party Influence in the functioning of the UP

The respondents have also highlighted the fact that the influence of politics has increased over the years on UP elections since 1997: "Influence of political parties in UP is increasing day by day. The political party in power is interfering in every activity within the UP" said a female members who is involved with the Union Parishad since 1985 (0203FM2).

Political parties have an informal influence on women's representation at the UP. However, the extent of their influence cannot be measured from outside. The influence ranges from the decision to take part in elections up to the decision to stand for elections for a second term. Women try to use this influence to both enter and survive in the UP. In some cases when women decide to participate in politics, it is either because of demand of the household head or a local influential person. In such cases these family members or local influentials are affiliated with politics. Thus when a woman decided to participate in local elections they already have an informal political support. There are, however, also examples of women who had no political backup and were elected as members in the UP.

The local influentials who are mostly affiliated with political parties, make choices about which women candidates to back, on the basis of certain characteristics which have been discussed in section 6. They would choose women who are educated, have leadership qualities and credibility to be their supported candidates for the party's benefit. Also the connection with a

political party plays an important role to participate in UP election whether it is through a family members or local acquaintance. Therefore it is a combination of these qualities with the necessary political support that would make a person suitable for contesting the elections.

Women use this opportunity to be involved in politics for their survival in the UP. When they have a political power and backup, male members and the chairman has to pay attention to their comments on UP issues. A political backup is a must to work and survive in the UP and political parties also use these elected members to bolster their stance in the area through the female members' access to other women in the community. Female members, who actually are enthusiastic about politics, get the opportunity to get acquainted with political parties and their leaders to go up in politics as well as to have a strong hold in the UP.

Two strategies can be taken by women members for their survival in the UP. One is supporting the political views of the Chairman. The chairman is of absolute power in UP, and members must show deference to him to be benefitted or at least survive in the UP. Any sanction for a UP is received and divided by the Chairman for distribution. Thus to get the intended benefit from UP, members have to obey the Chairman. Since most female members were not actively involved in politics before they enter UP, they choose to support the political belief of the Chairman to have a comfortable environment at the UP.

The second strategy is to support the ruling party. Women choose to support the ruling party when they come to office with their support. Thus they have to show loyalty to the party and support them even if the Chairman doesn't support the ruling party. Though this action puts them in great trouble in their work and allocations in the UP, they are benefitted by a strong backup from the ruling party which helps them advance in politics.

"The Local MP gets the right to distribute half of the allocation for UP. He uses his own nominated person who finalizes the list of beneficiaries. If any member is from the same political party as the MP he/she might get some more allocations from the MP. So now it has become more important for the members to have a political identity if they want to prove themselves by helping more citizens." (Puspa Rani 0102FM2)

In the former situation Chairman is mostly an opposition party supporter. In circumstances like these, the UP has to face a lot of trouble regarding sanctions and allocations. However, 50% of the allocations to the UP have to be shared with the ruling party activists regardless of the political belief of Chairman or the members. And this has become an unwritten rule in the UPs. The percentage varies in some places from 40-60%. As explained by Raihana Begum "Allocation of allowance cards is divided into ruling party activists and UP. Though I am a ruling party supporter, I do not get a share from their 50% to distribute." (0202FM3)

Having to give up 50% of the allocations the UP receives to the ruling party activists, there is less to distribute within the UP and to the population. Within the UP the women are further disadvantaged as they are lesser in number. The Chairman in practice would prefer to work with male members and thus tend to involve women members less in UP works. When 50% of the allocations are taken by the ruling party activists, UP has to divide the other 50% among its 12 Members and the Chairman for distribution. And for the reason mentioned earlier, they tend to provide less to women. Thus, women get less to distribute and are questioned by the citizens for not being able to reach their needs.

Some of the women raise their voices to have equal shares to distribute facilities among citizens as women are more aware of their rights, responsibilities and entitlements (e.g. involvement in minimum 30% works of UP). They ask the Chair to involve them in programme coordination and project implementation properly. However the women members also have to negotiate and compromise with the ruling party activists so they can be involved in UP projects and carry them out smoothly. There are several committees in the UP which consists of female members from UP as well as MP's selected members. These selected members are mainly ruling party activists of the region. Thus women have to agree with all their decisions to avoid problems in the UP. In some places there is negotiation and understanding between the political parties and they exert collaborative effort in the UP's development work.

"The chairman said that it will not be a good decision to fight with the crocodile while swimming in the water. Thus we negotiate with the ruling party supporting UP members as well as activists to distribute allowance cards in the region. Sometimes we distribute these allowance cards together so that people can see us working." (Khairun Begum 0201FM1)

In case of program coordination and project implementation political parties help the members who support them, but there is no formal support from the party. In some places there is collaborative behaviour from the ruling party activists to the members who support opposition party.

"We are involved in several committees with the female members in the UP. We help each other in several issues related to that particular committee. We do not prioritize the member who supports our party. Rather we work together in the community." (Local Politician 0101PO)

In spite of these attempts at negotiation and collaboration, UP members, both male and female, allege that in most of the cases, influence of the political parties is reducing UP members', especially female members', influence at the local level. One of the complaints made by both male and female UP members is that nowadays any arbitration in the locality is controlled and concluded by the ruling party activists. Thus UP members may be present there but the decisions are taken by the political party leaders. This reduces women's opportunity to practice leadership as women are only given priority to solve arbitrations related to females. Thus interference by political parties is a barrier towards their practice of leadership.

"Whenever we meet for arbitration, if the decision taken by a member (male or female) goes against the choice of ruling party political activist's will, they tend to leave the place and make a call to the local police station to manipulate the decision. This is disrespectful to the UP members as their decisions are having no effect." (Male respondent 0201MM)

Another important aspect of political influence is that the local MP influences decision making at the UP level. Sometimes the MP controls the sanctions for UPs and tends to provide the sanctions to ruling party activists for distribution. Again UP members have little access to the MP to discuss their problems. The MP visits them seldom and for a very short time. Women who are particularly affiliated with ruling party sometimes get the chance to meet the MP when he visits but the time is inadequate to talk about all the issues including political and UP service related facts.

An interesting finding of the study was the political affiliation of the indigenous group in the area. Although indigenous groups are considered to be a minority in the region and have to face a lot of racism, a female of that particular group holds an important post in a political party and she is intending to run for the Upazila Female Vice-Chairman's post. This is because of her enormous support and leadership quality. Minority and indigenous in the region mostly support AL since they find them more welcoming than other political parties in the region.

Some female members opposed the prospect of local government elections under a political banner since political banner will divide the voters into several parts and it will certainly reduce the support for particular candidates in a particular place. Now, women can easily approach any household to ask for votes and there is no division. Election under political banner will demolish this casual presence of reserve seat participants in the locality.

On the contrary, some of the politicians said that local government election under political party banner will ensure women's political power. If local government elections are carried out under a political banner, women will have proper political identity which will empower them more to practice leadership in UP. "Local government polls should take place under a political banner. Because it will ensure the distribution of political power to women and there will be no division in the sanctions to the UP." (Local Politician, 0102PO)

Civil society organizations and Women's Experience

There are several NGOs active in the region working to provide women with the knowledge and training of practicing leadership. These include SHARIQUE, BRAC's Community Empowerment Programme (CEP), Shushilon, Lighthouse, ACD, Khan Foundation, DASCO, and Prip Trust. These NGOs are working with local government and women's participation. The main interventions with elected members include the following:

Teaching women UP members about their duties- Since most of the female members are not well aware of their duties in the UP and the NILG training is provided after a long delay the NGO training on local government is very useful. A former member said, "*Many NGOs trained women for capacity building and playing an active role in the UP. I learned a lot about the procedures of UP from their trainings. It also made me aware of my duties and responsibilities as a female member.*" (0103EFM)

Making them aware of their rights and building capacity- A lot of the respondents mentioned that in the past they did not know about their rights and what was their due from UPs as members. Thus they had to defer to the chairman for any work in the UP. Women would sign different papers and cheques without knowing what was mentioned in them. After NGOs provided training they learned a lot about their rights and the support service from the NGOs have enabled them to claim what they rightfully get from the UP.

"After training from NGOs I know that I have a lot of power in the UP. Whether any other woman uses it or not, I use it. Now I present myself in the UP at the same level as a male member."

Khairun Begum (0201FM1), is a UP member who is highly successful and well accepted in the community for her sociable behaviour. Male members and even the Chairman

also fear her for her strong voice in the community. She said she achieved this confidence only because of the NGOs who educated them.

Now, whenever female members feel lack of information from UP, they directly contact the NGO representatives to clear their confusion. For example, SHUSHILON has a hotline to discuss several UP related issues with the female members. Female members call them to be sure of UP sanctions and to know about their rights in the UP.

Developing prospective female members- As NGOs are raising awareness among women about their duties and rights in the UP, women are becoming confident over the time. Along with this NGOs are also trying to bring out potential female members from wards. Raising awareness and mentoring from NGOs like SHARIQUE, BRAC (CEP) are building up future members and making them confident to work with men in the community.

There are other local NGOs which are providing women with training and equipments for livelihoods development. Elected members maintain good relations with them as educated and independent women are affiliated with these organizations. They are quite vocal about women's rights and in some cases challenge the social barriers. Since they have quite a lot of impact in the locality female members are interested in maintaining good relations with them.

Khairun Begum is very active and vocal female member. She started to compete UP election from 1997. She elected first time at 2003. After getting elected in 2003 she joined BNP (though her husband was active with AL Politics) as BNP was ruling party on that time, according to her "You have to hold the umbrella where water pours" (thi tk cmb co te tmw tk QvZv ai tZ nte jedike pani porbe sedike chata dhorthe hobe). She is very active with Women's Development Forum. She keeps good relation with UZP vice-chair to get information about sanction and project that distribute to her UP. Khairun got various training from NGOs. She said that without NGOs they couldn't have known their rights .She also added that after election we used to just go and from Union Parishad and while chairman asked to sign some document we simply did that...but NGOs opened our eyes and ears (Riv Avgi v cwi I t h vBZvg Av i AvBZvg tPqig vb ej tZv GKUv mmMtbPvi t`b mmMtbPvi w` Zvg ... ukS' Avgt i GB tPvK Kvb L Bj v w` tq tQ Riv GbwRI i v/).

For SHARIQUE she went Shunamgonj for a learning visit, Prip Trust sent her Dhaka for training. According to her some other NGOs are actively educating women on rights in the UP.

11. Policy and Programmatic Implication of the findings

Policy Implications

The weaknesses and contradictions inherent in the local government legislation and the differences in power and authority between the chair and members affect women as well as men. Resources and authority are limited and the UP cannot respond to the demands of citizens adequately. Both women and men are affected by these limitations which mean that their constituencies lose confidence in them. Therefore the various measures such as policy advocacy, being taken to increase the authority and resources of local government bodies remain urgent.

One of the conclusions that can be drawn from the study is that both the women candidates, political parties and citizens favour voting for women on reserved seats. On one hand women do not have either the economic resources necessary to contest the general seats or the "strength" to compete against male candidates. On the other hand the views of citizens and politicians is that if general voters had to choose between voting for women and men for a UP member seat, the male candidate would probably be given preference. Citizens are willing to vote for women representatives and also see their value, but not at the expense of male candidates. Therefore the policy implication is that in order to ensure women's representation reservations are essential.

Programmatic Implications

NGO interventions on capacity development have had a positive effect and have helped women and men UP members develop the knowledge and skills to be able to function and contribute to the UPs. However capacity building initiatives in itself are not enough to enable women to fully play their roles and fulfill their responsibilities. There are a number of constraints that prevent women from fulfilling their potential.

The research has shown that corruption and politicisation are pervasive in local government and local administration. Women, as well as men, have to operate and negotiate within this context. Not only do they need to know the formal rules and procedures they also have to be aware of the informal rules and be able to play by them. It is also stereotyping to say that women are not part of rent-seeking. They too ask for payments and also make payments, as and where needed.

While the women and men do strategise and negotiate with various persons, parties and institutions to overcome opposition and achieve their goals, compared to the men the women are less experienced and skilled at this. Peer to peer learning and support can help the women to be more conscious and strategic. For example they learned by example that complaining to the UNO about the UP chair would have a negative impact and the other women members chose not to complain after the experience of Josna Begum (0102 FM3). Also the study found that in some of the unions the women had been able to develop solidarity between themselves and support each other when they faced problems. Where they were isolated from each other the UN Chair and members were able to dominate them more easily.

A programmatic implication is that the facilitation of peer-to-peer learning and building solidarity through networks is important to help women members to strengthen their voice and effective participation.

Various UP structures and process should provide the opportunity for women members to play a leadership role and develop their management and leadership skills. These include the chairing of Standing Committees, Project Implementation Committees, being advisors to ward shobhas, etc. These have a contribution in giving the women specific tasks and responsibilities but their functioning is influenced by the actions of the UP Chair, the Secretary and other male members. The differences in authority between the chair and members means that the chair takes the final decisions and the members cannot go against his decisions. In order to ensure the smooth functioning of the standing committees or the projects the women members have to make compromises and "manage" the male members, the chair and also the political party activists nominated to the various committees. The programmatic implication of this is while it is

essential to emphasize the implementation of the existing legal provisions it is important to understand the constraints the women have to work within to make these functional.

Political parties are playing an ever increasing role in the local government bodies, and local level in general. While there is interest among the parties to involve women more and also interest among the women and young girls to be involved more, various social norms and prejudices prevent girls and women from joining. Also the culture and ways of functioning of the parties are also not women friendly. The role that student wings of political parties previously had in involving and developing women and girls' leadership seems to be absent. However there is a gap that needs to be addressed by the political parties to expand their membership, develop their younger members and ensure that women and girls are encouraged to join and develop their skills and leadership. There provision of safe spaces and culturally appropriate activities could help break the barriers and hesitations that families and females have.

There is a social expectation that a leader should be vocal, gifted in public speaking, authoritative, confident and everybody should listen to him/her, which is generally associated with a male model of leadership. However women leaders/UP members' contributions and capacities are increasingly valued and recognized. Both women and men repeatedly emphasized that women citizens can approach women members more freely, women members are more approachable and they are good at dealing with family conflicts. This is perhaps an alternative model of leadership that is being socially recognized and that can be promoted with men as well.

One of the biggest constraints mentioned for women to exercise their leadership was limitations to their mobility. They cannot go around by motor bike as easily as men and they cannot go out at night. Some programmes have tried to emphasize that shalish should be done in daylight hours so that women complainants and shalishkars can attend. Emphasizing the use of the UP premises for meetings and for citizens to come and meet the UP members can also minimize the differences between accessing women and men members

In conclusion we can see that women are strategic actors who decide to contest general or reserved seats based on an assessment of the context and the factors in their favour or disfavour. They function in the UP through making compromises and alliances with the UP Chair and male members and also political activists appointed to various standing committees. They use their political party allegiances and alliances to support their case or the UP Chair. They seek to exert influence and power when and where they can and strategically decide not to do so when the costs are too high or the possibility of a positive outcome are remote. Some of the women have suffered in the process of confronting the UP Chair, political party or government officials but at least they have tried to contest and place their views. The overall picture emerging is of a more conscious, vocal and capable group of women leaders and public representatives who cannot be discounted by any means.

List of References

- Chowdhury, N., (2002) *The Implementation of Quotas: Bangladesh Experience - Dependence and Marginality in Politics*. Stockholm: International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (IDEA)
- Democracy Watch (2009) 'Representation and Violence against Women in Politics in Bangladesh. A survey report', Dhaka.
- Frankl, E. (2004) 'Quotas and Empowerment: The Use of Reserved Seats in Union Parishad as an Instrument for Women's Political Empowerment in Bangladesh', Working Paper 4, Department of Political Science, University of Stockholm, www.statsvet.su.se/quotas (accessed 2 May 2010)
- Goetz, A.M. and Hassim, S. (2003) *No Shortcuts to Power: African Women in Politics and Policy Making*. London: Zed Book
- Government of Bangladesh, 2013 National Policy for Women's Advancement (revised 2013)
- Government of Bangladesh, Ministry of Women and Children Affairs. (2014). *Bangladesh Report: The Implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (1995) and the Outcomes of the Twenty-third Special Session of the General Assembly (2000)*. Bangladesh.
- Helvetas, *Local Governance in Bangladesh, Context Analysis of Power Relations*
- Hossain, N and Akhter, S (2011) 'Gender, Power and Politics in Bangladesh: a baseline study for the Upazila Support Project (draft)
- Khan, Z. R. and Mohsin, A. (2008) 'Women's Empowerment Through Local Governance: Emerging Issues and Debates', paper presented at Pathways of Women's Empowerment RPC Mid Term Review, Conference, Cairo, 20-24 January 2009
- Khondaker R, Khan, N., Jahan, N.T., Khan, M. (2013) *Empowering Women Through Reserved Seats in Parliament: Fight of Flight Response?* Dhaka: Khan Foundation
- Mahmud, S. and Nazneen, S. (2014) "Gendered Politics of Securing Inclusive Development". BIGD Working Paper, Dhaka.
- Mahmud, S. and Nazneen, S. (2014) "Gendered Politics of Securing Inclusive Development". BIGD Working Paper, Dhaka.
- Naripokkho (2009), *Report on Regional Dialogues between UZP Vice-Chairs and Women's Organisations*, Dhaka
- Nazneen, S and Akhter, M, (2014), "Inclusive Governance: Engendering Political Parties" in *State of Governance Bangladesh 2013*. Democracy Party Politics, BRAC Institute of Governance and Development, BRAC University.
- Nazneen, S; Ehsan, I and Hasan, Bayazid, (2014), "Exceptional Women. Reserved Councillors in Municipal Corporation in Bangladesh" in *Women in Politics: Gender, Power and Development* Edited by Mariz Tadros London: Zed Books
- Nazneen, S and Tasneem, S (2010) 'A Silver Lining: Women in Reserved Seats in Local Government in Bangladesh', *IDS Bulletin* 41.5:1-7
- Nazneen, Sohela, (2009) 'Bangladesh: Political Party Discourses and Women's Empowerment' in *South Asian Journal*.

Panday, P. K. (2008) 'Representation Without Participation: Quotas for Women in Bangladesh', *International Political Science Review* 29.4: 489-512

Panday, P. K. (2013) "Impact Study on Women Empowerment through Effective, Transparent and Inclusive Local Governance (Sharique Case)". Report prepared for Sharique, Local Governance Programme.

The Constitution of Bangladesh, People Republic of Bangladesh

Local Government (Union Parishad) Act- 2009, Bangladesh

BRAC Institute of Governance and Development (BIGD), BRAC University is a centre of policy and academic excellence. BIGD is devoted to research on a range of governance and development concerns, as well as the nexus between the two. BIGD's research is aimed at contributing to public policy as well as supporting its academic and training programs. It does not limit knowledge creation to being an end itself but rather to advance the pursuit of a just and prosperous society. It also plays an advocacy role to give voice to contemporary governance, political and economic issues. As an institute of BRAC University, BIGD works closely with the university motivated by its motto: 'inspiring excellence'. BIGD also has the unique advantage of being associated with BRAC, the world's largest NGO through its work. It is inspired by BRAC's values in shaping its institutional work and professional standards.



BRAC Institute of Governance and Development
BRAC University

SK Centre (3rd - 7th & 9th Floor), GP, JA-4, TB Gate
Mohakhali, Dhaka-1212, Bangladesh

Website : <http://bigd.bracu.ac.bd>



Inspiring Excellence