

**Gender and Local Governance:
Experiences of Women
Representatives in Bangladesh**

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Gender and Local Governance: Experiences of Women Representatives in Bangladesh

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DECLARATION

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I do hereby declare that this Ph.D. thesis entitled “*Gender and Local Governance: Experiences of Women Representatives in Bangladesh*” was carried out by me.

This is an original work based on primary and secondary sources. This thesis or any part of this thesis has not been submitted for publication anywhere. Any degree or diploma or distinction has not been conferred on me before, either in this university or in any other institutions.

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This is an original work of the researcher. All sources of data obtained or gathered have been duly acknowledged in this thesis. As far I know, this thesis or any part of this thesis have not been submitted or published anywhere.

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Dedicated to

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who has taught me how to stand on one's own feet.

Abstract

This study on “*Gender and Local Governance: Experiences of Women Representatives in Bangladesh*” was undertaken to examine political empowerment of the women in Local Government. Multifarious factors including socio-economical background, lack of educational background and lack of political participation of women in the grassroots level (Union Parishad) are said to be responsible for the gender inequity in Bangladesh.

Gender participation and sensitization in political and administrative structures is a very important key to a representative and responsive government. It is an important dimension of governance as democracy, politics, rule of law and human rights are involved in this issue. Gender in fact, is a crosscutting theme in the governance. Recent emphasis on gender representation in local government by development planners and policy advocates gives the issue more significance in the overall context of local governance reform and development policies.

No doubt, as a step of women empowerment, the elected reserve seats for women helps to promote participation and women access to the decision-making process numerically, though not practically much ensured. Due to socio-political and religious bindings, elected women cannot play their role and thus people’s aspiration and expectation to them were not met up. Women’s empowerment is not an issue or debate related to women, it is an issue of development of our society as women are about the half of the total population. In increasing the number of women in decision making positions does not in itself translate into greater empowerment for women. Measures to increase the number of women representatives need to be accompanied by measures to improve the quality of participation.

The aim of the research is to study the implications of the use of reserved seats in local government of Bangladesh in terms of gender and women’s political empowerment. In course of the study few hypotheses have been tested. First of all, that the political participation of women in local level politics is

conspicuously meager in Bangladesh mainly due to their economic dependence on male and their low level of education and socio economic structure.

This study looks at the status and potentials of rural local government in Bangladesh focusing on the Union Parishad women members and local people's experiences. According to the findings it is not possible to make conclusion that the reserved seats for women representatives is 'effective' or 'non effective' regarding women's political empowerment instead this must be seen in the context of the electoral system, the role of the ruling political party and the structural and functions of the local government.

The local government of Bangladesh is lacking both resources as well as authorities which constrain women's ability to act accordingly in point of fact, there is no discrepancy between the number of elected women and the practice of direct election seems to be strengthening the legitimacy of the elected women. The implementation of a quota system becomes an instrument to compensate for structural barriers. There have also been structural changes in terms of gender and it seems that the reserved seats have had consequences beyond political empowerment such including social empowerment.

Outcome of this research on gender equity shows that there is a crucial need for a gender specific development paradigm into all areas of policy making and development planning so that women's needs and aspirations can be met and their fullest participation in the political process ensured accordingly. Decentralization has been identified as one of the important prerequisites to ensure gender balance into development process. The essence of good governance and the success of a local government depend on people's participation. An effective local government system is essential to develop decentralized and meaningful democratic governance in order to achieve economic development and social stability in Bangladesh. Recently, in local governance women representatives have been able to exercise their new roles in more constructive ways. However, unequal participation of women and men in the government planning acts as a barrier to ensure good governance.

List of Abbreviations:

CEDAW: Convention on Elimination of All Forms of Discriminations against Women

CEO: Chief Executive Officer

DPHE: Department of Public Health Engineering

GDI: Gender related Development Index

GEM: Gender Empowerment Measure

MOWCA: Ministry of Women and Children Affairs

MP: Member of Parliament

NILG: National Institute of Local Governance

NGO: Non Governmental Organization

TNO: Thana Nirbahi Officer

NILG: National Institute of Local Governance

UP: Union Parishad

UPZ: Upazilla

VGD: Vulnerable Groups Development

VGF: Vulnerable Groups Feeding

Chapter 1

Introduction and Research Methodology

1.1. Introduction

A strong and effective local government is one of the elemental preconditions for ensuring good governance. It is generally agreed by all conscious people that an empowered local government is the strong foundation of the success of any democratic country. Strengthening local government body is the cherished goal of the people of Bangladesh. The local representatives of a local body based on democratic ideas can promote the greater socio-economic emancipation of the people of the country.

Women in Bangladesh live in a social system where socialization process plays an influential role to drive them into a substandard and a subordinate position in the society. Throughout the history of political participation, women have always been involved in politics but their participation has been ignored. It is evident that the success of a local government depends on equal people's participation both men and women.

Union Parishad is the only and most popular democratic institution at the grassroots level. It plays a vital role for rural development. Therefore, the women's participation at grassroots level is crucial and deserves special attention to empower them. Direct election of women to Union Parishads, in 1997, is a significant way of women participation in local government at the grass root level and can be considered as a doorway to democracy. Recent years we have witnessed an increasing awareness of women's pro-active roles in the local government politics and their contribution to the local development.

Local government in Bangladesh is one of the formal legal representative bodies at the grass root level where the women of the country can raise their voice. It is the oldest political institution in the country since the Urban Municipalities and Rural Union Parishad were created over hundred years ago. The Union Parishad system has been the most consistent in its existence as elected institutions of governance through regular elections.

Each Union Parishad elects thirteen elected representatives, one chair and twelve members including three women in reserved seats. The provision of the three seats reserved for women to overlap the constituencies of three general seats has raised a serious structural issue that has adversely affected women's role and functions. As we know in Bangladesh, women comprise nearly half of the total population but the status of women is much lower than that of men in every field of life. Women are here identified with domestic life while politics is viewed as a male dominated public activity that is typically masculine in nature.

In a male-centered socialization process, everything is biased towards gender; here women face difficulties to express free will in decision making. Women are dominated by the "Patriarchal system"* which contains social, economic and political elements. In Bangladesh, women are usually economically dependent on the males; financial problem is a major obstacle for them. Therefore, women should get support from the family and society as whole to enter into the formal socioeconomic work force. If a woman is economically solvent and independent from the family, her self-confidence increases.

*Patriarchy is a social system in which males are the primary authority figures central to social organization, occupying roles of political leadership, moral authority, and control of property, and where fathers hold authority over women and children. It implies the institutions of male rule and privilege, and entails female subordination. (Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia).

Lack of institutional training and political awareness: women seldom know about their rights and privileges. Special efforts are needed to promote women leaders from the grassroots level to higher political offices by imparting institutional training and guidance. That way, women will come out from their ignorance of their political, legal and constitutional rights.

Gender empowerment is determined by the degree to which women and men participate actively in social, economic, professional and political space, take part in the decision making process.

Development discourse emphasizes gender and governance at all decision making levels as critical areas of concern. In fact, good governance needs not only fair representation but also effective participation of women and subordinated social groups at the policy making and implementation level. On the other hand, without commensurate political empowerment, just social status and a rightful economic standing for women cannot be achieved or sustained (Khan, N.I. 2003).

The Constitution of the People's Republic of Bangladesh guarantees equal rights for all citizens. Article- 9 of the constitution promotes the special representation of women in local government. The Constitutional Amendment Acts of Bangladesh have brought in a large number of women into the realm of politics at the local level, which was unthinkable earlier. Before these acts the participation of women at the national, regional, and local levels was negligible. As said earlier, though women constitute half of the total population of Bangladesh, their participation in both electoral and representation in politics is insignificant. (Siddiqui, 1995)

However, in Bangladesh, democratic local institutions like the Union Parishad still remain weak due to political inconsistency and corruption. Bangladesh faces problems of corruption, lack of clear representation of citizen's interests by their elected representative, a highly centralized government and a promising local government movement that is still learning to exercise rights and privileges.

When the local government institutions will be able to plan, manage and generate additional resources, then their capacity to deliver services will improve and their relationships with general people will be enhanced. An effective and efficient people local government will definitely be able to reinforce the importance of government transparency and ultimately improve the quality of life for the average citizens.

This study is an attempt to review the participation of women at the grassroots level in Bangladesh. The study will examine the present role of government of Bangladesh to ensure gender balance at local level policy planning. In Bangladesh, despite some women being elected in the local bodies, obstacles related to women's gender identity, refrain them from playing their roles effectively. It is evident that lack of effective and timely planning, lack of political background, absence of proper socio- economic and political environment, lack of organizational framework, lack of skill and training far behind to prove their competencies compare to their male counterparts.

It has been observed that women have limited scope to exercise political rights, control over resources and choice over decision making. However, women have been trying to overcome the barriers through their active participation at the local level policy making. Attempts have also been taken to sensitize communities as well as local and national leaders and policy makers to the need for the gender balance in the political process. Efforts are going on to make politics democratic, participatory, accountable and transparent so as to ensure a just, humane and equitable society. The urgency of political empowerment of women has therefore increased manifold.

There is a need to enable women members to be more effective representatives of local government bodies. Two aspects of effectiveness need to be considered: effectiveness in participating in overall Union Parishad operations and effectiveness in stimulating attention to women's development issues. That being the case the foremost task is to reach out to women to make them politically

aware and conscious. This task requires to be taken up on a mass and intensified scale. Coordination and cooperation of government is necessary to achieve this goal. Political parties have a significant role to play as well.

Political participation of women in Bangladesh is closely linked with the patriarchal value embedded in the socio-cultural pattern reflecting systematic subordination and inequality of women. At present, Bangladesh has two- tiered local government system, Local government in urban areas with 10 City Corporations and 158 Pourashabha and 4,298 Union Parishads in the rural areas.

1.2. Statement of the Problems

The women of Bangladesh have been generally excluded from politics. Women have been also excluded from areas of decision making. Their potential remains largely unrecognized and their contributions are often overlooked. In a traditional society of Bangladesh, women have been assigned secondary roles. Men monopolize political participation, which is an important area of contribution for the development of the society.

On the other hand, unequal participation of women and men in the government planning acts as a barrier to ensure good governance in Bangladesh. Women's participation in local governance has been recently ensured through constitutional reform. In recent times, there has been a common realization that a strong and effective local government is one of the essential preconditions for ensuring good governance.

There have been some major attempts to reform local government under the different governments in different times. The objectives of all were to introduce participatory and accountable local governance through decentralization of functions and powers to locally elected institutions. All these governments also recognized the relevance and importance of the role of decentralized local institutions in planning and implementing need-based development projects for poverty alleviation and reduction of socio economic inequality.

However, the objectives were not realized and the government failed to keep their commitment towards grassroots democracy to develop power to the people at lower levels to manage their own affairs. Consequently, the primary goal of poverty reduction, economic equity and gender balance has remained unfulfilled.

The Constitution of Bangladesh guarantees equality of men and women in all spheres of governance. There is no legal barrier to women contesting or voting for any elective office, including that of the head of the state. Article 9 of the Constitution promotes the special representation of women in local government. Although the Constitution grants equal rights to all citizens in all spheres of life, yet there have been very few women in local government politics.

In 1976, a provision was made for two nominated women members and nine elected members were added in 1983. In 1992, it was changed to indirect election where three women members in each local government body were supposed to be elected by the Chairperson and other elected members. This process of filling women's seats in the local governance totally overlooked. The scopes of women's active participation and role in these political organizations where policies are decided and crucial plans for local development are formulated. The nominated or indirectly elected women members could not play more than the role of a 'yes' person of the Chairperson and members, who were predominantly men.

In 1997, for the first time in Bangladesh, the direct participation through election for women representatives was provided at the grass root level, the Union Parishad level. The striking features of the election were the overwhelming participation of women voters. About 2, 10,334 candidates, including 45,000 female candidates contested in the election. A total of 13,000 women were elected to women's reserved seat. In local governance this is itself a remarkable initiative for providing adequate representation to women in local level politics (www.lgrd.gov.org).

According to the Local Government Ordinance, elected women Union Parishad members will act as Chairpersons in at least three of 12 standing Committees of the Union Parishad. But in reality it is found that in many of the Union Parishads the Standing Committees have not yet been formed. Moreover, where they are formed, the women members have no responsibilities despite their inclusion in the committee. Though the female Chairpersons and Members have gained enough confidence in their ability to discharge administrative duties, the discriminatory attitude of their male counterparts has been the main stumbling block (www.lgrd.gov.org).

A strong local government is required to support and facilitate women's participation in social and political environment. The success of a local government depends on people's participation. In Bangladesh, women's participation in democratic political institution let alone other areas are abysmally low in contrast to their male counterparts.

As mentioned earlier, increasingly more women are contesting for elections both at the national and the local levels and are getting elected but they have still not yet been fully represented .

1.3. Objectives of the study

The objectives of this study is to identify the nature of women's participation and the emerging scenario of women leadership in local level politics, to find out the factors that work as obstacles in their satisfactory performance as compared to those of male members of the relevant Union Parishads.

This study made an attempt to analyze the nature of political empowerment of women in Bangladesh at grassroots levels as well as of democratic practices. One important objective of the study that has been identified is of the women and their involvement in the decision making institutions in local government.

The main objectives of the study are included:

- Understanding the grassroots level politics where women fit into their lives along with their family responsibilities.
- To examine the role of women Union Parishad members and their experiences in local level politics.
- To identify the constraints faced by women in the electoral process and as representatives in the local government.
- To identify the political empowerment of women representatives in local government through local level politics.
- Focusing on how effectively the local women representatives represent the needs of local people, their views and interests of their constituents.
- To identify the state of local democracy practiced by the local people through their elected representatives.
- To identify the unfair influences of ruling political party which create barriers to the duties of the representatives of the local body.
- Strategies to overcome the barriers and policy recommendations.

Moreover the present study will be meaningful as it is one of the few works that attempt at linking gender issues with local government. The study will further attempt to:

- Accommodate suggestions for the effective performance of both men and women as political leaders in local government by understanding the constraints as well as conducive factors in the democratic process.
- Evaluate the necessity of training or organize different programs

for them.

- Analyze the demand for reservation of seat for women and their involvement in decision making institutions at the local government area.
- Magnitude on the change in attitude and options of the people at large about women representatives of grass root levels from one of the hostility and underestimation to reconciliation and trust.

1.4. Review of Literature

There are a numbers of literatures available where intellectuals and researchers have discussed about the activities, present structure, function and short comings of the Union Parishad of Bangladesh. Based on those findings a brief literature review is being presented.

In the book '*Local Governance in Bangladesh Leading Issues and Major Challenges*' by Kamal Siddiqui, reformation of the local government has been discussed in a wider sense like the tiers of the local government, the relationships between elected officials and their bureaucratic counterparts, role of local government in land management etc. Siddiqui concluded that: "The tax base of the local bodies has to be sufficiently enlarged. The local bodies, in their turn, should make the best use of the tax base within their competence. The management of local bodies should be made more efficient by recruiting qualified persons and organizing skill-oriented training for the existing employees. The terms and conditions of the services should also be made attractive. Some of the tax items, yielding substantial revenue, may be transferred from the central government to the local bodies. Revenue sharing with the central government may be an effective way of increasing the income of the local bodies. The rate of taxes on non-income based items should be increased in proportion to the rate of inflation. In the case of property based taxes, the valuation of property should be revised in proportion to the rate of inflation. So

the same rate of tax should be able to yield more revenue.” (Siddiqui, 2005: pp 227) Different types of participation of the people were discussed in this chapter but no legal bindings were mentioned to enforce this concept in the activities of the Union Parishad. The formation, functions, duties of the Union Parishad Standing committees were described in this book.

The empirical studies about the local government and women’s political participation are few (Nathan, 1998). The most cited is “*Women representative at the union level as change agent of development*” by Qadir and Islam, 1987. It covers 66 Union Parishads and opinions were sought from 66 chairmen, 191 women members and 129 local people. The study of the findings has revealed that nominated women came from the rural elite group and they have a political family background. The system of direct election has now been in practice for 13 years and two elections have been held the first in 1997 and the second was in 2003.

In 1998 a study was done by World Food Programme in Bangladesh name “*Elected Woman Members of UP: A Socio-Economic Study.*” Here the general objective was to understand the power bases of the elected women in Union Parishad and identify constrains of their effective involvement in the Union Parishad. The study was conducted among 360 elected members and data were collected through both surveys and interviews. The study has shown that the elected women have a better socio-economic status than the average rural women.

In the book ‘*Local Government in Bangladesh*’ by Kamal Siddiqui, much important information was found about the evolution of the local government in Bangladesh. The changes made to these institutions in the past in respect of its structure, functions and duties are discussed very well. The issue of inadequate finance, lack of budget provision and personnel(s) in the Union Parishad are mentioned and suggestions given for more active role for the women to play as local government is the most important tier for decentralizing political empowerment.

“*Women in Urban Local Governance: A Bangladesh Case Study.*” In 2003 a case study was done by Nazmunessa Mahtab. Information was gathered from 15 out of 30 women in the reserved seats from all city corporations. The focus here is the power bases of the elected women, their political agenda, participation and problems faced. “*The Direct Participation of Women in Local Level Elections: A Review on City Corporations elections*” is a thesis that was done by Nazneen Islam Khan in 2006 from the University of Dhaka. Information was gathered from 6 city corporations, 50 women elected members from the reserved seats in urban local levels, in the city corporations. The study had focused the power and politics of the elected women in quota system, their political agenda, participation, responsibilities, performance and problems which was being faced by them.

‘*Union Parishad Training Manual*’ published by the National Institute of Local Government (NILG) is a government prescribed detailed guidebook for the Union Parishad to operate. All necessary rules and regulations are added in it to enable the Union Parishad to operate accordingly. In the sixth chapter of this book titled ‘Participatory planning at local level’, it was mentioned that, “Real development has not been achieved because in a top-down method, the demand felt by the people is not reflected and there is no participation and sharing of the people in making plans. In this context importance has been given in local level participatory planning as well as national planning.” (NILG, 2003:225)

Many studies have also been conducted by different NGOs that are active in training members of the local bodies in capacity-building. One major survey, sponsored by Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA), was made in 2002 in order to review some of these training programs for elected members and their effectiveness. The data was based on interviews from structured questionnaires with 231 female Union Parishad members and discussions in focus groups. Qualitative data was collected through extensive surveys and qualitative data through in-depth interviews. This survey showed that the elected

members had received a lot of training from different NGOs but also that they wanted more training (Democracy watch, 2002).

Empowerment is a multi-dimensional process which enables individuals or a group of individuals to realize their full identity and power in all spheres of life. Women have to empower themselves in social, political, economic, cultural and legal spheres. The politics of Bangladesh for women today is much different from that of the past. It has a historical background. Throughout the history of political relationships, women have always been involved in politics, although their participation has been obscured but now-a-days women's political participation is appearing at an ever-increasing rate.

1.5. Theoretical Framework

The study is an attempt to review the participation of women at grassroots level democracy in Bangladesh. The study has examined the role of the government of Bangladesh to ensure gender balance at local level policy planning. In Bangladesh women's participation at local level politics has shown that, although a large number of women are elected as local representatives, obstacles related to women's gender identity refraining them from playing their roles effectively.

As Papanek & Jahan (1979) had stated, gender differences, based on the social construction of biological sex distinctions, are one of the great fault lines of societies that mark the difference among categories of persons that govern the allocation of power, authority and resources.

However their studies did not mention clearly that there is a crucial need for a gender-specific development paradigm into all areas of policy making and planning so that women's needs can be met and their participation ensured. Drude Dahlerup refers to what she calls a 'quota fever'.

Drude Dahlerup and Lenita Freidenvall had argued that the European countries and the 'incremental track', a bottom-top development with gradual increase in women's overall resources and changes in the perceptions of womanhood, has

long been regarded as the model for countries around the world for increasing the number of women in formal politics. But according to them that countries can no longer be a model since the impatience among women worldwide is growing. They want gender balanced political institutions now and not in 75 years from now. Instead they are arguing for the 'fast track'. This is more based on a top-bottom strategy where one implements quotas in countries where women only constitute a small minority in parliament (Dahlerup and Freidenvall, 2003).

Dahlerup and Freidenvall had not identified strongly that women have limited scope to exercise political rights, lack of control over resources and limited choice over decision making.

Historically, men have dominated the world of government and politics everywhere. Parliament like other state structures has been a male domain. Almond said, "Women are likely to participate in politics than men" Women are less represented in national parliaments. Parliaments have been created by men and for men with little regard to women.

Women have been depicted as politically ineffective, unmotivated, and dependent upon the astuteness of men. Almond and Jr. Powell pointed out that universally "Political leaders are drawn disproportionately from upper status occupations and privileged family backgrounds" Milbrath and Goel also noted: The finding that men are more likely to participate in politics than women is one of the most thoroughly substantiated findings in social science.

One of the major reasons which prohibit women from political participation is political traditions and social biases. More than 30 countries have introduced gender quotas for elections to national parliament by constitutional amendment or by electoral law. And in more than 50 countries the major political parties' themselves demand that a certain minimum of the parties' candidates for election to national parliament must be women (Dahlerup and Freidenvall, 2003:2).

Women in all societies also face impediments in reconciling their family and public life. In most contexts, there is a culture that imposes on women a role

different from the one that is set aside for men. Moreover, as Linda Trimble and Jane Arscott pointed out, “electoral glass ceiling” impedes women’s representation in politics. On the other hand, Freeman observes: “empowerment requires group solidarity and resource” Both these routes were fraught with problems for women and neither was readily available.

However, the above mentioned studies seem to have ignored social biases and religious factors that limit women’s active participation in politics around the world. Decentralization has been identified as one of the important prerequisites to ensure gender balance in the development process.

After analyzing of some theory on gender and politics, this can be said that it is an appropriate time for a discussion on women and politics. In spite of the fact that almost all countries in the world have granted women the formal right to vote and stand for elections, the number of women in representative assemblies is still low. What about the real possibilities for women to actually be elected as representatives? There are different types of structural barriers that constrain the ability for women to stand and be elected as representatives and that one way to overcome this is to implement reserved seats.

Women have been depicted by scholars as politically ineffective, unmotivated, and poor in number and dependent up to the judgment of men. However, in Bangladesh, women have been trying to overcome the barriers through their active participation in the local level of policy making.

1.6. Research questions

Throughout the history of political participation, women have always been involved in politics but their participation has been ignored. The study had found some important significance as it is one of the few works that attempt to link gender issues with that of local governance.

The aim of the study is to find out the implications of the use of reserved seats in Bangladesh in terms of women's political empowerment and about the women's experiences. In this study two sets of research questions were used. The first question is about the system of reserved seats itself and how it works in practice and its implications for the grassroots women's capacity to act.

To identify the gender issue and participation of women representatives in grassroots level was another objective. The first question is: Which capacities do local governments have or need to effectively promote gender equality? Does decentralization enhance this capacity?

The second question is about political representation of women for women's political empowerment. How does the experiences of women representatives of Union Parishad work in practice and its implications for the women representations capacity to act? What about the real possibilities for women to actually be elected as representatives? The purpose of this study is to identify the nature of women's participation in local level politics and to find out the factors, which works as obstacles in their satisfactory performance as compared to those of men of the relevant Union Parishad.

1.7. Research Methodology

1.7.1. Selection of the Study Area

This study is an effort to analyze the participation of women representatives at the grassroots level and it depends on two main sources: empirical (primary) and secondary sources data. Primary data has been gathered from 7(seven) districts of 7(seven) division's 7(seven) Union Parishad. Secondary data information has been gathered from local and foreign author's books and articles from print and electronic media.

Seven districts from all the seven divisions of Bangladesh were purposely selected. The selected districts were Mirzapur Upazila of Tangail District from Dhaka Division, Bera Upazila of Pabna District from Rajshahi Division, Kulaura Upazila of Moulbhabazar from Sylhet Division, Brahmanbaria Sadar Upazila of Brhamaanbaria District from Chittagong Division, Bakergong Upazila of Barishal District from Barishal Division, Jessore Sadar Upazila of Jessore District from Khulna Division and Rangpur Sadar Upazila of Rangpur District from Rangpur Division.

To conduct the research 36 (thirty six) Union Parishad's women members were selected from all the seven divisions of Bangladesh. From the seven divisions, seven districts were selected purposively.

A total of 36 (thirty six) Unions were selected randomly from Upazila under seven districts. Since the Upazila have an unequal number of Union Parishads the sample unions and the number of the women members were selected accordingly.

108 (one hundred and eight) women (female local people) were selected as respondents. The respondents were selected randomly from that Union Parishads. Local females were also selected randomly from the sample Union Parishads.

Figure: 1.**Divisions , Districts ,Upazilla and Union Parishad of the study area**

Division	Selected District	No of UPZ of the selected district	Names of the selected Upazila	No of UP of the selected UPZ	Randomly selected Union Parishad	No of Female UP Members	No of Local peoples Female
Dhaka	Tangail	12	Mirzapur	107	6	6	16
Rajshahi	Pabna	9	Bera	73	5	5	16
Sylhet	Moulovi bazar	7	Kulaura	67	5	5	16
Chittagong	Brahman baria	9	Brahmanbaria sadar upazial	96	5	5	15
Barisal	Barisal	10	Bakergonj	86	5	5	15
Khulna	Jessore	8	Jessore sadar	91	5	5	15
Rangpur	Rangpur	8	Rangpur sadar	83	5	5	15
7 Division	7 Districts		7 Upazilla		36 Unions	36 Women members	108 Local Female

Source: Field survey.

1.7.2. Demographic features of Bangladesh

Before focusing the socio economic condition of the research area, it is necessary to look at the demographic features of Bangladesh.

Population: 150,448,000

Growth rate: 2.06 % (2007 EST.)

Birth rate: 29.8 births/1,000 population (2006 est.)

Death rate: 8.27 death/1,000population (2006 est.)

Life expectancy: 62.46 years (2006 est.)

-male: 62.46 years

-female 62.45 years

Fertility rate: 3.11 children born/woman (2006 est.)

Age structure:

0-14 years: 32.9% (male 24,957,997/female 23,533,894)

15-64 years: 63.6% (male 47,862,774/female 45,917,674)

65-over: 3.5% (male 2,731,578/female 2,361,435) (2006est.)

Sex ratio:

At birth: 1.06 male(s)/ female (2006 est.)

Under 15: 1.06 male(s)/ female

15-64 years: 1.04 male(s)/ female

Gender ratio:

At birth: 1.06 male(s)/female

Age 15 and over can read and write: 43.1% of total populations.

Male; 53.9% Female; 46.1% (**)

1.7.3. Methods of data collections

All data have been collected directly from each selected Union Parishad. Structured and open ended questionnaires were made for the interviews. Case study also been conducted for this study. 10 (Ten) field surveyors had been appointed for the survey. Sample survey was conducted with the help of two assistants. With the assistant's help and support the structured interview had been completed within timeframe.

1.7.4. Sources of Data

The data for the study have been collected both from the primary and the secondary sources. Primary data had been collected on intensive fieldwork from the selected areas which mentioned earlier. In the light of the objectives of the study, a standardized schedule is used for interviewing the respondents. Before administering, the schedule had been pre tested among the selected areas.

The data were collected from the secondary sources that are required to fulfill the objectives of the study. The data were collected by the way of consulting various documents such as Gazette notification, Annual reports, Booklets, Articles, books and journals and newspapers from home and abroad.

1.7.5. The sample:

In this study, "gender issue" in Local Governance is an independent variable and the "experiences of women representatives" as the dependent variables. In the 6th chapter, the statistical information and analysis of the data, based on field survey had been discussed thoroughly.

** (2003:Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics (<http://www.bbs.gov.bd/>))

Wikipedia: Demographics of Bangladesh) (World fact book 2006)

Since, this research focuses on the experiences of the women representatives in local government the sample on which the model was tested has been drawn exclusively from among the 36 Union Parishad of 7 districts. Each selected Union is considered here as a sample case. The population of the Union and the size of the Union are not the same. The sample comprises 36 Union Parishad. Data on all variables for all of the Union Parishad are sometimes not the same, where there only 30 Union Parishad for which data on all variables are available.

1.7.6. Data and the Variables

The major objectives of this study are to understand the role of women representatives in local governance. Operationally, then experiences of women representatives in local governance are measured in terms of their socio economic status, back ground of the family, previous experience in politics, members of a family holding a position in politics, the experience before elected and after being elected, people's opinion towards them etc. had been the dependent variables. Gender and local governance viewed in terms of the definition of gender, gender equity, and policy, structure of local governance and functionally inconsistency of the structure, rural development through local governance, people participation had been the independent variables.

Two different sets of data have been used in the study. The first set, to be called the cross sectional data, represent the base years of 2010 elected women representatives. The second set called the longitudinal data set represent two time points; the data at an earlier point in time is seen as influencing the data at a later point. The study will also allow one to understand the long term effects on development in political empowerment of women in local level politics in Bangladesh. It is difficult to find out women's participation role in local government as the research is being done by compact way, but through this process it was able to find the trend of the women towards politics.

1.8. Limitations of the study

The study emphasizes on the gender issues in local government at grassroots levels in Bangladesh. At the very outset of the study, it was intended to find out and to deal with a large sample of 200 respondents. That number of sample size could not be completed because it was impossible to deal with such a large sample. However, the respondents were extremely busy.

It was difficult to manage time for interviewing of some of them. It took sometimes a week or more than one week to take an appointment from them because some women members were out of their place during the period of data collection. Some of them were totally not interested to give interviews as they felt that the result for the improvement of their role in local level politics may not be effective. Some others were reluctant or frustrated.

- The respondents were able to spend 15 to 20 minutes which were not at all sufficient to gain an overall idea about the research topic.
- The respondents of the study area were staying in different places of the districts therefore; the researcher and the associate had to go to the respondent's local offices and thereby had to face a great deal of financial problems. On the other hand that public office was not a suitable place to interview about their socio- economic conditions and other matters.
- The research was intended to analyze the political empowerment of the women members in local government. Therefore their activities were different of some extent which sometimes caused trouble.

- Lot of difficulties was faced during data processing. Although method of interview is very much preferable to social science research, it is also difficult to cross check the information gathered from the respondents.
- In terms of field work, this is significant in highlighting the short comings of both interview and case study methods.
- Trying to conglomerate the techniques of data collections in term of undertaking both interview and case study method. That conglomeration method assisted the study a lot to achieve real significant about what the study wanted to focus really for the research effort.

In order to fulfill of the purpose of the study several limitations have been faced mostly on the time and resources available for the research. The scope of the study is limited to the local level politics in Bangladesh and therefore the study had excluded other urban and national level politics. In the study it was chosen to focus on elected women to the reserved seats even though there are a few women elected to general seats as well as the post of Chairman since these are open for both men and women.

Chapter 2

Local Government in Bangladesh: A Historical Overview

2.1. Local Government in Bangladesh

A viable local government system is fundamental to develop decentralized and meaningful democratic governance in order to achieve economic development and social stability in Bangladesh.

The history in Local Government of Bangladesh goes way back to the British Colonial period. Local self governing Panchayet's (a body serving in an administrative capacity) at village level were setup in 1870 to establish their administrative control at the lowest levels (Khan, N.2003).

Under the Bengal Local Self Government Act in 1885, Union Committees were formed at the village level, Local Boards at the Sub-Divisional level and District Boards at the District level. Both nominated and selected members formed these bodies. Autonomy was not granted to the local bodies. During Pakistan period, the names of local government bodies were changed but their status remained almost the same.

After the independence of Bangladesh the attempt was made to strengthen local government institutions at three levels with provisions for women members. Efforts are forming 'Gram Sarkar' and 'Palli Parishad' at village level in late seventies, did not succeed. In 1982 Upazila Parishad was established as an elected local government body at Thana level but was abolished in 1991(Shamim, I., & Nasreen, M.:1994-95).

In all cases the local government institutions were given the responsibilities for maintenance of law and order, infrastructure development and their maintenance, health, education etc. within their area. They had limited sources of own revenue income and for most of their activities they mainly relied on various grants from

the central government. Zilla Parishad is a local government at District level there is no elected body for their management. Political participation of women in Bangladesh is closely linked with the patriarchal value embedded in the socio-cultural pattern reflecting systematic subordination and inequality of women.

At present, Bangladesh has two tier local government system; Local government in urban areas in 10 City Corporations and 158 Pourashavas and 4,298 *Union Parishad in rural areas. Union Parishad consists of representatives from several villages has remained the most effective administrations body at the local level (Shamim, I., & Nasreen, M.: 2002). Since 1997, quota of three seats or one forth of the totals has been recovered for women in the Union Parishad. This has bought up women's representation from a minimal few to over 20 percent. However, reform suggested for one third female participation at the sub district and district levels remain unimplemented (Ibid: 1994-1995).

2.2 Evolution of Local Government its Legal and Political Background

Local government is the management of local affairs by the locally elected persons. If Government's officers or their henchmen are brought to run the local bodies, there is no sense in retaining them as Local Government Bodies." (Kudrat-E-Elahi Panir vs. Bangladesh 44DLR:AD:1992).

The story of the evolution of the local government system in Bangladesh is in many ways similar to that of India and Pakistan as all three countries share a common history. Local governments in one form or another have been in existence in the Indian subcontinent for centuries.

*A Union is the lowest tier or unit of administration. A Union is a group of village and the formal political institution at this level at the time of the participation of India in 1947 was known as Union board. It was replaced by Union council in 1959. After 1971, the Union council was replaced by Union Parishad (Khan.Nazneen :2006).

Two varieties of self-government institutions, i.e. the headman and *Panchayats* appear to be operational in rural areas since early times. The headman was not an elected official but came from the most dominant family in the village.

His importance was due to two factors: all contacts, be it political or administrative, between the villager and authorities had to be routed through him and he was involved in collection of taxes from the village. The *Panchayat** was an elected body with executive and judicial functions. But often the headman controlled the *Panchayat* (Siddiqui 1992:15). During the Mughal rule of India, the *Panchayat* system disappeared altogether.

Mughal contribution to the development of urban local government was remarkable as *Mughals* gave considerable importance to towns. Each town included a number of wards or *Mohallas*. A *Mir Mahalla* was appointed to act as a spokesman for each *Mahalla*. The *Kotwal*, or Chief Executive Officer of the town, wielded wide-ranging powers including magisterial, police, fiscal and municipal power. He was assisted in performing his duties by two officials: a *Kazi* who was a judicial officer and a *Mahatasib* who was assigned to prevent illegal practices, (Siddiqui 1992: 17-18).

The *Mughal* system with all its novelties lacked mechanisms for participation by the citizens. It was nothing more than a top-down hierarchical administrative system that was intended to be an extension of the central authority into the local areas.

*The *Panchayat* is a South Asian political system mainly in India, Pakistan, Bangladesh and Nepal. It is the oldest system of local government in the Indian subcontinent. The word "panchayat" literally means "assembly" (*ayat*) of five (*panch*) wise and respected elders chosen and accepted by the local community. However, there are different forms of assemblies. Traditionally, these assemblies settled disputes between individuals and villages (Wikipedia).

During almost two hundred years of British rule (1765-1947) over the Indian subcontinent, a number of experiments were made with the local government system. All the experiments were intended to devise a system that would serve their imperial interest.

The major objective of the British in India was twofold: maximization of land revenue collection and maintenance of law and order. Naturally, the British as an imperial power had little understanding of and interest in indigenous local self-governing institutions.

Though in 1870 the Village *Chowkidari* Act in Bengal established union *Panchayats* to collect tax to maintain *Chowkidars* (village police), Lord Ripon's Resolution on local self-government laid the foundation of local self-government in rural India. This resolution of May 18 1882 was important for two reasons: it set out general principles for development of local institutions in the future and provided the rationale behind functions of local bodies. The Lord Ripon resolution was passed in 1885 as the Bengal Local Self-Government Act III of 1885.

In the arena of urban local government, British policy resulted in setting-up a municipal administration in the Presidencies and giving responsibilities to municipal committees for a number of civic amenities. But until the 1870s, officials or their designated representatives ran urban local government bodies.

Gradually Municipalities became representative bodies with the promulgation of a number of acts between 1870 and 1947. These acts, among other things, introduced election as a mode of choosing one's representative and subsequently extended its coverage. But Chairmen and Vice Chairmen of the Municipalities continued to be elected indirectly by the popularly elected commissioners.

One of the acts, the Bengal Municipal Act of 1932, strengthened the powers of Municipalities in levying rates and taxes and in the utilization of funds (Siddiqui 1994:47). But the same act provided considerable powers, to the government and

local officials to inspect supervise and control Municipalities and negated the powers of taxation of local level bodies to a large degree.

Union boards consisted of two-thirds elected members while the rest were nominated. The Chairman was elected among members of the union boards. The boards were given a number of specific responsibilities including the authority to levy taxes. By the end of the 1920s district boards were functioning under the stewardship of non-official chairmen.

During the formative years of Pakistan's existence as an independent nation until 1971, the provincial government of East Pakistan initiated some important changes. General Ayub Khan, who seized power in 1958, introduced a system of local government known as *Basic Democracy but the concept of Basic Democracy a four-tier system, lacked novelty and innovation.

It bore a clear resemblance of two layers, the union councils and municipal committees of the British days (Khan 1997). Since Independence in 1971, a number of attempts have been made to tinker with the local government system in Bangladesh. Changes have been made from time to time in terms of the nomenclature of tiers of local government, but almost nothing was done to strengthen local governments. Therefore, the structure of the local government system has remained more or less unchanged.

Immediately after Independence in 1971, the name of the Union Council was changed to Union *Panchayat* and an administrator was appointed to manage the affairs of the *Panchayat*. The name of *Thana* Council was changed to *Thana* Development Committee while the District Council was named *Zila* Board or District Board.

*The Basic Democracies Order, 1959 covered both urban and rural local government. It provided for four tiers of local government: 1. Union Council 2. Thana Council 3. District Council 4. Divisional Council, (Siddiqui, Kamal: 1995).

Again in 1973, Union *Panchayat's* name reverted to Union *Parishad*. A more significant change in the local government system was brought about in 1976 through the Local Government Ordinance. This ordinance provided for a Union Parishad for a Union, a Thana Parishad for a Thana and a Zila Parishad for a District.

The Union Parishad comprised one elected Chairman and 9 elected members, two nominated women members and two peasant representative members. The *Thana Parishad* consisted of the Sub-Divisional Officer being the ex-officio Chairman, the Circle Officer and a Union Parishad Chairman. The Zila (District) *Parishad* was to consist of elected members, official members and women members whose numbers were determined by the government. Its term of office was five years. However, no elections were held and government officials ran the Parishad.

In 1980, as a result of an amendment of the Local Government Ordinance, the *Swanirvar Gram Sarker* (self-reliant village government) was introduced at the village level, but was abolished by a Martial Law Order in July 1982. A major change was initiated in the local government system through the introduction of the Local Government (*Upazila Parishad* and *Upazila Administration Reorganization*) Ordinance in 1982. This Ordinance was followed by the Local Government (Union *Parishad*) Ordinance in 1983, the Local Government (*Zila Parishad*) Act in 1988 and the three Hill Districts Acts and *Palli Act* in 1989. The *Upazila Parishad* Ordinance (1982) was particularly significant as this was supposed to help implementation of the decentralization programme of the government.

In the *Upazila* System (as it came to be known), the (directly) elected Chairman would have the principal authority in running the affairs of the *Upazila*, his tenure being five years. The *Upazila Nirbahi* Officer would be subservient to the Chairman. After nine years of reasonably effective implementation, the

Government of the Bangladesh Nationalist Party, who came to power through a fair election, abolished the *Upazila* system in 1991.

During its five-year tenure, the government could not provide an alternative democratic form of local government. When after another free and fair election in 1996 the Bangladesh Awami League came to power, they constituted a Local Government Commission and came up with a Report on Local Government Institutions Strengthening in May 1997. The Commission has recommended a four-tier local government structure including *Gram/Palli (Village) Parishad*, *Union Parishad*, *Thana/Upazila Parishad* and *Zila (District) Parishad*.

All these tiers are concerned with rural/regional administration, while urban local governments remain outside the Commission's purview. The two major tiers of urban local government's, *Pourashava* (for smaller Municipalities) and City Corporation (for four of the largest cities) are in order.

2.3. History of Local Government in Bangladesh

Since 1971 there have been three major attempts by successive governments to strengthen local government in Bangladesh. The first experiment began in 1972 and ended in 1975. Bangladesh was divided into 61 districts. Each district was to be headed by a governor. The purpose was to bring about political control over district administration. However this did not have much impact because the government was toppled by a military coup shortly after the system was announced.

During the second experiment which began in 1976, local government was to consist of Zila Thana and Union Parishads for the rural areas and Pourashavas for the urban areas. The local government system was to be based on the concepts of Gram (village) Sarker and Swanirver (self reliance) to strengthen local government, provide more autonomy, and help mobilize people at the village level for development works. Gram Sarkers were to be organized around

increasing food production, expanding mass literacy, promoting population control/family planning activities and maintaining law and order.

However, the system of elections to the local bodies was never implemented, so local government was dominated by the bureaucracy. In 1981 a change in the form of the Government did not allow those systems of local government to be fully implemented. A third experiment began in 1982. This upgraded the 464 Thanas of Bangladesh into Upazilas, or sub-district units (Siddiqui, Kamal: 1995).

The Upazilas were to become the center of all development activities, policy planning and implementation. Each Upazila had an elected council, with a separate staff led by an Upazila chief executive officer T.N. O(Thana Nirbahi Officer) functioning as its secretariat. For strengthening local government to be brought together, for the first time, two conflicting elements—popular participation and merit-based administrative units implementing development plans. Local government units were also maintained at the Union level, albeit with reduced powers. Pourashavas in the urban areas were also maintained.

The Government of Bangladesh also decided to abolish the Upazila (Thanas) system in order to ensure that people's participation in decision making was concentrated at the point of primary contact, namely new Union Parishad (Siddiqui, Kamal.1995) A Union is the lowest tier or unit of administration. An Union is a group of village and the formal political institution at this level at the time of the participation of India in 1947 was known as Union board. It was replaced by Union council in 1959. After 1971, the Union council was replaced by Union Parishad.

The different constituent villages of a Union have representations in the Union Parishad. All the three types of Political institution at the Union level (Union Board, Union council and Union Parishad) are elected bodies, though there were differences in their constitution and functions. These were the formally constitute political units at the lowest level of rural Bangladesh.

The Union Parishad has had the longest and most continues existence of the various tiers of local government- although its name has occasionally changed and also its power, authority and responsibilities have been reduced or augmented by successive governments. Between 1992 and 1996, the government of Bangladesh focused on how to meet the requirements of Article 11 of the Bangladesh Constitution, which provides that the local government bodies should be composed of elected persons, vested with necessary power and able to impose taxes for local purposes.

As an introductory strategy, the first democratically elected government after the change of regime in 1990, constituted a high powered 17 member Local Government Structure Review Commission, to suggest and recommend an effective system of local government. In the process of reviewing and implementing selected recommendations of the Commission, the Government of Bangladesh, determined that the focal point of local government in Bangladesh should be the Union Parishad (Union Council).

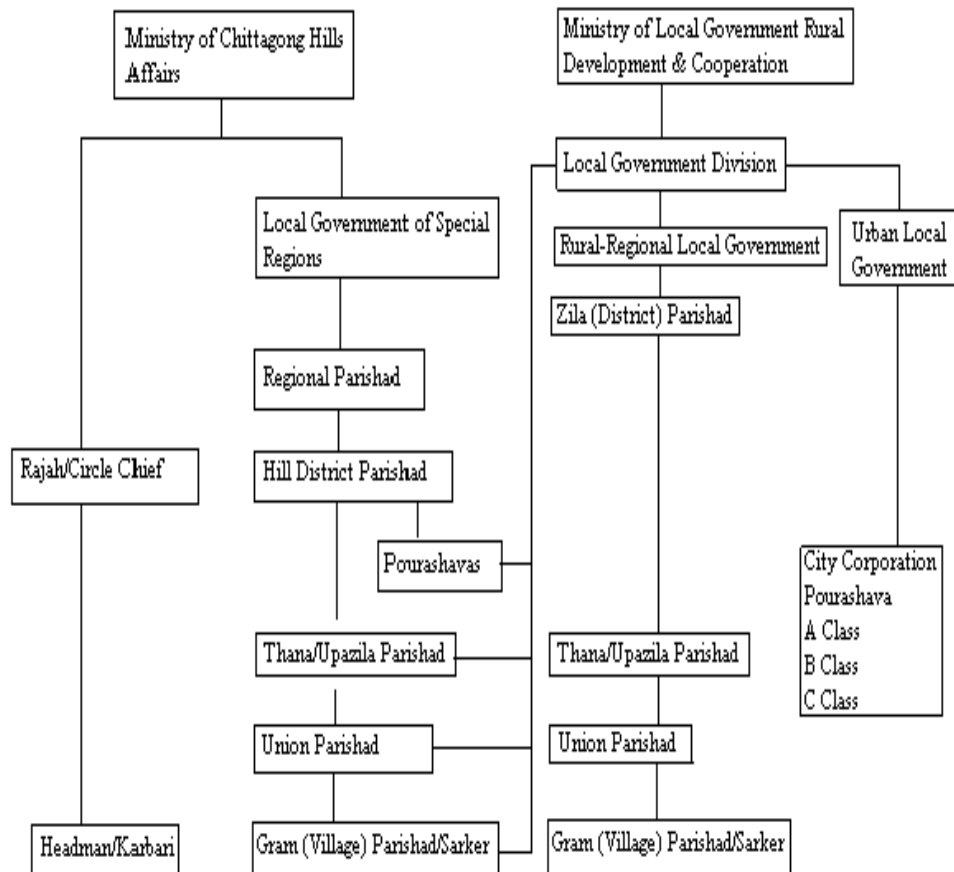
The history of local government in Bangladesh shows that local bodies have been established at different levels in different periods. Laws /Ordinances have been made to form local bodies at village, Thana, District and Divisional level from time to time. Since inception the local government institutions have undergone frequent changes in their functions and responsibilities.

The present structure of local government in Bangladesh had its origin in British colonial period. The first attempt at establishing local government institution was made during the latter part of the nineteenth century. The structure, functions and financial management of local government institutions have undergone many changes from the British colonial period to the present day.

It is recorded in history that the villages were self reliant before the colonial rule. Every village had its own community based organization known as Panchayet. All the adult members of the village society constituted it. Apart from taking

decisions in social matters adjudication in disputes and maintenance of law and order were among its responsibilities. The Panchayet used to mobilize resources for the discharge of their traditional functions. The Panchayet evolved naturally out of the social needs and was based on public opinion. There was no legal basis or authority behind them.

Figure: 2. Local government system in Bangladesh



Source: Tofael Ahmed, 2002

During the British rule the Bengal village Chowkidari Act was passed in 1870 with administrative, economic and political objectives. This paved the way for setting up local government body under the law. Under this Act several villages were organized into a Union and Chowkidari Panchayet, was set up in each Union . The Chowkidari Panchayet had five members who were appointed by the government for three years .The Panchayets were responsible for appointment of Chowkidars (village police) for maintenance of law and order. The village police were paid through collection of Chowkidari tax from the villagers.

Under the Chowkidari system members were considered as government functionaries rather than representative of the villagers. The Panchayets were used mainly to assist the administration in maintaining law and order and for collection of tax. They had no role and function in respect of development activities. For these reasons the need for local government bodies with greater responsibility was felt replacing the Chowkidari Panchayet. A major step in this direction was marked by the passing of the *Bengal Local Self Government Act* in 1885. Under these Act, Union Committees, Local Government Boards and District Boards were set up respectively.

The Bengal Village Self- Government Act of 1919 abolished Chowkidari Panchayet and Union Committee and in their place set up Union Board and District Board. Two third of the members of Union Board were elected and one third nominated. The system of nomination was abolished in 1946. The main function of Union Board was maintenance of law and order, roads and bridges, provision of health care, charitable dispensaries and primary school, water supply and assistance to the District Board. The Union Board could dispose of minor criminal cases and was given the authority to levy Union rate.

During Pakistan period under the Basic Democracy Order of 1959 local government bodies were set up at four tires viz. Union Council at Union level, Thana Council at Thana level, District Council at District level and Divisional

Council at Divisional level. On an average a Union comprised an area with 10,000 inhabitants and the Union Council was constituted with 10 to 15 members, Two third of the members were elected by voters and one third was nominated by the government. The system of nomination was abolished after the introduction of the constitution. The members used to elect a chairman and one vice chairman among them.

In addition to the maintenance of law and order of their area, the Union Council was given 37 functions among which agriculture development, water supply and education, communications, and social welfare were included. The Union Council was also given the authority to set up conciliation court and the members were given judicial power under the Muslim Family and Marriage Ordinance of 1961. Under the Basic Democracies Ordinance, 1959 the Union Council was authorized to impose taxes on property and other sources to build its own fund in addition to existing Chowkidari fund. Government grant was given for rural works programme and for constitution of Union Parishad office.

The Thana Council was constituted with public representatives and government functionaries. All the Union Council chairmen in a Thana became the representative members while the Sub Divisional Officer and all Thana level officials were the official members of Thana Council.

The Sub Divisional Officer and the Circle Officer (Development) were the Chairman and Vice Chairman of the Thana Council respectively. The Thana Council was given the responsibility for the following: (i) Coordination of all development activities within the Thana : (2) formulation of development plan: (3) implementation of development project : (4) assisting Union Councils in their activities: (5) promotion of family planning activities: (6) environment related activities & (7) arrangement of training for Chairman and members of Union Councils.

The main function of the Thana Council was the coordination of the activities of Union and Thana Committees within its jurisdiction. The Thana Council did not have any financial power to impose and collect taxes and all its expenses were borne by the government. District Council was constituted with official members and nominated members, half of the members of District Council were elected by the Chairman of Union Parishad and town Committees in the district. The government appointed the remaining half. The Deputy Commissioner of the District became the ex-officio chairman of the District council.

The Divisional Council was constituted with government and private members, The Divisional Commissioner served as its chairman. Apart from coordinating the activities of the local government bodies within the Division it had no other fixed responsibility. The present local government system in Bangladesh had its origin in British colonial period.

The self-governing local Panchayets called 'Little Republic' by some that functioned at village level gradually became weak and disappeared soon after the colonial rulers established their authority over the length and breadth of the country. Local government institution was introduced by the colonial rulers at village level in Bengal in 1870 to further their administrative control and on economic and political considerations.

In 1885 Union Committees were formed at the village level, Local Boards at the Sub-Divisional level and District Boards at the District level under the Bengal Local Self Government Act. The members of these bodies were both nominated and elected. The local bodies had no autonomy, though the names of local government bodies were changed during Pakistan period their status remained almost the same with very little increase in autonomy.

After Bangladesh became independent decision was taken to strengthen local government institutions at three levels and to make provision for women

members. In 1982 Upazila Parishad was established as an elected local government body at Thana level. Earlier efforts at forming Gram Sarkar and Palli Parishad at village level did not succeed. The Upazila system introduced in 1982 was abolished in 1991. Since inception the local government institutions were given the responsibilities for maintenance of law and order infrastructures development and their maintenance, health, education etc. within their area.

Though they had sources of own, revenue income foremost of their activities they mainly relied on various grants from the government. At present only Union Parishad in an elected local government body. There is no elected body at the Thana level and though Zilla Parishad is a local government at District level there are no elected bodies for their management. (www.lgd.org.bd)

2.4. Local Government: Finance

Local bodies in Bangladesh are in constant shortage of funds. The sources of their income are generally taxes, rates, fees and charges levied by the local body as well as rents and profits accruing from properties of the local body and sums received through its services.

Contribution from individuals and institutions, government grants, profits from investments, receipts accruing from the trusts placed with the local bodies, loans raised by the local body and proceeds from such services are another source of income governments may direct to be placed at the disposal of a local body. Holding taxes is the most important source of own income of local bodies. Loans and voluntary contributions are rare. Non-tax revenues are of two kinds: fees and tolls and rents and profits on properties of the local bodies.

Urban local bodies rise between 55-75 per cent of the revenue from their own source while a significant proportion comes from government grants. Nowadays, foreign or international project funds also contribute a significant share of a corporation's budget. (Bangladesh country briefing paper: ADB)

2.5. Local Government Ordinance(s) in Bangladesh

- Bangladesh President's Order No. 7 of 1972 changed the name of Union Parishad to Union Panchayat. President's Order No. 22 of 1973 renamed it as union Parishad.
- Paurashava Act 1973, Amendment in 1977.
- The Local Government Ordinance, 1976 created Gram Sabha, later named Gram Sarkar.
- The Local Government (Thana Parishad and Thana Administration Reorganization) Ordinance, 1982 introduced Upazila system with elected chairman.
- The Local Government (Union Parishad) Ordinance, 1983 (First Amendment 1993; Second Amendment 1997 - UPs sub-divided into 9 wards).
- The Local Government (Upazila Parishad and Upazila Administration Reorganization (Repeal) Ordinance, 1991 .
- Creation of the Thana Development Coordination Committee, 1992 with MPs as advisors.
- The Gram Parishad Act, 1997. High Court embargo.
- The Upazila Parishad Act, 1998, not yet implemented. .
(www.lgd.org.bd)

A stable local government system can initiate and strengthen local democratic process by constituting locally elected representative bodies for upholding democratic values and practicing democratic process and procedures and carry out development activities. Adequately empowered and accountable local government institutions are essential vehicles for ensuring formulation and implementation for good governance.

Chapter 3

Gender and Local Governance: Bangladesh perspective

In recent times, there has been a common realization in Bangladesh that a strong and effective local government is one of the elemental preconditions for ensuring good governance. It is generally agreed by every conscious people that an empowered local government is the strong foundation on which the success of any democratic nation rests.

In Bangladesh, women are identified with domestic activities while politics is viewed as a male dominated public activity, which is actually masculine in nature. However, women have been more politically stable in the last two decades. The government of Bangladesh has amended its laws for fair representation of gender in the local government to ensure good governance.

Notwithstanding the fact that constitutional support and legislative measures are necessary for bringing out social change, this however, cannot be achieved single handedly. Conscientious effort is needed to strengthen and consolidated women of Bangladesh for significant empowerment.

The essence of good governance lies on one hand, the inclusion of local level planning in the national government and on the other hand, the success of a local government depends on people's participation. It is the grassroots level people who could contribute significantly to the governance of their communities.

3.1. Objectives of the Gender analysis of this study

The objectives of the gender analysis of the study are as follows:

- To encourage the Union Parishad to commit itself to creating an enabling environment within the Union Parishad to promote equal rights and opportunities.

- To help build a coordinated plan for reducing gender discrimination within the Union Parishad in local government.

3.2. Gender

The term ‘gender’ has no commonly accepted Bangla equivalent. There are also many, particularly in the development sector, who simply favor writing the word ‘gender’ using Bangle characters. Any way the intended meaning of the term ‘gender’(or its different Bangla equivalents) is of course, the social condition of being male or female.

Upon reflection, one would realize that the differences that we observe in the society between men and women in terms of their conditions and positions are determined not by nature, but by society itself. Gender roles and relationships vary across time and from society to society, but gender and inequality have usually been closely related, and men typically claim more property, prestige and power.

The societies of Western Europe and the United States, like most, have a strong tradition of patriarchy, or male dominance, throughout the social structure. In a patriarchal society, men have more control over the economy and more access to leadership roles in religion, politics, and other institutions. In these societies, women possess many characteristics of a minority group namely, a pattern of disadvantage based on group membership marked by a physical stigma (Joseph F.Healey: Christopher: 2005).

Thus women could be, and in many ways should be, treated as a separate minority group (UNDP: 1994) has developed its *GRDI and its **GEM based on proportions of seats in parliament, of administrative and managerial jobs, of professional and technical jobs, and of earned income attributable to woman.

GRDI** (Gender-related Development Index, which is based on the expectation of life at birth, education and income) *GEM** (Gender Empowerment Measure, which is based on socio economic and political situation.)

These measures form a useful first step in mapping degrees of gender inequality between countries, but ignore key issues such as the domestic division of labor and unpaid work (Presser and Sen, 2000:162-163).

3.3. Governance

The definition of “governance” is one of divergence of opinions and propositions. It has captured academia’s minds through multi dimensional perspective. The researchers have tended to look at it as a process following which a positive and targeted objective can be achieved. Governance has been defined as ‘the act or manner of governing, of exercising control or authority over the action of subjects and system of regulations (London-Mills and Serageldin, 1991:304). Others have perceived it as the reflection on the “judgment on the quality of government. (Jahan, Syeda Rownak: 1992)

3.4. Good Governance

The World Bank defines governance as “the manner in which the power is exercised in the management of country’s economic and social resources for development.” UNDP defines governance as “the exercise of power or authority political, economic, administrative or otherwise to manage a country’s resources and affairs. It comprises the mechanism, processes and institutions, through which citizens and groups articulate their interests, exercise their legal rights and mediate their differences”(Hasan, Manzoor: 2010).

Actually good governance notified in a society, are as follows.

1. Accountability.
2. People’s participation.
3. Transparency.
4. Openness.
5. Responsiveness.
6. Responsibility.
7. Consensus.
8. Rule of law.
9. Equity.
10. Inclusiveness.
11. Effectiveness.

The quality of good governance in any society would eventually depend on the intensity of interface between the ‘demand’ of citizens entitlements and the supply of institutions’ responsiveness. It is also be noted that good governance is achieved and optimized if citizens’ voice is heard and heeded.

3.5. Major ingredients of good governance:

1. Good governance is one that ensures the safety, security, honour and dignity of the poor specially women.
2. Good governance to them is a process which ensures better, just and equitable and human distribution of food aids like *VGD, **VGF and Test relief.
3. A system that provides more credits and investment to generate rural employment.
4. Good governance should mean better maintenance of law and order to ensure peace and safety of the rural people specially women.
5. More opportunity for training and skill development for the rural people particularly women and disadvantaged groups.
6. More scope to participate in community activities in community activities and in the affairs of the Union Parishad.
7. Assurance of better health and educational support for the poor (Momen, Mobasser: 2003).

VGF: Vulnerable Groups Feeding, **** VGD:** Vulnerable Groups Development and **Test relief** is provided during digesterous situation.

In addition they also identified some features of that good governance as:

1. Free from corruption.
2. Officials of the Government are kind and understanding.
3. When the public resources are used appropriately and in consultation with rural people.

Nevertheless it were identified that some board features of Governance. Some of these include:

1. Promotion of democracy and open pluralistic societies with free and fair electoral process.
2. Strengthening of transparent, accountable, efficient and effective National and Local government.
3. Promotion of respect for human right.
4. Reinforcement of law including fair and accessible legal and judicial system.
5. Promotion of independent media and the dissemination of information.
6. Anti-corruption initiatives and efforts to reduce excessive non-developmental expenditure. (Momen, Mobbaser:2003)

Figure: 3. Comparative aspects of priorities of Good Governance

Conceptual framework Donor agencies (Four pillars)	Governance-what community perceives as priority
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Accountability b. Transparency c. Predictability d. Participation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Better management of the economy by: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Maintaining the price level of essential goods within the reach of the poor and common people. ➤ Creating more employment in public sector. ➤ Enhanced pro-poor and rural based investment. ➤ Easy access to credit and investment opportunities. b. Opportunity/opening scope for secured earning and employment. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Assurance of basic needs. Creation and extension of services and support for basic needs like health, education and food security. • Better law and order. • Physical and social security. • Developing honest leadership. • Elimination of corruption. • Guarantee of political stability. • Access to cheaper credit for agriculture and other activities. • Assured and easy access to governmental services. • Scope for participation in managing community affairs.

Source: (Nasreen, M. & Shamim, I.2002)

3.6. Local Government

Local government is basically an organized social entity with a feeling of oneness. By definition, local government means an intra-sovereign governmental unit within the sovereign state dealing mainly with local affairs, administered by local authorities and subordinate to the state government (Jahan, 1997:92). In political terms, it is concerned with the governance of a specific local area, constituting a political sub-division of a nation, state or other major political unit. In the performance of its functions, it acts as the agent of the state. In other words, the local government is an integral part of the political mechanism for governance in a country. Then, as body corporate with juristic person, it represents a legal concept (Muttalib and Khan, 1983:2).

3.7. Women

A woman is an adult female human being, as contrasted to men, an adult male, and a girl, a female child. The term women (irregular plural: women) is used to indicate biological sex distinctions, cultural gender role distinctions, or both (Wikipedia, 2005:1) In Bangladesh, women constitute about half of the total population of the country.

Apart from the household activities, they are contributing substantially to the national economy. Bangladesh is one of the first developing countries to establish a Ministry of Women's Affairs in 1978, three years after the first World Conference on Women in Mexico.

The government has already prepared a National Policy for Advancement of Women and made some noteworthy progress in implementing the National Action Plan, prepared in response to the Beijing platform for action (Mahtab, Nazmunezza. (2003).

Inspite of these achievements, the majority of women in Bangladesh have yet to be empowered to participate actively in the social, cultural, economic and political life of the country. Gender discrimination is widespread in all spheres and at all levels albeit, the Constitution of Bangladesh(Article 27, 28(1), 28(2), 28(3) and 65(3) guarantees equal rights to all citizens clearly incorporated provisions for equal status of women.(Rahman, Md. Mostafizur & Ara, Fardaus:2006).

3.8. Empowerment

Empowerment means giving power & authority. So by women empowerment we mean giving power & authority to the women. The process of empowerment requires transformation of structures of sub ordinance, control over material and intellectual resources, gaining decisions, making authority and reduction of gender inequality. Vanessa Griffin (1987:117-18) identifies, some components to illustrate what the term empowerment indicates:

- Having control or gaining further control;
- Having a say and being listened to;
- Being able to define and create from women's perspective;
- Being able to influence social choices and decision affecting the whole society;
- Being recognized and respected as equal citizens in human beings with a contribution to make.

Empowerment means a practice to establish control over resources to obtain ability and opportunity to participate in decision-making process and its implementation.

3.9. Women and their socio economic condition in the study area

In Bangladesh, women comprise nearly half of the total population. But the status of women is much lower than that of men in every field of life. Women are here identified with domestic life while politics is viewed as a male dominated public activity that is typically masculine in nature.

If local government is to meet the needs of both women and men, it must build on the experiences of both men and women through an equal representation at all levels and in all fields of decision making, covering the wide range of responsibilities of local government. Bangladesh has long history of women's operation, inequality and patriarchy.

3.10. Women and Politics

In recent times, there has been a common realization that a well-built and successful local government is one of the elemental preconditions for ensuring good governance. It is commonly agreed by every conscious people that an effective local government is the strong foundation on which the success of any democratic nation rests.

In Bangladesh, women are identified with domestic activities while politics is viewed as a male dominated public activity, which is actually masculine in nature. However, women have been more politically stable in the last two decades.

The government of Bangladesh has amended its laws for fair representation of gender in the local government to ensure good governance. Notwithstanding the fact that constitutional support and legislative measures are necessary for bringing out social change, this however, cannot be achieved single handedly. Conscientious effort is needed to strengthen and consolidated women of Bangladesh for significant empowerment.

The question is whether an intervention like the constitutional amendment is able to ensure women's empowerment or whether the patriarchal structures,

manifested in the household and the state, will continue to dominate (Shamim, I and Nasreen, M. (2002). Through women constitutes half of the total population of Bangladesh, their participation in both electoral and representative politics are insignificant.

Women have been more politically stable in the last two decades. A quota has been ensured women's presence in the local government and National Parliament. Among women politicians, the older group entered politics through social works, while some among them and the new generation have emerged from student politics.

Reasons for women participation in Local Government in Bangladesh:

- Local government being easier for women to fit into their lives along with family responsibilities and employment.
- Local government is being more accessible as there is more positions available and less competition for places than in central legislature.
- Reserved seats for women on local bodies.
- More acceptances and involvement of women in local government.

Bangladesh government has signed the United Nations Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), which guarantees political and civil rights for women. These guarantees have led to national policies and programs being established which aim to work for change in women's lives. The local government of Bangladesh is required to consult and to ensure participation although this is not always gender specific.

All elected governments in Bangladesh, since its independence, felt the need to have a viable local government for ensuring effective governance as a result; we have seen decentralization as an important policy agenda of elected government. Thus, reforming local government is not a new phenomenon in Bangladesh. The

successive local government reform programs had been handed down to the sovereign state of Bangladesh from Pakistan as a post colonial extension.

However, the necessity to reform the existing structure of local government by various successive governments in Bangladesh indicates their failure to create effective institutional arrangement for enhancing local democracy and delivering development programs (Shamim, I and Nasreen, M: 2002).

In Bangladesh, there have been five major attempts to reform local government under five different governments. The objective of all, at least at the level of rhetoric, was to introduce participatory and accountable local government through decentralization of functions and power to locally elected institutions.

All these governments also recognized the relevance and importance of the role of decentralized local institutions in planning and implementing need based development projects for poverty alleviation and reduction of socio economic inequality. However, the objectives were not realized and the governments failed to keep their commitment towards grassroots democracy and to develop power to the people at lower levels to manage their own affairs. Consequently, the primary goal of poverty reduction, economic equity and gender balance remained unfulfilled (Khan, Z. Rahman :1998).

On the other hand, women are not receiving adequate benefits from years of planning and development because of their inadequate representation on participation and non involvement in the preparation and execution of plans for their economic development and social justice through decentralized institute.

In 1997, the Union Parishad Ordinance of 1983 was amended and through this Amendment, for the first time, provision was made for direct election for the female members to three reserved seats for women in the Union Parishad (*The Local Government Union Parishad Amendment Act, 1997*). Much enthusiasm has been observed among the women centering Union Parishad election. The number of voters was 50 million and most striking feature of the election was the overwhelming participation of women voters. About 2, 10,334 candidates

including 45,000 female candidates contested the Union Parishad election. A total of 13,000 women candidates were elected in the election to represent women's reserved seats (Shamim, I and Nasreen, M. (2002).

Bangladesh has enforced the law for better governance and fair representation of gender in the Local government. The study was intended to find out the interlink among gender issues in local government and the performance of the women representatives of the local government.

3.11. Social and cultural issues for women in Bangladesh

Women are underrepresented in local government in Bangladesh. However, recent years have witnessed an increasing awareness of women's productive roles, mobility, and their contribution to development. Ever since the first world conference on Women in Mexico 1975, gender issues have increasingly become a predominant theme of the worldwide development discourse.

3.12. Family

By custom, a patriarchal social system exists in Bangladesh. The life of women in Bangladesh is therefore dominated by this social system. Such a system upholds a rigid division of labor that controls women's mobility, roles and responsibility, and sexuality. Traditionally, a woman in Bangladesh derives her status from her family. Her role includes the maintenance of her family as a social institution and as an economic entity. Most importantly, through child bearing and child rearing, she ensures the existence of succeeding generations. Increasingly, however, women's roles, responsibility and mobility are changing due to persistent poverty and the gradual erosion of the familial umbrella of support.

3.13. Patriarchy

The traditional patriarchal society of Bangladesh is based on class and gender divisions. Class mobility allows movement between rich and poor, but the division of social space and the difference in behavioral norms between men and

women are rigidly maintained. The family, which constitutes the basic unit of social control, sets the norm for male and female roles.

Within this system, the father or in his absence, the next male kin is the head of the household. As a result, both decision making powers and economic control are vested in hands of men. Furthermore, the family operates through a clearly defined to inherit their fathers property in favor of brothers or in the event of inheriting property, pass control to their husbands or sons. In both cases, the man gives protection to the woman in return for control over her property, thus directly reinforcing a patriarchal tradition.

3.14. Gender discrimination

Over time, Bangladesh's patrilineal system has given high value to sons as potential provider's and perpetrators of family names. They receive preferential treatment and access to education, better nutrition and health care. Women on the other hand are generally viewed in their reproductive roles and are given a subsidiary status as economic dependents.

Society has dictated that daughters are temporary member of their natal homes. Since they are perceived as non productive members of the family, daughters have little access to education, especially in poor families. Scarce resources are invested in the sons as potential providers. Girl's enrollment at the primary level education has increased remarkably from around 50-80 percent between the 1980s and 1996. (Women in Bangladesh: Country Briefing Paper-ADB.org. Pg 1-17 www.web.worldbank.org).

The dropout rate of girls is much higher than boys from the secondary level onwards. Parents are reluctant to send daughters to school because they fear for the daughter's safety, as chastity and the reputation of unmarried girls are crucial factors that determine her value in the eyes of her potential husband and in laws. Girls are viewed as potential mothers and homemakers, thus priority is given to their training in domestic chores rather than to their right to an education.

3.15. Violence against women in Bangladesh

Rape, assault, trafficking, death due to dowry, etc. are common features of Bangladeshi society. The four broad categories of violence against women in Bangladesh are domestic violence, violence at the work place, trafficking in women and forces prostitution and sexual abuse. The present form and nature of trafficking can be explained by poverty and social disintegration. The spread of wage employment or bonded labor such as domestic labor, women working in the sex trade (mail-order brides), in entertainment (e.g. camel jockeys), child abuse, and organ trading can be identified as demand factors.

Supply factors are the economic situation and social vulnerability and frequent natural disasters. Bangladesh's location facilitates trafficking of women as it is loosely patrolled. Common means of trafficking are kidnapping, abduction, marital migration, selling of small children by parents, guardians and close relatives, selling of wives by their husbands and deceiving migrant workers. Recently, violence against women has reached another dimension with the rise in the number of trials through the Fatwa (religious judgment) in rural areas. Village elders are usually from a **Shalish* or tribunal to settle some local disputes.

***Shalish** social system for informal adjudication of petty disputes both civil and criminal, by local notables, such as *matbars* (leaders) or *shalishkars* (adjudicators). Two types of adjudication have been in place in rural Bangladesh from days immemorial, These were shalish and the extension of the state's judicial arm into the rural areas through specific legislation. Normally, the process of a particular shalish starts with interrogating the disputants to ascertain the facts. Then the shalishkars offer their solution and seek the opinions of the disputants before; finally, they come to a decision. Although this procedure is found to be uniform throughout the country, there are local variations depending on local customs and tradition. Shalish is supposed to lead to a conciliation between the contesting parties. But in the context of Bangladesh's rural social structure, shalish seems to have more often than not been used as an appendage of the existing rural power structure, sometimes, of religious bigotry. (National Encyclopedia of Bangladesh)

This tradition custom of excluding women in the rural shalish can be manipulated by the local Mullah (religious leaders) and the social elite to find women guilty of extramarital sexual affairs and other acts. Punishments are meted out in contravention to the existing penal code. Some women were flogged publicly and a few among them have committed suicide.

Prompt protest and local actions by women's organizations, NGO's and human right groups forced local administrators to take legal measures against the perpetrators.

3.16. Women and Electoral Process

Although Bangladeshi women do not hold key positions during the electoral process, they render significant contributions during election campaigns by taking part in organizing public meetings, processions, and rallies. Women leaders and party workers engage in the task of mobilizing and canvassing votes, particularly women, for their party candidates.

By making special arrangements such as separate election booths for women and female presiding as polling officers and turn out rate of women votes has increased. During the general elections of 1991 and 1996 and local level elections in 1993 and 1997 the level of enthusiasm among women to exercise their voting rights was very encouraging. Because of the special arrangements and security measures taken by the Government, there were few disturbances and the presence of women in polling centers was significant (www.onlinewomeninpolitics.org)

3.17. Bangladesh: Legal Rights and Political Participation of women

The constitution of Bangladesh grants equal rights to women and men in all spheres of public life[article 28(1) , 28(2) ,28 (3)].However, due to a variety of cultural factors as well as the misinterpretation of religion, woman's human rights are often violated. Various laws have been enacted and amended to protect women's right: the Muslim Family Laws Ordinance of 1961, the Muslim

Marriage and Divorce Registration Act of 1974, the Dowry Prohibition Act of 1980, the family Court Ordinance of 1985, and the Child marriage registration Act of 1992. However, often women are not conscious of their rights. This is particularly true of poor women (Siddiqi, K.: 1992).

3.18. Inheritance and Maintenance: Status of women

Women's right to priority/inheritance is not equal as that of men. Under Muslim law, a daughter inherits one half the share of her brother. A wife receives one eighth of the deceased husband's property, whereas the husband receives one fourth of his deceased wife's property, when there is a child. Hindu women's right to inheritance is limited. Christians provide inheritance between sons and daughter (MOWCA 1997). Existing laws on child support do not adequately enforce male responsibility for their children's welfare. Data on the incidence of family desertion by men are not available. However, anecdotal evidence and existing data suggest the incidence of abandonment of women and children by men is increasing.

In one estimate, it was found that close to one third of women are married to men who have other wives whom they do not maintain. Men are expected to support their wives and children if they themselves have initiated the estrangement, but support can only be enforced if men remain in the vicinity, which is often not the case. There are no sanctions against men who do not support their families and the wife generally moves back to her natal home with the children. She may be given a place to stay, but she usually has to take responsibility for feeding and educating her children as well as making a living. Bangladesh has ratified the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women with reservations [(Articles 2, 13 9 (a) and 16.1 (9c) and 16.1 (f)]. Recently, the Government withdrew the reservations on Articles 13(a) and 16.1(f). The remaining reservations are under review. Since the provisions of this Convention are not yet incorporated into national legislation, the Government is not legally bound to them (Shamim, I and Nasreen, M. (2002).

3.19. Gender discrimination in Health issue

Given the size of the population, health expenditures receive inadequate allocation at the household level. Women are more disadvantaged than men in terms of access to health care. Unlike most countries of the world, the life expectancy of women in Bangladesh is slightly lower than men.

Women family members are less likely to receive modern medical care and they generally rely on traditional and cheap methods of health care. Even today, trained personal attend only one third of births in Bangladesh. The maternal mortality rate is still very high at 440 per 100,000 live births. The nutritional status of girls is also worse than that of boys.

Though the rate of maternal mortality has gone down over time, it still remains high. In the case of maternal mortality, 16-25 percent of deaths are due to septic abortion, 20 percent due to eclamcia, 5-10 percent due to postpartum sepsis, and another 5-10 percent of women die due to tetanus. The remaining major causes of female death are bleeding, prolonged labor, and violent deaths. Most of these factors are preventable with proper health care, but the majority of women in Bangladesh have inadequate access to health services. (BSS: 1998)

3.20. Gender discrimination in Education sector

Education receives the highest allocation of resources in the Bangladeshi social sector. As boys are perceived ultimately to take care of parents, sending them to school and investing in their education is preferred to investing in girls. Nevertheless, the primary level enrollment rates for girls have gone up remarkably. The gap between male and female enrollment, which stood at 22 percent in 1985, declined to 3 percent over the past decade and a half.

Although noteworthy achievements have been made in female enrollment at the primary level, progress has been very slow in secondary level education. At this level male and female enrollment rates improved by 5 and 10 percentage points,

respectively, between 1985 and 1995. At the primary level, girls enrollment is increasing; it has risen from 45 percent in 1990 to 49 percent in 2000.

At the secondary level, the dropout rate of female students reaches half, which is higher by 10 percentage points than the rate of male students. Very few women continue their education up to the tertiary level. This negatively affects the overall rate of return from education and women's labor market entitlements. Lower access to technical education and higher secondary education, gender-biased curriculum and curriculum without job prospects are critical concerns for women's education that must be addressed through coordinated efforts.

3.21. Women's Participation: Employment status

Women's participation in economic activities shows great variations by gender, by nature of activity, and place of residence. For example, more than three quarters of employed women of 15 years and above are found to be unpaid family laborers as opposed to less than a tenth who are self employed (47 percent), followed by contract laborers (26 percent). Only a few (13 percent) work as unpaid family helpers. The agriculture sector is overwhelmed by unpaid family workers who are disproportionately represented by women. Self employed or own account workers are predominately found in the trade, hotel and restaurant, transport, storage and communications sectors where men's involvement is sizeable (nearly a quarter) and women's is negligible. Every four out of five workers in the construction sector are day or contract laborers, although this sector is represented by only 3 percent of the employed men and less than 1 percent of women. For women in the rural areas, the number working in the construction sector is likely to be higher. However a sizable chunk (nearly one fifth) of unpaid family helpers is found both in the agriculture and manufacturing sectors and women disproportionately represent them. Hence even, even in the informal sector, women are not only concentrated in a few sectors, but also their labor is largely consumed without any remuneration. By way mostly involved as self employed or own account workers, suggesting their greater access to resources and economic opportunities (BBS:2000).

3.22. Rural women's economic activities

Rural income-generating activities include post harvest activities, cow fattening and milking, goat farming, backyard poultry rearing, pisciculture, Agriculture, horticulture, food processing, cane and bamboo works, silk reeling, handloom, garment making, fishnet making, coir production and handicrafts.

A good number of rural women are also involved in rural construction work. Women workers are found in certain activities traditionally falling within the male domain (earthwork, construction, and agricultural work the field). This is particularly the case for landless women who largely belong to the hardcore poor group. It indicates growing economic pressure and erosion of familial support and traditional beliefs and norms regarding women's outside work.

3.23. Women's participation in politics and decision making

Notwithstanding all barriers of Purdah (literary: veiled) and patriarchy, women have become more politically visible in the last two decades, A quota has ensured women's presence in the local government and national Parliament. Among women politicians, the older group entered politics through social work, while some along them and the new generation of women have emerged from student politics. Despite many odds, statistics and analyses reveal a slowly growing trend towards women's political participation.

However, they face an ominous challenge. There has also been a growing influence of money in Bangladesh politics, particularly in electoral politics and in guarding/promoting spheres of influence. This acts as a further constraint on women's political participation since fewer women have access to financial resources. It is very difficult for women to work effectively in this system unless such practices are eradicated (Hussain, S, Ara :2000).

3.24. Women in political party position

Party affiliation depends on membership drives and on the organizational and electoral needs of each party. The actual number of women members in different

political parties, however, cannot be determined, since gender-specific records are not maintained. Nevertheless, a slow trend towards women's greater participation has emerged over the decade as party workers, women render valuable contributions in the mobilization of voters, especially among other women. Although there are only a few women in leadership positions, their numbers have increased over the last two decades. There is limited female involvement in party hierarchical statures.

However, women occupy the top leadership positions in each of the two largest parties in Awami league and Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) under the leadership of Sheikh Hasina and Begum Khaleda Zia. They became leaders during crisis periods and have been successful as driving forces and unifying factors of their respective parties. Significantly, neither of them inherited the mantle of leadership generate their own dynamics and momentum to lead their parties through difficult times.

Nevertheless, their close and inner circle of advisors mostly consists of men. In occupying the role of a leader in public life, they have perhaps contributed to liberalizing values in a predominantly Muslim culture where traditionally men had exclusive prerogative in politics. They played a crucial role toward democratization and brought about a certain degree of continuity into the political process. They have a strong potential to be positive role models for women of all ages in Bangladesh, provided they demonstrate a commitment to gender equity by involving more women in their parties and in government. The election manifestos and constitutions of different political parties reveal that there is little emphasis on gender equality in party platforms.

3.25. Situation of Women in Bangladesh

“Women are seeking to claim their right to equal opportunity in politics around the world, but have yet to achieve it in any nation developed or developing.”

Winnie Byanyima: Director of UNDP Gender Team.

Women in Bangladesh are often portrayed as generally poor, illiterate, and ignorant. Their unequal economic and social status, low literacy levels, poor health, high maternal mortality and disadvantages under the law stemmed from their lack of participation in development. (Parpart, Jane L., Shirin M. Kathleen Staudt.2002). Boserup first clarified this position and advocated incorporating women into development projects, particularly into those that would provide them with economic independence and enhanced standing in their families and communities. This was vigorously supported by many other academics and feminists, and major bilateral and multilateral donors added women's programs to their portfolios and promoted development policies that called for the inclusion of women.

While women made gains in health (especially Family planning) in literacy and in income earning, much was left undone. It rapidly becomes clear that simply adding women to development was a flawed approach. (Boserup, Ester.1970.) Bangladesh has a legal system consisting of two different types of laws: the general law, which is based on egalitarian principles of equality and secondly, personal law, or the Islamic family law which is based on religion and cultural practices and does not operate on the basis of equality to women and men.

Under the 1972 constitution of Bangladesh, woman's rights are protected under the board and universal principles of equality and participation. Bangladesh also has a number of laws formulated especially for the protection of women. These include:

- 1) Anti Dowry Prohibition Act 1980
- 2) Cruelty to Women Ordinance 1983
- 3) Suppression of Immoral traffic Act 1993
- 4) Prevention of Repression against Women and Children

Bangladesh has statutory provision that guarantee women the right to participate. A strong legal support for women's rights, practices of inequality in all sphere of society continued. Although Bangladesh has acceded to the United Nation Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) on paper; it largely fails to implement the steps to incorporate the obligation of the convention into its national legislature (Khan, N. 2003).

The Constitution of Bangladesh provides for equality of men and women. There is no legal barrier to women contesting or voting for any elective office, including that of the head of the state. Article 9 of the Constitution promotes the special representation of women in local government. Although the Constitution grants equal rights to all citizens in all spheres of life, yet there have been very few women in local government (Khan, Zarina Rahman .1998).

In 1976, provision was made for two nominated female members in addition to nine elected members in 1983. In 1992, it was changed to indirect election where three women members in each local government body were supposed to be elected by the Chairperson and other elected members.

This process of filling women's seats in the local councils totally ignored the scope of women's active participation and role in these political organizations where policies are decided and crucial plans for local development are formulated. The nominated women could not play more than the role of a 'yes' person of the Chairperson and members, who were predominantly men. (Khan, Zarina Rahman .1998).

3.26. Local Government system: Constitution of Bangladesh

The constitution of Bangladesh adopted in 1972. The fundamental principles of state policy are articulated (Article 9) and in the chapter on Local Government (Articles 59 and 60) a clear vision of Local Governance is to be found.

--The state will encourage local government institutions composed of representatives of the areas concerned and in such institutions special

representation will be given, as far as possible, to peasants, workers and women (Article 9).

--Every administrative unit shall be entrusted to bodies composed of elected persons in accordance with law. (Article 59:1).

--These elected bodies constituting the local government system will perform such function as (a) administration and the work of public officers,(b) the maintenance of public order, and (c) the preparation and implementation of plans relating to public services and economic development .(Article 59:2).

--In order to enable the local government to undertake and fulfill the aforesaid responsibilities, Parliament would, by law, vest councils with authority to impose taxes, prepare budgets, and maintain their own funds based on local needs (Article 60).

All the articles of the constitution of Bangladesh relating to the vision of Local Government contain the values of local democracy, freedom, participation, autonomy and efficiency. The compilation of these articles jointly prefers autonomous local bodies with the authority to generate local resources to act independently and efficiently and inspires the participation or representation of women, peasants, and workers.

The central government values the local government not as its extension or part but as an autonomous self-governing body responsible and accountable to its own locality (www.lgd.bd.gov).

3.27. Women of Bangladesh: Equal Rights to decision making

There were 30 reserved seats for women in the Parliament in addition to the 300 elected seats in which women were equally eligible to contest. However, very few women (5 in 1986, 4 in 1988, 8 in 1991, 5 in 1996 and 5 in 2001) have been elected to the parliament through direct electoral process. This is partly due to less involvement of women in politics and partly due to the reluctance of political

parties to field women candidates. In recent years, an increasing trend in women's participation in the electoral process is being observed.

While only 5 parties put up 15 candidates in 1986, in 1991, 16 parties put up 40 candidates and in 1996, 36 women in 2001, 37 women candidates were nominated. At the local government level, in the last Union Parishad election, which provided for direct election of women to one quarter to the seats at the local level, 12,828 women were elected. In addition, 20 women have been elected as chairpersons of their Union Parishad out of a total of 4,276 and 110 women have been elected in the general seats. In four City Corporations, there are 38 women Commissioners in the reserved seats.

To ensure women's participation in politics, the 1972 Constitution made provision of reserved seats for women in the Parliament valid for 10 years. In 1978, the number was raised to 30 seats bringing the total numbers of seats to 330, which expired in 1987 (Noor, A.1997).

After a three years vacuum in 1990 the provision was again incorporated in the women for a further 10 years period which expired at the end of the Seventy Parliament by the middle of 2001. Therefore, to continue the provision of the reserved seats for women for few more years, it had to be reincorporated in the Constitution through necessary amendments which was not possible due to the existing political crisis arising out of the opposition boycotting the last Parliament.

Women's organizations, civil society groups and women at large have articulated the need for women's participation in politics, but have demanded introduction of direct election in the reserved seats for women and also to increase the number of seats from the present 30. To advance women's integration in politics and decision making, women's organizations are actively lobbying to determine a minimum quota for another specified period and introduction of direct election to the reserved seats for women (Khan, Salma.2003).

Women in rural and urban areas in Bangladesh are victims of various forms of gender-based violence but they are largely denied access to justice. Violence can be seen as a mechanism through which men as a group and as individuals attempt to exert control over women and maintain their social dominance (Halim, Sadeka, 2004)

A traditional tendency is to consider women as subordinate to men and this perception justifies domestic and family violence as a form of control or “protection” of women. This also hides sexual harassment, rape, incest, sexual exploitation of women. Many violent acts occurring within the domestic sphere are not even recognized as crimes, rather these are considered to be domestic and private affairs.

Rural women experience violence in numerous forms and circumstances. Lack of access to justice creates a kind of mind set for women themselves to hide violence committed against them because of shame, fear and helplessness. Women who are victims are blamed for their victimization (Hossain, Naseem.2007)

The formal justice system in Bangladesh is inaccessible to many people and in particular to the majority who are poor, women and disadvantaged people. Although the judicial system appears powerful in the constitution, the overall public perception is negative. The lengthy, complex procedures and high expenses make the court system inaccessible, inefficient and inhumane. When judiciary remains swamped by cases and delay, the indigenous ‘salish’ system contributes by not decongesting the courts of cases brought before it.

‘Salish’ seems to be more rational to the villagers than other justice system because the conditions for reaching an understanding are more likely to be present in this system. The rural elite who adjudicate in the ‘salish’ can not be characterized as local intellectuals, but they understand the societies they live in and they can clearly distinguish between objective conditions from normative expectations and strategic intentions.’ Salish’ is a dynamic process.

Tradition of kinship, norm of honor and shame, bondage of gratitude, patron-client relationship, local power structure, and community mores define how decision is to be reached and how justice is to be served. (Naseem, 2004, pg 26)

3.28. Constitutional Guarantees:

The Constitution of Bangladesh guarantees certain rights and privileges to women for their fundamental rights. The constitution of the independent country of Bangladesh was drafted in 1972. The clauses on women's rights and their basic freedom were ensured in the Constitution.

Article 27 of the Constitution states that, "All citizens are equal before the law and are entitled to equal protection of the law."

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

According to **Article 28 (2)**, "Women shall have equal rights with men in all spheres of the state and of public life."

Article 28 (3) states: "No citizen shall, on grounds only of religion, race, caste sex or place of birth, be subjected to any disability, liability restriction or resort, or admission to any educational institution."

Article 28(4) states: Nothing in this Article shall prevent the state from making special provision in favor of women and children for the advancement of any backward section of the population."

Again **Article 29 (1)** states: "No citizen shall, ground of sex be ineligible for or discriminated against in respect of any employment or office in the service of the Republic" (Siddiqui, Kamal.1992).

3.29. Legislative measures

To safeguard the various constitutional rights, the Government has enacted various women-specific and women-related legislation. Notable among these are:

- *The Child Marriage Restraint Act 1929*, amended in 1984, rising the age of marriage of a girl to 18 years from 15 years and of a boy to 21 years and makes offences under this act punishable.
- *The Dowry Prohibition Act 1980*, amended in 1982, forbidding anyone from demanding dowry and punishing by fine and imprisonment.
- *Women and Children Repression Prevention Act 1995*, amended in 2000, to protect women and children against any type of violence.
- *Acid Crime Repression Act : 2002* and the *Acid Control Act 2002* for death penalty of acid attack perpetrators”(Siddiqui,Kamal.1994).

3.30. CEDAW

Bangladesh has ratified the *Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women* (CEDAW). The government has withdrawn reservations about some provisions of CEDAW, relating to personal rights such as family benefits and guardianship of children. The withdrawn reservations of Bangladesh pertain to article 13(a) and article 16(1) (b) of the Convention.

However, in 2000, Bangladesh has ratified the new optional protocol that is intended to promote implementation of the Convention and strengthen its impact on women issues (www.lgd.bd.gov).

3.31. The National Policy for the Advancement of Women in Bangladesh

The national Policy for the Advancement of Women in Bangladesh:

The main goals of the policies as follows:

- Establish equality between men and women in all spheres;
- Eliminate all forms of discrimination against women and girls;
- Establish women human right;
- Develop women as human resource;
- Recognize women's contribution in social and economic spheres;
- Eliminate poverty among women;
- Establish equality between men women in administration, politics, education, games, sports and all other socio- economic spheres;
- Eliminate all forms of oppression against omen and girls;
- Ensure empowerment of women in the fields of politics, administration and the economy;
- Develop appropriate technology for women;
- Ensure adequate health and shelter to women;
- Provide housing and shelter to women;
- Create positive images of women in the media; and take special measures for women in specially disadvantaged situations (BBS: 1998).

3.32. Articles of the Constitution of Bangladesh on Local Government

The Union Parishad owes its existence to the Constitution of Bangladesh.

Article 59 of the Constitution of Bangladesh states:

1. Local government in every administrative unit of the Republic shall be entrusted to bodies composed of persons elected in accordance with the law.
2. Every body such as is referred to in Clause (i) shall, subject to this Constitution and any other law, perform within the appropriate administrative unit, such functions as shall be prescribed by Acts of Parliament, which may include functions relating to:
 - a. Administration and the work of public offices
 - b. The maintenance of public order; and
 - c. The preparation and implementation of plans relating to public services and economic development (BBS:1998).

Article 60 states: For the purpose of giving full effect to the provision of Article 59, Parliament shall by law confer powers on the local government bodies referred to in that Article, including power to impose taxes for local purposes, to prepare their budgets and to maintain funds.

However, under the Fourth Amendment of the constitution in 1975, this provision was abolished. In Chapter II of the Constitution, corrected up to 28 February, 1979, there is only one sentence on local government, in Clause 9: “The state shall encourage local government bodies composed of representatives from relevant areas and in these bodies, there shall be as far as possible, special representation of peasants, workers and women.”

Under the Twelfth Amendment of the Constitution in 1991, it has been stated: “Local government in every administrative unit of the Republic shall be entrusted to bodies composed of persons elected in accordance with law. Every local body

shall perform within the appropriate administrative unit such functions as shall be prescribed by Acts of Parliament.”

In 1992, the Local Government Structure Review Commission recommended major changes in the structure, composition, functions and finances of rural local government bodies in Bangladesh in order to facilitate local government activities and also to ensure people’s participation in them. Accordingly the Jatiya Sangsad (National Parliament) passed the Local Government (Union Parishad: Amendment Act, 1993).

According to this law, a Union was divided into nine Wards, in each UP it reserved 3 seats exclusively for women member, provision for forming standing committees were introduced. Provision for direct election of the 3 women members of the reserved seat of the UP was introduced in the Local Government (Union Parishad: Second Amendment: Act, 1997), (www.lgrd.bd.gov).

3.33. Laws and Ordinance(s) on Local Government

1972: President’s Order No.7 (pre-1972 local bodies election declared improper and administrators were appointed)

1973: President’s Order No.22 (authorized elections to local bodies in 1973)

1976: Local Government Ordinance

1977: Paurashava Ordinance

1982: Local Government Ordinance) Upazila Parishad and Upazila Administration Reorganization)

Chittagong Municipal Corporation Ordinance

1983: Local Government Ordinance (Union Parishad)

Local Government Ordinance) Upazila Parishad and Upazila Administration Reorganization, Second Amendment)

Local Government Ordinance (Union Parishad, Amendment)

Local Government Ordinance (Upazila Parishad and Upazila Administration Reorganization, Third Amendment)

Local Government Ordinance (Upazila Parishad and Upazila Administration Reorganization, Fourth Amendment)

Dhaka Municipal Corporation Ordinance

1984: Khulna Municipal Corporation Ordinance

1987: Rajshahi Municipal Corporation Ordinance

1988: Local Government act (Zila Parishad)

1989: Rangamati Hill District Local Government Parishad Act

Khagrachari Hill District Local Government Parishad Act

Bandarban Hill District Local Government Parishad Act

1991: Local Government Repeat Ordinance (Upazila Parishad and Upazila administration Reorganization) (Source; Local Government Division (www.lgrd.bd.gov)).

It had been already mentioned that the local government ordinance (union parishad) 1983 provide the legal basis for the formation of the union parishad, but it does not contain clause for the role, power and responsibility of the women members.

On the other hand in 1997, the government increased the number of standing committees set up by the Union Parishad. That standing committee instructed that women members should be President of at least 25% of the committee. The terms of reference of these committees and modules were not clearly specified. The Government of Bangladesh also directed that each Union Parishad to form

a” Social development Committee’s in each of the three female wards to be headed by the female members concerned” (Siddiqui, Kamal.1994).

The ratio of male and female members virtually remains almost 3:1. Relevance laws and rules provide that decision making in the Union Parishad will stem from what the majority supports. Therefore, no doubt that, in terms of numerical strength women members is three times weaker than the male members which clearly show that the women members can do little to influence the decision taken in the Union Parishad.

It is observed that women’s participation in the local government system remained minimal. There have been no significant changes or reforms so far to improve the quality of women’s leadership in the grassroots level though the government forms a task force to review the laws and ordinance in the Union Parishad.

3.34. Lacking of women in performing local level politics

1. Women were unacquainted with their duties, and responsibilities.
2. They often lack experience and education.
3. Women were treated with disrespect and disregard by male councilors, not informed of meetings not given agendas of meetings, budgets or assigned committees, decision were made without consulting them, they had to sit separately from the men, and males attended in their place.
4. General observation: Women did not belong, or should only be concerned with social welfare issues.

3.35. The future of Local Government: An overview of Bangladesh

Local government’s future of Bangladesh depends on the act of elected representatives of the local people and key national policy makers to make

informed and hard choices. My research work on Local Government in Bangladesh lays the foundations for making such choices.

Governance includes the cooperation and cooptation of all individuals and groups in society and not merely activities and function that governments single-handedly undertake by them.

The research found that governance is thriving in all corners of Bangladesh. People are organizing themselves. What governments in the past have attempted to do in local administration, however, has and continues to be of limited significance.

Governance refers to a process through which all individuals and groups in society can participate in making choices about social, refers to the organizations and structures through which governance takes place. Local government without local governance is of limited use. Considering local government, as has been in the past, without ensuring local governance is a ready made formula for failure.

The Constitution of Bangladesh through its preamble, fundamental principles and articles provides some guidance for both governance and government. Effective participation of people through elected representatives (article 11) and elected bodies (articles 59) provides the essential framework for governance, through not a comprehensive framework.

Article 9 requires that governmental intuitions be set up at all administrative units to provide for basic local government organizations and structure.

The research complements the constitution of Bangladesh by developing a vision for local governance. Four fundamental vision statements arise out of the analysis and findings of the research work. These are:

- Local government is an integral part of a comprehensive national governance vision of partnership between Central government and Local government.

- The inclusion of all social groups is a fundamental necessity for autonomous local government.
- Self-governance is possible and is a desirable outcome of democratic institution building.
- The individual Bangladeshi is capable and resilient, despite adversities and is deserving of trust and management of public goods and services.

In Bangladesh, women have been excluded from areas of decision making process. Their potential remains overlooked or unrecognized. Their contributions in the society are often unnoticed.

Women's equal participation in political area plays a vital role in the general process of the advancement of women. It is not only a claim for justice or democracy but can also be seen as an essential condition for women's interests to be taken into account. Without the active participation of women and the incorporation of women's issues at all levels of decision-making, the goal of gender equality, and development cannot be achieved.

Chapter 4

Union Parishad: Systems, Functions and Operations

Union Parishad is the lowest tier of Administrative unit in Bangladesh. At present Bangladesh contains a four tier local government structure but in compliance to the constitutional provision an elected local government body exists only at the union level. According to Local Governance Ordinance, 1983, 'union' means 'a rural area' declared to be a union under section 3 (GOB: 1990:2-3).

Union Parishad is the oldest and lowest local government system in Bangladesh. It has been functioning for more than hundred years of development of the country. At present we have 4,480 Union Parishads. Union Parishads are run by the local representatives. The voters of the Union Parishad directly elect all. Its roles and representatives are guided by different levels.

Union Parishad is mainly responsible for economic, social and community development. It is also responsible for the implementation of development schemes in the field of agriculture, forestry, fisheries, education, health, irrigation and flood protection, family planning, protection and maintenance of infrastructure, motivating people to use latrines, the registration of births, marriages, deaths and so on.

It is mentioned earlier that at present the Union Parishad is the only elected local government body at local level. Zilla Parishad is a local government at District level, but there is no elected body for their management. Bangladesh is a highly populous country. Administratively it has been divided into the Divisions, Districts, Thanas, Upazilas, Union and Villages.

Figure: 4. The structure of Administration in Bangladesh

Level	Number of units	Average size of population	Average area covered (in sq. km)
Division	7	19,700,000	23,933
District	64	1,900,000	2,306
Thana	460	220,000	302
Union	4,441	24,700	33
Villages	68,000	1500	2

Source: BBS (Statistical Year book 2011)

The number of members of the Union Parishad is fixed and does not depend on the size of the population of the Union. A union consists of 5-15 villages with an average combined population of 24,500 (Nathan,1998:110,Thorlind,2003:61-62).

Rural local government bodies are entrusted with a large number of functions and responsibilities relating to civic and community welfare as well as local development. The functions of the Gram Parishad, Union Parishad, Thana/Upazila Parishad and Zila (district) Parishad are elaborate and include amongst other optional functions.

The present Union Parishad is governed by the Local Government (Union Parishads) Ordinance, 1983. In 1988, 1993 and 1997, major changes occurred with respect to the structure and composition of Union Parishad. However, these amendments have been incorporated in the 1983 Local Government (Union Parishads) Ordinance. The structure and composition of the Union Parishad are based on these amendments.

The structure, power and functions of the Union Parishad in Bangladesh have been changed many times since its inception. The present structure of the Union Parishad came through the demand of the people and the thoughts of the political leaders.

The present Union Parishad has its legal basis in the constitution. Union Parishad, the century old institution has been serving people within its limited resources and authority. The institution directly and indirectly is controlled by the central government from its inception.

Historically, Union Parishad failed to follow a unique standard of governing system because of fragile and inconsistency practice of democracy in the country. Union Parishad is struggling for image crisis because of suffering from scarcity of resources, little control over jurisdiction, political interference to meet its local need.

4.1. Structures, Systems and Functions of Union Parishad

At present in Bangladesh, the Union Parishad is constituted under the legal basis of the constitution of Bangladesh. In section 9, 10, 11, 59 and 60 of the constitution the formation, responsibility and functions of the local government institutions has been described. Based on those sections the Union Parishad operates according to *The Local Government (Union Parishads) Ordinance, 1983* and its elections are held according to the *Union Parishad (Election) Rules, 1983*.

4.2. Organogram of a Union Parishad in Bangladesh

Union Parishad is composed of one elected Chairman and nine elected members from each ward and women members from each of the three wards reserved for women. Thus, the Union Parishad Organogram consists of thirteen members as shown below:

Figure: 5: Structure of a Union Parishad

Chairman								
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
Member	Member	Member	Member	Member	Member	Member	Member	Member
One	Woman	Member	One	Woman	Member	One	Woman	Member

Source: LG Division Ministry of LGRD & Co operation.

As per structure, Union Parishad consists of one chairperson, nine general members and three women members in reserved seats, for a total of 13 persons. This means that the percentage of women will be at least 23%. All the positions, including the chairman, are directly elected in non-party based elections (Siddiqui, 2002).

4.3. Structure of the Union Parishad

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

4. **Official Members:** The block Supervisor (Directorate of Agriculture), Health Assistant, Family Planner, Welfare Worker, Ansar /VDP and all other field staff of government departments working at Union level. They will have no voting right.

5. **Others members:** Representatives of Muktijoddah, Cooperative Societies Disadvantages groups/ Professional fishermen, landless workers, destitute women, etc will be members of Union Parishad without voting right (Local Government division: Ministry of LGRD & Co operation).

As per structural frame, Union Parishad consists at 13 members, who represent 9 wards of a union. A Chairperson, nine men and three women members, women member is representing three wards, whereas each man is representing only one ward. A male candidate had to go to the voters of a ward for election campaign while women candidates had to go to the voters of the whole Union.

Figure: 6 : Union Parishad: System and function

<p>Each woman to the reserved seats is elected from three of the nine wards. Open for women only.</p>
<p>The chairman is elected from all the nine wards together. Open for both men and women.</p>
<p>Each general member is elected from one of nine wards. Open for both men and women</p>

The chairman is elected from the whole Union Parishad; this position is open for both men and women to contest. The nine general members are directly elected from each of the Union's nine wards; these positions are open to both men and women. The women in the reserved seats do not have any special ward of their own but are elected from three of the general wards.

In these wards (open for women only) women candidates contest against each other but are elected by votes from both men and women. According to the Bangladesh Election Commission, chairmen or member candidates (both general and reserved seats) have to fill in a nomination paper to the local administrative officer TNO (Thana Nirbahi Officer) and pay 2000 taka respectively 750 taka.

Gram Parishad at the village level, there have never been any elections even few times was planned. City Corporations elections for the urban local system of local governance for the six big cities in Bangladesh had been held in different times. Below the City Corporations there are 90 Pourashavas which can be compared to the rural Union Parishads. The Pourshavas have the same system with three reserved seats for women (Mahtab, 2003:5). The three hill districts of Banderban, Rangarnati and Khagrachhari have a special type of local government with three Zila Parishads, Union Paishads and headmen at the village level (Siddiqui, 2000:13).

The government pays the remuneration of the chairman and members of the Union Parishad. The income sources of the Union Parishad are very limited and the duties and functions are enormous. Since its inception, the local government institutions were given the responsibilities for maintenance of law and order, infrastructures development and their maintenance, health, education etc. within their area. Though they had sources of own revenue income for most of their activities they mainly relied on various grants from the government. At present only Union Parishad is an elected local government body.

The Union Parishad gets approximately 2, 50,000 -30, 0,000 taka per year from the government (LG report 2009-2010: [www. Lgd.org.bd](http://www.Lgd.org.bd)) the funding is based

on size of the population, geographical area and level of poverty. Apart from the funding from the government, the Union Parishad is supposed to collect their own revenues through taxes, leasing fees from ghat and ijara etc. (Aminuzzaman, 2003:5, Natan, 1998:109).

They are also supposed to maintain law and order (Aminuzzaman, 2003:3-4, Natan, 1998:109). The World Food Programme also works through Union Parishad and distributes wheat through VGF (Vulnerable Groups Feeding) cards (World Food Programme, 1999). The work in UP is financed through the Annual Development Program (ADP) allocated through the Upazila.

4.4 . Local Government: State policy of Bangladesh

The constitution of Bangladesh adopted in 1972. The fundamental principles of state policy are articulated (Article 9) and in the chapter on Local Government (Articles 59 and 60) a clear vision of Local Governance is to be found.

- The state will encourage local government institutions composed of representatives of the areas concerned and in such institutions special representation will be given, as far as possible, to peasants, workers and women (Article 9).
- Every administrative unit shall be entrusted to bodies composed of elected persons in accordance with law (Article 59(1)).

These elected bodies constituting the local government system will perform such function as

- (a) Administration and the work of public officers
- (b) The maintenance of public order and
- (c) The preparation and implementation of plans relating to public services and economic development Article 59(2).

- In order to enable the local government to undertake and fulfill the aforesaid responsibilities, Parliament would, by law, vest councils with authority to impose taxes, prepare budgets, and maintain their own funds based on local needs (Article 60).

All the articles of the constitution of Bangladesh relating to the vision of Local Government contain the values of local democracy, freedom, participation, autonomy and efficiency. The compilation of these articles jointly prefers autonomous local bodies with the authority to generate local resources to act independently and efficiently and inspires the participation or representation of women, peasants, and workers. The central government values the local government not as its extension or part but as an autonomous self-governing body responsible and accountable to its own locality (Siddiqui, Kamal 2000).

4.5. Functions of the Union Parishad

The Union Parishad functions are as follows:

- Conducting socio-economic surveys of households, every five years to be used for development plan preparation;
- Maintain vital statistics like registration of births-deaths, marriage etc.;
- Make plans for natural resource management and development;
- Supervise management of primary educational institutes; motivate parents to send their children to school and create better awareness for adult and female literacy;
- Create awareness for better primary health care;
- Maintain law and order and control terrorism, violence against women etc.;
- Ensure participation in local and central government development planning;
- Encourage co-operatives and NGOs;
- Initiate participatory development of local roads, bridges, culverts etc.;

- Support various development activities related to agriculture;
- Encourage and initiate tree plantation programmes;
- Assist various organizations in their development efforts.

In addition, Union *Parishads* have been assigned with the adoption and implementation of poverty alleviation programmes directly by themselves and through NGOs and co-operatives. The *Thana/Upazila Parishads* are entrusted with functions similar to *Gram Parishads* and Union *Parishads*.

In addition, they have the responsibility of making integrated 5-year development plans for the *Thana/Upazila* on the basis of plans submitted by the Union *Parishads*. *Zila (District) Parishads* are responsible for monitoring activities of the *Thana/Upazila Parishads*, implementing district level economic, social and cultural development programmes and preparing project proposals for road, bridges and culverts (Siddiqui, 2002). Additional responsibilities of the Union Parishad are as follows:

1. Ensure provision of health services at the union health centers, supervise family planning related act and monitor the same. Arrange for supply of safe drinking water and promote sanitation programme.
2. Construction of inter ward roads, maintenance of the same, management of small scale irrigation.
3. Implementation of the project programme along the Union Parishad roads and all earthen embankments.
4. Peaceful resolution and amicable settlement of inter ward disputes.
5. Promote social resistance over violence against women, terrorism, all types of crimes and cooperate for maintenance of law and order.

6. Up-to-date registration of birth, death and marriages based on report received from Gram Parishad.
7. Assist Upazila Parishad in the preparation of inter ward agriculture and fisheries development necessary action.
8. Cooperation with and advice all agencies within the Union having credit programme and help rural people.
9. Increase awareness for women and child development and take concrete actions where necessary.
10. Encourage people to undertake cottage industries with good potential and facilities the involvement of poor people in various income generating activities.
11. To make comprehensive Union Plan and inclusion of inter ward development project for the each Union.
12. Supervise the development of primary schools and also supervise their functions. Source: (Local Government division: Ministry of LGRD)

The Union Parishad undertakes multifarious works for the development of the rural areas. These include:

1. Preparation of a comprehensive Union Plan and inclusion of inter-ward development projects after identification and prioritization.
2. Assist and cooperation for the development of primary schools, supervise their functioning and motivate people for spreading literacy.
3. Ensure provision of health services at the Union Health Centers, supervise family planning related activities and services and monitor

the same. Arrange for supply of safe drinking water and promote sanitation programme.

4. Construction of inter-ward roads, maintenance of the same, management of small scale irrigation and water resources.
5. Implementation of affording station programme along the Union Parishad roads and all earthen embankments.
6. Peaceful resolution and amicable settlement of inter ward disputes.
7. Promote social resistance over violence against women, terrorism, all types of crimes and cooperate with administration for maintenance of law and order.
8. Up-to-date registration of birth, death and marriages based on report received from Gram Parishad.
9. Assist Upazial Parishad in the preparation of inter ward agriculture and fisheries development projects and take necessary action.
10. Cooperate with and advise all agencies within the Union having credit programs and help rural poor to participate in the same.
11. Increase awareness for women and child development and take concrete actions where necessary.
13. Encourage people to undertake cottage industries with good potentials and facilitate the involvement of disadvantaged and poor people in various income generating activities. Source: (Local Government division: Ministry of LGRD)

4.6. Others Functions of the Union Parishad

1. Infrastructure development (Construction of roads, bridges, culverts etc)
 2. Social welfare.
 3. Law and order.
 4. Education
 5. Social Security
 6. Public health
 7. Agriculture
 8. Shalish (arbitration)
 9. Revenue collection
 10. Taxes
 11. Family welfare affairs
 12. Coordination with Upazila
 13. Patronization of socio cultural activities
- (Local Government division: Ministry of LGRD)

4.7. Sources of income of the Union Parishad

The following are the sources of income of the Union Parishad;

1. Taxes on the household.
2. Taxes for maintenance village police under the village police act.
3. Fees chargeable on marriage festivities etc.
4. Taxes on entertainment's facilities like Cinema, Theatre, Jatra
(village theatre) Circus and Village fair.
5. Taxes on vehicles playing within the territorial jurisdiction of Union Parishad.

6. License and permit fees on trade/business.
7. Special fees for public welfare.
8. Lease on Haatbazar, water bodies, ferry ghat etc.
9. Land registration fee.
(Local Government division: Ministry of LGRD)

4.8. Responsibilities of the Union Parishads

The responsibilities of the Union Parishad are determined by law. According to sub-section 2 of section 30 of The Local Government (Union Parishads) Ordinance, 1983, mainly the Union Parishad has the following compulsory responsibilities. These are:

1. Adoption of measures for preventing disorder and smuggling.
2. Adoption and implementation of development schemes in the fields of agriculture, forestry, fisheries, livestock, education, health, cottage industries, communications, irrigation and flood protection, with a view to improving the economic and social condition of the people.
3. Promotion of family planning.
4. Development and use of local resources.
5. Protection and maintenance of public property, such as roads, bridges, canals, embankments, telephones and electricity lines.
6. Review of development activities undertaken by different agencies at the union level, and submission of recommendations to the Upazila Parishad with regard to the activities of those agencies.
7. Motivation and persuasion of the people to install sanitary latrine.
8. Registration of births, deaths, blind people, beggars and destitute people.
9. Censuses of all kinds (Siddiqui, 2005:154).

4.9. Standing Committees of an Union Parishad

1. Finance and establishment committee:
2. Education
3. Mass education:
4. Health, family planning and epidemic control committee:
5. Audit and accounts committee:
6. Agriculture and other development works:
7. Social welfare and community centres committee:
8. Cottage industries and cooperatives committee:
9. Committee for welfare of women and children,
10. Fisheries and livestock committee:
11. Committee for conservation of the environment and tree plantation:
12. Union public works committee:
13. Rural water supply and sanitation committee:
14. Law and order committee:
15. Committee for sports and culture:

(Local Government division: Ministry of LGRD)

Local government as a political institution to ensure public participation in development activities is yet to take proper shape in Bangladesh. Since Independence in 1971, successive governments have tried to use the local government system for their own political interest. The party or regime in power wanted to make the local government representatives their power base and manipulated the system to this end.

Figure:7. Local Governance: Success/Achievements and Lack of functioning

Local Governance system	Success/achievement	Lack of functioning
<p>(1971-75)</p> <p>Inherited the rural government consisting of Union, Thana and District. But changed the system as follows:</p> <p>Deputy Commissioner was appointed as administrator of Zila Board Circle Officer was appointed as administrator of Thana Development Committees, in place of Thana Council.</p> <p>In January 1975 the Constitution was amended providing for one party rule and a Presidential form of government.</p>	<p>* Basic Democracies system was introduced.</p> <p>* Participation of people in the local Council ensured, especially at the Union Council and the Municipalities through holding elections.</p>	<p>*Difficulties in selection of persons for the different bodies because of (1) lack of unanimity among the MCAs themselves and (2) involvement of non-elected political leaders that led to inter and intra-party factions.</p> <p>* In some districts MCAs took over the administration of TDCs as Chairman, but failed to run the affairs of the committees on the basis of fixed agenda.</p> <p>*Absence of elected local councils at Thana and Districts Level.</p> <p>* The vision of the elected local government totally discontinued in the wake of imposition of one party rule.</p>
<p>(1975-81)</p>	<p>*Election to the Union</p>	<p>*Lack of firm decisions</p>

<p>The local government law of 1976 provided for elected local councils at all levels except Thana.</p>	<p>Parishad and Municipalities were held.</p> <p>*Constitutional amendment was made dealing with the local councils to include special representations from peasants, workers and women.</p> <p>*Eliminated a more than century-old administrative unit called the sub division.</p>	<p>on the part of government to rely on the existing apparatus of local government for decision making in areas that affect the day-to-day life of the people.</p> <p>* Thana Councils were not made effective.</p> <p>* No Zila Parishad election was held.</p> <p>*Decision –making at the local level was politicized.</p> <p>The concept of Gram Sarker repeated but never got off the ground.</p> <p>* Zila Parishad was a never constitute and continued to be administered by the Deputy Commissioner.</p>
<p>(1982-90)</p> <p>The Upazila System was introduced with the concept of promoting the decentralization process at the Thana Level.</p>	<p>*Updated the Thana to include both regulatory and developmental factions.</p> <p>* Converted the old subdivisions into districts but without creating any corresponding local councils at these levels.</p>	

	<p>* Assigned greater authority to the Thana councils renamed Upazila Parishads, in terms of decision making in planning and implementation of local development projects.</p> <p>*Placed Upazila Parishad under the control of a directly elected Chairman and all functions at the Upazila level of government were placed under the administration control of Chairman of Upazila Parishad.</p> <p>*Appointed judicial officers at the Upazila level to try both civil and criminal cases.</p> <p>* Introduced a new legislation on Zila Parishad with representation of all members of the parliament, elected Chairman of Upazials and Municipalities of the district.</p> <p>*Established 3 separated</p>	
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	Zila Parishads in the District of Rangamati, Bandarban and Khagrachari with a persisting demand of the tribal population to manage their own affairs with sufficient autonomy.	
(1991) Caretaker Government Special ordinance was put in place relating to Union Parishads and Municipalities.	*The specific responsibilities assigned to these local bodies include maintenance of law and order to ensure a free and fair election to the parliament. This added a new domination of task for the local bodies.	
(1991-96) The provision for elected local councils during this period was made through the Twelfth Amendment of the Constitution.	*Union Parishad worked as an elected local body. *Municipalities/city corporations the local government system. *Given effect to constitutional provision of declaring Union and Municipalities as administrative units. Set up Thana Development and coordination committee at	*Thana or Upazila as a unit of elected government was not accepted. * No action taken to have elected Zila Parishad on the lines. * No attempt was made to install Gram Sava as recommended by the Local Government Commission.

	the Upazila level as recommended by the local government commission.	
(1996-2000) New local government laws relating to the constitution of Upazila was passed by the Parliament.	<p>A new local government law relating to Upazila was passed and it was allowed to be an administrative unit for the purpose of article 59 of the Constitution.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> * The law introduced gender dimension. * It made MPs whose constitution fell within the Upazila, to be the Advisers. * Zila Parishad Act was passed which also provided gender dimension and making the Mps Advisers to the Parishad. Moreover it was to be an elected body. *Establishment Chittagong Hill Tracts Regional Council. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Palli/Gram Parishad was not implemented. * Except the Union, Pauroshava,Ciy Corporations and Hill Districts Councils, no elected local government functioned. <p>The void continued to exist in respect of Upazila and Zila Parishads.</p>

Source: (Shamim, I and Nasreen, M. (2002: p 61,62

Figure: 8. Women participation in Union Parishad Election (1973-2003)

Elections	Year	Women Candidate		Elected Chairman and Members	
		Chairman	Member	Chairman	Member
1 st	1973			1	
2 nd	1977	19	19	4	7
3 rd	1984			6	
4 th	1988	79	863	1	
5 th	1992	115	1135	8	20
6 th	1997	102	43969/456*	23	12882/110*
7 th	2003	232	43764/617*	22	12684/79*

*Women contested and elected to the general seats. Source: www.ec.gov.bd.org

4.10. Women participation in Union Parishad Election (1973-2003)

In 1973 election only one woman was elected as the Chairperson of Union Parishad among 4,352 Unions. In the election of 1977, only four women were elected as Chairperson whereas this number was only 6 in the election of 1984. In the Union Parishad election of 1988, 18,566 contestants fight for the position of Chairperson of 4401 Union Parishad. There were only 79 women contestants constituting only 0.4 percent for the post of Chairperson and 863 for membership. Only one female chairperson was elected in 1988. Again in 1992, available data indicates that for the position of Chairperson of 3,899 Unions out of 4398 Union Parishad, 115 women contested for Chairpersonship and 1135 for members. Only 20 members were elected (Quadir, 1995:35). For elective position of members, the figures for the respective elections in 1988 and 1992 were 863 women out of 1,14,699 (constituting 0.7 percent) and 1135 women among 1,69,643 (comprising again some 0.7 percent) contestants (Ahmed S.G.1997).

Figure: 9. Rural Local Bodies Elections in Bangladesh

Local Bodies Elections	Date of Elections	No of UP/Pourashava/ City Cor/Hill District Council/ Upazial Parishad	No. of Voters (Approx)
(a) Union Parishad			-
1. 1973	19 dec-30 Dec 1973	4,441	-
2. 1977	13 Jan – 31 Jan 1977	4,441	4,72,30,000
3. 1983-84	27 Dec1983 – 10 Jan 1984	4,441	4,70,00,000
4. 1988	10Feb 1988	4,441	-
5. 1992	22 Jan 06 Feb 1992	4,441	4,99,00,000
6. 1997	01 Dec.-31 Dec 1997	4,441	4,82,00,000
7. 2003	25Jan – March 16	4,223	6,15,15,866
(b) Hill District Council			
(1) 1989	August 25,1989	3	-
(c) Upazila Parishad			
(1) 1985	May 16 and May 20 1985	460	4,57,86,351
(2)1990	March 14-25 1990	4760	4,59,00,000

Source: Bangladesh Election Commission Website (<http://www.ec.bd.org>)

4.11. Union Parishad Election 2003: Some Facts and Figures

Union Parishad Election 2003 was 7th and the largest local government election in countries history. The election started on January 25 and ends on March 16, 2003 consecutively in 4,234 unions out of 4492 unions. A number of 61,515,806 (six crore fifteen lakh fifteen thousand and eight hundred six) voters have made this election a history for Bangladesh. (The daily Star: 26th Jan 2003)

In Bangladesh, party-line politics highly depends on the party influence among the local government representatives. Political parties having strong hold in the local level can easily control. This is why local government election observation is important.

4.12. Information on Union Parishads Election 2003: At a glance

Number of unions: **4,223**

Number of polling stations: **39,372**

Number of polling booths: **155,749**

Total number of Voters: **61,515,866**

Total number of Male Voters: **3, 13, 44,168**

Total number of Female voters: **3, 01, 71,698**

Number of Returning Officers: **1,868**

Number of Presiding Officers: **39,372**

Number of Assistant Presiding Officers: **155,749**

Number of Divisions: **6**

Number of Districts: **64**

Total Number of Women contesting candidate: **39,419**

Total Number of Chairman contesting candidates: **21,376**

Total Number of Member contesting candidates: **137,909**

Number of Domestic observers: 40,000 (Approx)

(www.dwatch-bd.org)

4.13. Election 1997 and 2003: A brief comparative analysis

A comparative analysis of the situation of women's participation in the 1997 and 2003 Union Parishad elections reveal some broad emerging trends that is indicative of the effects of a non comprehensive policy for facilitating women's effective participation in local government, an important step in the process of political empowerment of women.

A noticeable negative trend is the decline in the number of women competing in the reserved seats. The numbers of women seeking election to the 12,669 reserved seats declined 12.34% from 44,969 in 1997 to 39,419 in 2003. Another emerging trend is the visible loss of interest of women to seek reelection particularly due to their negative experience in the Union Parishad. Over 40% of the women members choose not to compete for a second time in the 2003 elections.

It is reported that the reason for withdrawal of women is mostly due to their negative experience in an anti women environment in the Union Parishads and the absence of supportive systems and structures. This is a clear indication that female Union Parishad members' experience of local government is a negative one. These findings ought to evoke serious concern for the policy makers interested in advancing women's empowerment.

An interesting trend emerging from the same studies however may throw some light of hope for the future of women's participation in the political system of the country. This is the trend of a rise in the number of women seeking election to the general seats including that of the chair competing with men. In 1997 the number of 456 women competing for the general seats rose to 617 in 2003. The number of 102 women who contested men for the chairs seat in 1997 rose to 232 in 2003. Though a small leap in terms of percentage and rate it is a trend worth noticing particularly by policy advocates supporting women's political empowerment to government and outside.

This emerging trend should encourage and guide policy makers in the right direction in their endeavors to facilitate women's effective and not token participation in the political system. Similarly other institutions in the political system like the political parties should also take notice of this trend in women's motivation and determination to enter and engage in a strongly male dominated public sphere in considering future policy on women's participation. If it is acknowledged and accepted that women's effective engagement in the development process is a precondition for the achievement of the targeted goals then this trend women's will to participate despite huge odds has to be considered and encouraged in the future policies.(Khan, Zarina Rahman, :2006)

4.14. Major Issues in Union Parishad

- Undue bureaucratic control
- Blatant interference of Members of Parliament (MPs)
- Exclusionary participation of women
- Financial disempowerment compromising the viability of local bodies
- Lack of mobilization of local resources
- Lack of financial devolution
- Concentration of powers and authorities
- Too many laws and circulars which are meaningless and contradictory
- Lack of skills and competence
- Widespread corruptions

(www.dwatch-bd.org)

4.15. Possible Reform Areas

- A comprehensive law replacing 130 laws and over 100 sub-laws and rules.
- A constitutional amendment to settle the outstanding issues: fiscal devolution, tiers etc.
- Confine the role mps to exercising legislative authority and oversight roles .
- Massive training program.
- Direct transfer of untied resources (Gani, M. Showkat & Sattar, M.Ghulam: A Baseline Report January, 2004)

4.16. Training

Training of local government officials and employees is generally limited to the officers and conducted at the National Institute of Local Government (NILG), located at Dhaka. Elected representatives as well as appointed and nominated personnel are provided training at NILG. Some are even sent abroad for short term training. Lower level technical or general staff are rarely given any training or chance to improve their skills (Siddiqui, Kamal 2000).

4.17. Discipline

The Bangladesh Local Council Servants Rules (1968) guide the disciplinary conduct of employees of local bodies. These rules contain grounds for penalization, which include inefficiency, misconduct, corruption and subversion. Enforcement of disciplinary action often becomes difficult due to union pressure.

4.18. National Institute of Local Government (NILG): Functions

Operate training courses for the elected representatives, officers and employees of city corporations, municipalities, district councils and Union Parishads on matters relating to local government.

4.19. Local Government link with the Central government

According to the research, it has been observed that in the existing system, local government bodies are subject to strong control from higher level authorities, specially the central government. In case of Union Parishad, there are dual control and supervision exercised by both Upzila Parishad and the central government in various matters.

In the recently approved system however, control would only come from the central government, in auditing income expenditures. In case of Upazila/Thana Parishad and Zila Parishad, similar control will prevail from central government. Upazila/Thana and Zila Parishads would also be subject to internal auditing.

Most of the elected government has taken steps to give importance to the empowerment of local governments, beginning at the Gram (Village) Parishad to the Zila (District) Parishad. Therefore, a Commission was set up for local governance. (Daily Star: 10 December 2010).

At present, local governments are subject to control in various matters, such as: The National Government exacts legislation on local bodies and formulates detailed rules relating to conduct of election, business, powers and duties of chairmen, assessment of taxes, preparation of budget, making of contracts, appointment and service matters of local government employment, accounts and audit and many other important areas. Even when local governments make regulations, these are to be approved by the central government.

The Central Government has the final authority in the determination of the size and boundaries of the local body's territory. The Central Government has the power to decide on the structure and composition of the local bodies. The Central Government substantially controls the personnel system of local bodies, particularly the appointment of the Chief Executive Officer in City Corporations and Pourashavas as well as other officials.

The Central Government controls the functional jurisdiction of local bodies. Besides, designated functions (as in ordinance), the government can assign any other function to a local body. Inter-institutional disputes within local body areas are to be settled by the Central Government. In the large cities there are multiple agencies offering services to the citizens. Often there is serious lack of coordination amongst them and between the local government body and service delivering central government agencies.

In the field of finance, government supervision and control is wide and strict. In addition to financial control in general, the central government can wield power by reducing or enhancing grant-in-aid to local bodies, even to city authorities. The Central Government asserts control and supervision over general administration of local bodies, including of large City Corporations.

The central government may order an inquiry into the affairs of a local body generally or into any particular affair either on its own initiative or on an application made by any person to the government; and the Central Government has the power to dissolve a local body on charge of gross inefficiency, abuse of power, or inability to meet financial obligations. However, instances of such action in Bangladesh have been rare in recent time.

The present system of local government in Bangladesh is under heavy control of the central government. It is hoped however, that the ongoing process of empowering local governments by the present regime will be able to bring out significant change in the structure. Even if it is a partial success, this would be some gain in favor of local body autonomy. There is an imbalanced link between the central government and the local governments. The central local linkage occurs in the matters of overseeing the functioning of local governments, providing financial support and assigning additional functions, which is to be performed on behalf of the central government.

In Bangladesh, however, local governments operate more as subordinate agencies of the central government. Every effort should be made to make local

government bodies operate as autonomous partners. At present the central government controls and regulates local governments through various laws and also reserves unhindered authority to supersede a local body or to suspend an elected chairman. The existing law provides for the suspension of the Chairman of a Union Parishad, but does not specify the process of disposal or the time limit for such disposal.

As a result, a Chairman considered recalcitrant for any reason may remain suspended for an indefinite period. There is no provision for appeal against an arbitrary action in this regard. Besides, in such cases the same authority acts both as the prosecutor and the judge. There are also many ways in which the bureaucracy at the local level, particularly the Deputy Commissioner, exercises controlling authority over the local bodies and their elected functionaries. At present local government is treated as a line function, like any other line function of the central government.

4.20. Extent of Public Participation

The Constitution of Bangladesh framed and approved in 1972, within a year of the country's independence, categorically emphasizes the need for establishing local government with a representative character (Chapter 3, Article 59). It also implies direct participation of the people in constituting the local body and in managing the affairs of such bodies.

However, in the years following the adoption of the constitution, the spirit of people's participation in local bodies was not always adequately maintained. Frequent changes in the local government structure are partly responsible for this. The extent and quality of people's participation have also been variable. The best participation was the opportunity of casting votes during the election of local bodies. But elections were not held at regular intervals.

The Local Government Commission has also recommended participation of various categories of disadvantaged groups in local body activities, through nomination in committees. At village level, people's participation is very much in

practice in all NGO led programmes, as well as in many government programmes. As for the urban areas, local level participation has been sought, but with limited success so far.

Local government as a political institution to ensure public participation in development activities is yet to take proper shape in Bangladesh. Since Independence in 1971, successive governments have tried to use the local government system for their own political interest. The party or regime in power wanted to make the local government representatives their power base and manipulated the system to this end.

It is being noted that the existing administrative structure and elected local bodies do reach the grass-roots level and have almost all the features necessary for participatory decentralized administration. But, this structure has failed so far to perform efficiently for two reasons, despite the strong support for local government enshrined in the Constitution, the central government has compromised these advantages by exercising control over local government and starving these agencies of resources. Most administrative decisions still remain to be taken centrally. Frequently they are involved with top-level officials in the secretariat, even some ministers depending on the subject. Several abortive attempts have been made at decentralization, but the system has remained highly centralized. As of such, local bodies are characterized by weak administrative capacity, a limited financial and human resource base and little public participation" (Ahmed 1997).

Chapter 5

Political Empowerment of Women Representatives

in Union Parishad

Women empowerment is a precondition to empower women in politics. A just social status and a rightful economic role of a woman cannot be achieved without commensurate political empowerment. Bangladeshi women need to strengthen their political participation at the grassroots level and to live safe in the world of global democracy.

The local governance ordinance 1997 made provision for reserve seats for women representations but does not ensure their activities or responsibilities properly. Therefore, there are invisible difference between general seat and reserved seat. As a result, discrimination and indifference automatically have been occurred. It is seen that, male counterparts are more in general seats, hence the indifference between male and female representatives in local governance are more than ever before.

5.1. Responsibilities of the women members in Union Parishad

In local level rules, regulations and ordinance of Union Parishad is not divided specifically among male and female members. The executive power of the Union Parishad is admissible for the Chairman. He/she him/herself or his selected persons can carry on the duties.

In the manual of Union Parishad, there are no provisions on specific duties for the elected women representatives. On the other hand male counterparts of the local level politicians think that there is no need for women's involvement in local governance. Women elected members are frustrated by their negligence (Hasanuzzaman, Al Masud: 2002.pg: 183)

Actually, there is no administrative provision against the distribution of work among women members, source from local government rural development

authority says. It should be understood by every one that women members are elected from the three unions as well as one male member is elected from only one Union Parishad, naturally their duties should not be the same nature and structures. But which sectors will be different from the main duties or responsibilities and which part will be incorporated, definitely there should be a guideline. Therefore, women members are asking for their specific responsibilities to be performed.

5.2. Quota system: A device for women political empowerment in Bangladesh

Almost 95 percent of all countries in the world have granted women the most fundamental democratic right, the right to vote and the right to stand for elections. The real scenario is, however, that the number of women that actually stand for election and becomes representatives is very small in number. Statistics from the Inter-Parliamentary Union show that the world average of women in National Parliaments is only 15.3 % (Khan.Salma:1994).

This under-representation of women in formal politics is now widely regarded as a problem. “International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance” recommend and has projects on women and decision-making. At least 103 countries today have taken some kind of political steps, like quotas in order to increase the number of women in formal politics. While these measures first emerged in the 1950s in countries like Bangladesh and Pakistan there has been a rapid increase in the last decade and a majority of these steps have been taken since 1995 (Krook, 2003c:2-3).

More than 30 countries have introduced gender quotas for elections to national parliament by constitutional amendment or by electoral law. More than 50 countries of the world the major political parties' themselves demand that a certain minimum number of the parties' candidates for election to national parliament must be women (Dahlerup and Drude, 2002).

5.3. Quota system: An instrument for political empowerment

The two neighboring countries India, Pakistan along with Bangladesh have introduced quota systems at the local level for women reserved seats with direct elections. One way to determine the low rate of women in formal politics is the presence of structural barriers that constrain the ability for women to run for election and become representatives. Factors like electoral systems, political parties, and tier of development, gendered norms and cultural difference, socio economic issues are some that could be mentioned. The implementation of a quota then becomes a device to compensate for structural barriers like these.

The implementation of reserved seats in Bangladesh (1997), India (1994), Pakistan (2001) and has been regarded as a historical step, not only to increase the number of women in formal politics but also when it comes to political empowerment for women in the region. In India they have 33% reserved seats for women, in Pakistan 29%² and in Bangladesh 25% reserved seats, all representatives are being elected directly (F.Emma :2004). The direct election to local bodies in Bangladesh has brought about a 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.

5.4. Quota and political empowerment: Strategically overview

The implementation of quota systems in local government is often a top-down strategy in which women are given political positions from above. Reserved seat is often not a result of national demand from women's organizations in the countries but rather due to populist politics by governments to gain international or national political status.

5.5. Quota for reserved seats

Reserved seats however guarantee a certain percentage of women as the seats themselves only can be filled by women. The concept 'quota' or reserved seats is not one strategy but a term including many different strategies and systems with

different outcomes, will be gaining in future. Supported by law or constitution, it is important to make a distinction between legal quotas and party quotas. There is also a difference between 'quotas as reserved seats' and 'electoral quotas' or 'candidate quotas'. In Bangladesh, reserved seats are a system that guarantees women a certain number of seats in the parliament or in the local government independent of the electoral result.

The other two systems prescribe a certain percentage of women on the lists presented to the voters in the election (Dahlerup and Freidenvall, 2003:9). It is important to note that these different types of quotas tend to vary in the degree to which they actually increase the number of women in politics (Krook, 2003b).

To compare 'quotas as reserved seats' with 'electoral quotas or 'candidate quotas' there has to be a big difference in the results. The problem here is the lack of guidelines as to where female candidates must be placed on party or electoral lists. If they are put at the bottom of the list they are of course less likely to be elected.

In India, Pakistan and Bangladesh seats are reserved for women by law or constitution. In the case of India, Pakistan and Bangladesh it is also important to make a further distinction between 'reserved seats with indirect election' and 'reserved seats with direct election'. Systems with indirect elections have a certain number of seats that are reserved for women, but they are nominated and elected by, for example the directly elected representatives.

In systems with direct election there are certain seats reserved for women to whom only women are allowed to contest. The former systems of reserved seats in India, Pakistan and Bangladesh were filled with nominated and indirect elected women. In the new systems they are direct elected to the reserved seats.

It is been observed that reserved seats issues in local level politics is a new international discourse on women in institutional politics is an important factor behind recent introduction of quotas in South Asian countries like India, Pakistan and Bangladesh. The women in grassroots level have a lower political awareness

and serve the patriarchal interest of the family and as such their participation in politics is in itself patriarchal participation.

Local politics in rural Bangladesh has concluded that the local government as an institution mainly serves the interests of the rich and powerful elite and the poor tend to be viewed as manipulated, forced and violated by the local elites (Nathan, 1998). Political empowerment seems to require a prior process of social empowerment through which effective participation on politics becomes possible.

The quota system which was in use from the 1970s until 1996 in Bangladesh (at both national and local level) women were nominated and then elected indirectly. The system has been heavily criticized by researchers, and according Najma Chowdhury, the reserved seats in the parliament reflected a paternalistic approach to women's representation.

Instead of empowering women, the patriarchal political culture of society transformed these instruments to further marginalize women in the political sphere (Chowdhury, 1994a:98). She argued that the system of indirect election of the reserved seats in parliament only ensured that the party maintaining a numerical majority in the legislature would continue to control the seats. The nomination process also resulted in good relations to the ruling political elite being more important than local political support (Chowdhury, 1994a:98, & Chowdhury, 2002:52).

The self image of the local women is generally low in each Union Parishad. The ideal of womanhood held in society can rarely be attained because so many factors prevent it, including the male view of women as chattels, the practice of Purdha, the religious marginality of women, divorce and the undervaluing of their large contribution which women make for the society. Basically, women internalize the low esteem in which men generally hold them. Increasingly, the local people are them who are functionally landless, whose recent increase in numbers is alarming. Identified problems are as follows:

- The belief that simply extending education and opportunities to women would solve their problems was an unexamined assumption.
- Treating women as “add-ones” in development activities meant they were of secondary importance and hence often received token funding.

The results of women’s government units to promote their incorporation in national development scheme also appeared largely unsuccessful. Gender and development programs emphasize the limitation of focusing on women only and stress the necessity of realizing that women’s lives are grounded in social relations with men that set parameters for their actions, beliefs, and outlooks.

5.6. Political party connection

The reality is that local democracy is not that easy to attain. The scenario prevailing in Bangladesh presents a grim picture in respect of local democracy. Though the history of local governance in Bangladesh is hundred years old institute but till today, the citizens of Bangladesh have not experienced a stable Local Government structure. Though the vision of Local Government is clearly articulated in the Constitution of Bangladesh, but due to political interference and lack of political will, central control is still prevailing despite local government body’s untapped potential.

5.7. Participation of Women members in various developmental activities in local level

The participation of women Union Parishad members in various development activities are given below:

- (a) Infrastructural development, constructions of road, bridges culvert etc.
- (b) Relief and rehabilitation.
- (c) Health and environment improvement,

- (d) Women and child development, public health
- (e) Social justice, decision making in village court, arbitration and
- (f) Communication with public and private sectors etc.

The study examines the participation in these activities from two perspectives—one, informal involvement and two, more formal involvement through the various relevant committees.

5.8. Health and environment

It is also to be mentioned that “Awareness creation” among the people for hygienic toilet set up, cleanliness; safe child delivery, tree plantation and safe water drinking habits were the most important involvement of the women members in the Union Parishad. A large proportion of the women leaders were involved in setting up and building awareness for hygienic toilet. Environmental activities including plantation and awareness creation about the danger of arsenic contaminated water and to beware of taking initiatives against natural calamities like cyclone, flood, strike etc. were also reported as a very important work for them. Counseling and providing motivational support were the prime role for women in the health and environmental activities. The villagers who were homemakers were significantly more involved in environmental activities.

Even though the new Union Parishad members were more involved in arsenic awareness work, re-elected members were more likely to be involved in the sanitation activities.

5.9. Women and child development

Most of the members reported taking part in activities to prevent violence against women. One-fourth of the women conducted meeting with both parties in preventing violence. It is noted that the level of capacity in preventing violence against women, a key challenge for women’s empowerment seemed to be weak among the women Union Parishad members. Besides these, other activities that

the members were involved in to prevent violence against women include, arbitration or *Shalish*, boosting up awareness through meeting , conducting case or informing police etc. few of the women reported being involved in mobilizing financial assistance for the vulnerable women. Involvement in activities to socially rehabilitate vulnerable women was weak. Reelected and more aged members were more likely to participate in activities pertaining to women development and their social protection.

About two-fifth of the women Union Parishad members reported participation in various child development activities, mostly in creating awareness about children's education. Very weak involvement was reported in mobilization for child immunization, and promoting child nutrition. Women members coming from better off families, home-makers and re-elected women UP members were more likely to be involved in child development related activities.

5.10. Relief and rehabilitation activity

Union Parishad members reported involvement in relief and rehabilitation activities. Their participation in such activities was mostly as members. Few of them also reported their involvement in selecting the VGD/VGF cardholders. The VGD/VGF card selection and relief or rehabilitation activities were highly significant among the women Union Parishad members who came from strong family back ground or came from high economic family condition and those who were re-elected in the Union Parishad election

5.11. Infrastructure development

Less than a quarter of the women Union Parishad members reported participating in infrastructure development activities. The study had found that the Union Parishad members did not participate in all areas of infrastructure development equally. A very small number of women participated in the more technical role of infrastructure development works of the villages as supervisor or counselor. The bi-variant analysis shows that the aged, women from high earning families, and re-elected women Union Parishad members were significantly more likely to

be involved in infrastructure development work. They do get priority in this regard.

5.12. Social justice, Law and Order

One half of the members reported being involved in social justice related activities such as shalish, arbitration, etc. In this regard their role as the judge and a few of them were in the role of counselors. One third of the women Union Parishad members also took part as a member of jury in the village level courts. 50% women Union Parishad members reported taking part in suppressing crime in their locality. The Union Parishad members who were older and re-elected were much more likely to be participated in the decision-making role. One third of the women reported their participation in crime suppression through arbitration. Generally, the experienced women who are aged with more education were significantly more likely to be involved with activities related to social justice.

5.13. Communication and Committee involvement

50% of the women reported relationship with the various NGOs working in the rural areas to develop the society. Over quarter of the women UP members had the relationship with BRAC; Nijera Kori etc. most of them had the relation with Shushilan and over a majority women maintained the relation with other NGOs. The women UP members who were homemakers, came from better off families, and re-elected were significantly more networked and active in their roles.

Involvement in different formal committees is an important prerequisite for more effective participation in decision making of local governance. This was very weak and backward position for the women Union Parishad members. On the other hand, in almost all the committees they played a very marginal role as members. One third of the women Union Parishad members reported their involvement in two or more committees.

Except the family planning activities and women health issues their participation in all developmental work was remarkably higher than what their committee involvement would suggest. Thus, despite quite active participation in the various activities of the various Union Parishad committees, the women Union Parishad members were marginalized in terms of their involvement in actual decision-making platforms. The committee involvement was found to be significantly higher among the more aged women, coming from better off family and re-elected (LG Report :www.lgd.org.bd).

Based on “Gender and good governance in Bangladesh: A Baseline Study” by The Research and Evaluation Division (RED) of BRAC, identified the situation of elected women Union Parishad members’ involvement in various public and social activities which are given bellow.

- Typically, the women Union Parishad members are young and modestly educated. They also feel that they have good leadership qualities. More than half of them are re-elected and thus had previous exposure to the functions of the Union Parishad.
- They are involved in various public and social activities, though not equally in all domains. However, their involvement is mostly informal and they tend to be excluded from the various formal committees of decision-making. Even in instances that they are involved in the committees, their position is marginal.
- The women Union Parishad members who were more aged, came from better off families and were re-elected were significantly more involved in the various activities and the committees.
- The FGDs: Focus Group Discussion (according to the baseline study) revealed that the women Union Parishad members felt that they lacked knowledge and information on the overall functions of the UP, their roles and responsibilities as Union Parishad members, government resources, such as, allotment and distribution system of relief, food for work, VGD cards, old age

allowances and health, and agriculture facilities at the union level (Gender and good governance in Bangladesh: A Baseline Study. Pg: 9).

5.14. Gender and Local Governance: Its implications on development

Among the findings of the study on local governance states that the local government systems of Bangladesh is unable to conduct it's responsibilities. The formal responsibilities currently assigned to local government is numerous and varied. Realistically, Local Government is able to undertake fewer activities and even then in a very limited manner.

5.15. Gender and Local Governance: Experiences of women representatives so far

In Bangladesh the Election problems are greater. Use of force and money are the two major factors, which influence and manipulate election results. Women who had no ability and capacity to exert pressure or use money are in a disadvantaged position in the election. It is not safe for them to contest in the election. In some areas women were threatened if they chose to contest the election.

If they did not comply, they were threatened that they would be killed. These types of activities created barriers to women contesting in the Union Parishad election. (Nasreen.2002) Now Election Commission of Bangladesh is taking initiatives to overcome these types of problems.

Violence in election is a common phenomenon in Bangladesh. Vested quarters, in some areas, have tried to resist women's participation in the election. Being defeated in the election, supporters of the chairman threatened and assaulted the wife and sister of Tarun Mandal, an activist of the contestant candidate at Sheikh Nazirpur village of Pirozpur District.

5.15.1 Profile of a woman Union Parishad Chairperson

Laili Hamid was an elected chairperson of Sallah Union Parishad, in Kalihati Thana of Tangail District. She is married and a mother of three children. She is a matriculate. She was chairperson of Mahila Unnayan samiti before being elected as chairperson of the union Parishad. Her father was a school teacher. Her grandfather, father in law and husband were elected Union Parishad chairperson at various times.

She comes from a family with a political background and also married into a family with the same tradition. This has made her aware of Union Parishad work. In her option, the union parishad Chairperson is the leader of the Union. As a woman chairperson, she is more concerned about women's issue and violence against women. She is aware of different problems of women in her constituency. She feels that it would be easier for women to come to a female chairperson to talk about their problems, rights and responsibilities.

During the election campaign, she and her sister in law went to different areas of the Union. She arranged at least one meeting in each village before the election. She also went different houses to seek votes from both male and female members.

There were four male candidates running against her the election but she won with a handsome margin. She is not a member of any political party. So, far she has not faced any specific difficulties in carrying out her responsibilities as chairperson.

After becoming chairperson, she began conveying meetings of the Vulnerable Group development (VGD) programme every month. Although the general meetings of the Union Parishad are not held regularly, the members of the Union Parishad attend all meetings when called. She gets cooperation from the Thana and Zila Administrations.. The religious leaders sometimes created problems. They preached that it is prohibited in Islam for women to become chairperson or leader of a Union Parishad. But their words did not have much impact upon her election or performance as a chairperson. In her option, the main problem facing women in the Union is dowry, which creates tremendous family conflict and conjugal trouble. She goes to different village for Salish, even at night. Two or three members also accompany her during Salish.

Directly elected women can become effective role models for future generations.

5.16. Women: Non Voting Rights

Although the Bangladesh Constitution guarantees equal rights irrespective of gender, the reality is different in the scenario. In some part of the local level, women are being deprived of their voting rights due to the male members of their family or religious groups. Kalikapur and Jaudi is two Unions of Madaripur district that have 9,000 women voters but they could not cast their vote for the last 35 years because of the *fatwa. It was found that the local elite, through a religious promulgation, imposed a ban on the voting rights of women of the locality. Since then they could not cast their vote. During the Parliament election held on June 12,1996, some officials of an NGO (Madaripur Legal Aid Association) inspired some of the women voters to exert their voting rights. But social ostracizing-phobia panicked them. As a result 9,000 women abstained from casting their votes. However, women candidates contested for the elected posts while the voters were men only (The Daily Jonokontho: Nov, 30,1997)

5.17. Local level Politics: A real scene

The elections to Union Parishad are technically non-party based. Despite this, there are informal connections to national parties and the election often mirrors the support for the ruling party and the opposition. According to Ahmed, the political parties control and decide who will represent the party in the elections – even at the local level. By doing so they are playing an important role shaping women’s representation in formal politics. A strong connection to a party is one of the basic requirements for nomination as a candidate (Ahmed, 2003).

*Most importantly, a fatwā is not by definition a pronouncement of death or a declaration of war. A fatwā is an Islamic legal pronouncement, issued by an expert in religious law (mufti), pertaining to a specific issue, usually at the request of an individual or judge to resolve an issue where Islamic jurisprudence (fiqh), is unclear (www.understandingislam.org).

During field research I had found that one can also ‘buy’ the support from a political party if one offers the right amount of money though none of them told me directly. According to their indirect opinion, the political parties don’t offer any money to support the election campaign; rather, one can pay money to be nominated.

This study had also found that Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) and Awami League (AL) have been really interested in increasing the number of women in their own parties. By nominating few women candidates they have worked as an efficient gate-keeper to the general seats (Ahmed, 2003). According to official statistics from Bangladesh Election Commission, 110 women were elected to the general seats in the 1997 election and only 91 in the 2003 election.

It is been noted that the small number of women in the parties also has consequences for the reserved seats. One of the problems is that they don’t gain much experience of insider politics which makes them less influential in the system than male counterparts. They had lack leadership experience and become quiet and shy when they enter the Union Parishad. This is of course also a consequence of gendered norms and cultural patterns and the pre-determined social roles assigned to women and men. Although the women themselves are not active in any political party, their relatives may be. In my interview sample, six women out of 17 had some male relative (husband, brother, father) who was/is politically active. And even if they did not tell me that they represented any particular party their relatives’ connection must not be underestimated, something that I will discuss in the next chapter.

5.18. Local Governance: NGO-nominated women

Among the women respondent, five women told that they had been nominated and encouraged by their NGO (Nijera Kori) to stand for election. These women

had also received help during the election campaign from other members of the organization. According to Hashmi, the link between women involved in NGOs and running for election at the local level seems to be weak and does not go beyond nominating some women as candidates in the local council elections. In the elections to UP in 1997 only 10 per cent of the elected members (both men and women) were NGO-organized. Out of 700 elected women however, the number was a little bit higher, around 38 per cent. Hashmi argues that NGOs have had little influence on voters to vote for or against any candidate or party despite all the positive words about their success (Hashmi, 2000:141).

5.19. Local level election campaign

The election commission has imposed some general rules to be maintained by the candidates. Even the campaign itself seems to cost a lot of money and time which is really behind the scene.

5.20. Authority of Union Parishad

Union Parishad is a very old institution and the only elected level of local government, it seems to be a weak institution since all important decisions are made at the national level. Actually, Union Parishad play a minor role when it comes to development planning of the union. One of the problems is that Union Parishad does not have the proper authority to make important decisions regarding their union.

According to Aminuzzaman, the responsibilities of the Union Parishad go beyond the legal, managerial and financial capacity of the body. They don't have any authority to take any substantive or policy decisions without the approval of the controlling authority. Instead the work is directed by laws and regulations from the government. Apart from this, all the work in Union Parishad is supposed to be conducted through 12 standing committees¹⁶ which are often not functioning (Aminuzzaman, 2003:4-5). These problems were also illuminated by informants that I talked to.

The central government control on the local government pervades all aspects of its functioning and decision-making. For example, the ADP prescribes that 60% of the finances amount must go to projects about communication and transportation, 20% to agriculture and irrigation, 10% to education and 10% to physical infrastructure. The heavy focus on infrastructure makes it difficult to make any meaningful investment in other areas (Aminuzzaman, 2003). This was also reflected in my interviews.

When I asked the women members what they had done, all of them told that they had been able to build roads, bridges, culverts, putting efforts in “Shalish” and so on. No one mentioned that they had done anything for health clinics or schools in the union for example. There is apparently no law or like the quorum of the parliament that all of the members of the union have to be present to make decisions like these. Instead some of the women told me that they were sometimes not informed about meetings which dealt with large amounts of money.

5.21. Limited resources of Union Parishad

Union Parishad has limited financial resources. The budget allocation that comes from the government is not sufficient for the Union to fulfill all its responsibilities. The Union’s ability to collect its own revenues through taxes is limited since the people in the rural areas are very poor. In view of the study findings regarding the possibilities for the Union Parishad, to collect their own revenues is becoming further constricted since more and more of the financial resources now go first to the Upazila/Thana level which is supposed to distribute the money to the Unions in the area.

Actually the Union *as such* had too little budget therefore for a majority of women, it had been a problem for them to get their share of the resources that are distributed by the Union Parishad and the different development funds which all work is supposed to go through. To get money for projects the Union Parishad sends a list of project proposals to the Upazila/Thana level for approval

(Aminuzzaman, 2003). It is in this process that the women have problems in getting their projects on the list for approval. There is no practice of publishing budgets and instead the chairman often selects projects with limited involvement of the members (Aminuzzaman, 2003).

Structurally the union is divided into nine wards and a member elected as a general member has to look after one ward. But the women elected to the reserved seats have three wards to cover which means that their wards are three times larger than those of the general members. Most of the women brief in their opinion that since the ward of the reserved seats are three times bigger than the wards of the general seats this should be reflected in the shares of the development funds. That is, the women should be given three times the money compared to a member from a general seat.

The struggle and competition over resources between general members and women in the reserved seats does not appear to be logic since the wards of the general seats and the wards of the reserved seats are overlapping each other and they could cooperate.

It had been noticed which I got from my interviews, there is no cooperation between the members from the general seats and the women from the reserved seats that cover their wards. Instead they are competing over the resources that are given in the Union Parishad to be able to have their name on the projects that are approved. The problem with resources has to be understood in the light of how a project that is done through the Union Parishad is looked on by the village people and the role of the members.

A real scenario is, many people come to the member's private houses to ask for help. To be a successful member one must be able to do things and help people. Some of the women representatives mentioned this as a problem; a majority of the key persons highlighted this issue. Even if the women manage to get the same amount of money as the members of the general seats they have a three times larger ward to cover. Five of the women told that this was one of the reasons why

they did not run for re-election and some times this issue can be a great issue for non co operational matter.

They explained that a lot of poor people had come to their house asking for help; when the member couldn't help them, they became helpless. I tried to figure out that "How to solve this financial problem with the limited resources of the Union Parishad?" Many elected members pay from their own pockets to fulfill their commitments to their voters. The male members will be benefited in other ways which make this behavior logical.

Many women do not get anything from their membership. One of the women told me that she was not able to benefit from her membership in Union Parishad and that it had been a catastrophe. She was briefing with great sorrow. All family members had put a lot of money in the election campaign in the conviction that they would all be benefited by her new role. But as she couldn't do anything (it only cost a lot of money) her family, who had been supportive before, became angry and disappointed at her. She had become a burden to her family.

5.22. Union Parishad: Chairmanship

The actual scenario is the powers of the Union Parishad are predominantly vested in the chairman, who is authorized to exercise such powers by him /her or through other persons authorized by him (Aminuzzaman, 2003). Most of the interviewers whom I talked to also illuminated the problem that the Union Parishad has a centralized power structure where it is the chairman makes the decisions.

It is been found that the system of electing the chairman directly from the whole ward and not from the elected members has created a structural problem in Union Parishad where the chairman dominates and holds the key to everything. Instead of answering to the members, the chairman cooperates with the government officials and works with the members he likes – while others are ignored.

If the chairman is elected by and from the elected members then this domination may be dissolved. Then the chairman would be answerable to the members in the Union Parishad and forced to cooperate with them.

The problem with the Union Parishad as a 'chairman-dominated' institution was reflected in my interviews and had consequences for the elected women and their capacity to act. Some women representatives had very bad experiences with the chairman who did not want to cooperate with them. They were ignored and insulted during the meetings if they were informed at all that there was a meeting. They had not been able to accomplish anything in the Union Parishad.

Few other members had very good relations to the chairman and had been able to pass projects like building roads and so on. The other two women members, who told me that they had not been supported by the chairman, had instead a strong support from other members of the Union Parishad that put pressure on the chairman to listen to them.

Only two women told me that they had been supported by the chairman and that he had listened to them, and also honored them. The lack of clear demarcation of what the roles and responsibilities of the members in Union Parishad actually have had unseen, that is why the 'chairman-dominated' structure is being practiced by them in everywhere in local level politics.

The Union Parishad charter only highlights the duties and functions of the chairperson. This creates a scope for not sharing functions, power and resources with female members (Siddiqui, 2002). The study done by the World Food Programme mentioned earlier pointed out that many women were not members of any standing committee. If they were, they were mainly given responsibility for social welfare (World Food Programme, 1999).

Truly, there have been changes due to pressure from a network of elected members to the reserved seats. After the 1997 election the government specified that 1/3 of the chairs in the different standing committees had to be filled with women and that 30% of all the resources that are distributed through the union

have to be given to the women. The government, before the Union Parishad election 2003, presented a new circular where the roles and responsibilities for the different members were defined.

5.23. Male attitudes towards women members

The traditional patriarchal society of Bangladesh is based on class and gender divisions. Within this system, the father, or in his absence, the next male kin is the head of the household. As a result, both decision making powers and economic control are vested in hands of men. As a result, both decision making powers and economic control are vested in hands of men.

Most women are not used to being active and participating in the public sphere, and lack of confidence which is of course important for the work in Union Parishad. The interviewers also mentioned that many villagers, both men and women; think it is difficult to accept a woman as a representative as this is not the traditional role of a woman.

The study found that female members perceived a lack of co-operation from the male members and that there was a communication gap between them. Male members have a tendency to oppose whatever female members propose even if they have the best ideas.

Many of the male members argued that the women members could not plan, participate or perform their duties properly as the female members can not influence the decisions. Most male members also argued that the elected women should deal with women's issues like violence against women, dowry and divorce and discouraged them to participate in other development works.

When I asked whether the female members had been able to participate in the meetings, whether they had been able to speak and so on, almost all of the women told me that they have had some problems even if a majority had participated in all the meetings.

The women members were not been supported by the chairman and had experienced the greatest problems. They had not been informed about the meetings; the male members had ignored them when they tried to speak or made noises so nobody could hear them during the meetings. Even the women who felt they were supported by the chairman complained about other male members' attitudes towards them. This was manifested in many ways, for example by lack of respect and honor, laughter and so on. Some women also told me that the chairman and male members had been angry when they demanded money for development projects.

5.24. Women participation in politics: increasing rate

As mentioned earlier the concept 'quota' is not one strategy but a term for many different compensational strategies and systems like 'quotas as reserved seats' and 'electoral quotas' or 'candidate quotas' which have different outcomes when it comes to increasing the number of women. Reserved seats are a system that guarantees women a certain number of seats in the parliament or in the local government regardless of the electoral result. The other two systems prescribe a certain percentage of women on the lists presented to the voters in the election (Dahlerup and Freidenvall, 2003:9, Krook, 2003b).

According to official statistics from the Bangladesh Election Commission, the number of reserved seats is the same as the number of elected women. The system with reserved seats with direct election in Bangladesh doesn't not seem to have the same implementation problems other systems have. Of course this is not a guarantee that the seats will be filled, as women must stand for election. In some conservative areas of Pakistan the reserved seats for women have not been filled (Reyes, 2002).

In Bangladesh this has not been a problem. The new system with direct election instead of indirect election to the reserved seats is also important. As noted before, the former system with indirect election was criticized by researchers in Bangladesh. The women were not active and did not receive the same respect as

the directly elected members (Chowdhury, 1994a, Chowdhury, 1994b, Thörlind, 2003).

The system with reserved seats in Bangladesh has the advantage that there is no discrepancy between the percentage of reserved seats and the number of women elected. The women have invested a lot of effort and money to be elected and they will not accept being passive members in the Union Parishad as the nominated women before them had been. This was also mentioned by many of the women said that they feel they have a lot of support behind them as they have been elected by the people in their ward.

5.25. Women's capacity to perform in local governance

The relation between the system of reserved seats in Union Parishad and women's capacity to act seems to be dependent on a lot of factors. One of these things is the gendered norms and the practice of *purdah*.

Thus, the elected women members of each Union Parishad in general seat or in reserved seats both they do not have much history of formal involvement in activities pertaining to the public domain. Women lack political experience become uncertain in public life.

In local level, politics are considered to be a 'male' thing and not for women. In the villages people have problems accepting that a woman can be a representative. The gendered norms also have an influence on women's abilities to act in Union Parishad as some elected male members do not want to accept and cooperate with women.

The election-system, with expensive election campaigns, also makes women dependent on support from their families. This may also restrict the elected women's ability to make their own decisions in Union Parishad. Even though the size of the ward is bigger (which make it more time consuming and more expensive than an election in the general seats) the competition is not equal to the general seats.

Many of the women I talked said that it was easier to be elected from the reserved seats than from the general seats since they do not have to compete with the men. When it comes to the authority and resources of Union Parishad this seems to have an impact on the ability for *both* the members in the general seats (often men) and the members in the reserved seats.

The central government control has consequences for what type of project they can develop and all the members are dependent on their relation to the chairman. But when it comes to the lack of resources women seem to be more vulnerable than the male members. The problem is that the chairman and the male members, compared to most of the women, have an income of their own and access to the family's income. They can also fulfill their commitments to their voters more easily than the women members even if the funds of the union are small and then become influential in society.

When I asked the women if they had problems to combine their work in Union Parishad with their duties in the household nobody told me this was a problem. They had all got help from their mother-in-law. It is also clear that the system of reserved seats with direct election, compared with the earlier system with nomination and indirect election has increased the legitimacy of the elected women as well as their own aspirations to do something; the women that had worked very hard to be elected had no intention to sit quietly in the meetings in the Union Parishad.

5.26. Experiences of women representatives: Local problems

All the elected women were well aware of their local problems such as erosion of roads, absence of communication, lack of women's education, under aged marriage, divorce, mother's health, trafficking, violence against women, dowry, prosperity, grabbing etc. Most of the women mentioned problems such as lack of education, health care, lack of water and sanitation facilities, problems with dowry and early marriages.

What was the solution about the problems which they are going through---they told me they had not been able to do anything and they had not participated in the meetings in Union Parishad? They were very unhappy and told me that they could not get any support (from the family or from the village people to run for reelection. These women both had party connections and had they not received any training during their term. All the other women representatives had been very active in Union Parishad and gone to all the meetings in UP. They told me that they had been able to do things like roads, culverts, bridges and distributed VGF (Vulnerable Groups Feeding) cards.

Another most important activity was distribution of wheat through VGF cards. The roads, the women I talked to had done, were small roads in the villages used by rickshaws. Even though roads like these are important for women the heavy focus on infrastructure seems to be related to regulations from the government that prescribe how financial resources are supposed to be used.

During the interview, it was quite clear that there was a discrepancy between what they had done and both their knowledge about local problems and what they wanted to do about these problems. Some of the women told me that they for example tried to improve the situation for divorced women and widows, wanted to establish a college in the village, provide furniture and water facilities to the primary school, attend to the lack of water and sanitation facilities, work against the practice of dowry and early marriage etc.

Apart from roads and so on she told me that she had given furniture to a Madrasa and dismissed a legitimate complaint to the police against her uncle, who had insulted a poor landless woman! That she was depending on her husband's political activity was obvious since the reason why she did not run for re-election was because the newly elected chairman was from another party and would not be supportive of her.

One woman told me that she had managed to get a Member of Parliament to pass a road project to build a bigger road to their union. Even though her husband was

not politically active they belonged to a higher socio-economic group than the other women I met. This woman member did not attend the meetings alone, but used to be accompanied by her husband. During the interview her husband was very active and filled in the answers for her and sometimes told her what to say.

5.27. Received training: important issue

As I had observed that the general knowledge among the elected women about the roles and responsibilities in Union Parishad was small and that there is a real need for training among them. As it is mentioned before that on a regular basis Women Union Parishad members should get training on their specific roles and responsibilities from National Institute of Local Government and other non government organizations.

A majority (70%) of the elected women to the reserved seats have received some training related to their membership (World Food Programme, 1999). The study done by Democracy watch showed that 50% of the female members had been trained by three or more NGOs (Democracy watch, 2002:36). Most of the women representatives had generally received 20 or more days of training. The number of days of training was a little bit lower; three women members had not received any training at all.

5.28. Some practical experiences of the women representatives

Asking about the new role as an elected member in Union Parishad had meant to them eleven of the women members told that they had not been able to do anything, said that it had been a bad experience. Four of them cried and was very sad as they had become a burden to her family. The other women members were positive and told me that it had been a good experience.

According to their statements, their new role in Union Parishad had given them a better position both in the village and in their family. Many of the women mentioned that they now are able to speak and to raise their voices publicly. Before their membership this was not possible for them.

Now people in the Union Parishad and in the village listen to them and they are also able to communicate with high officials like TNO (Thana Nirbahi Officer). They also told me that they were able to move more freely without permission from their husband, something that was very important. In this sense the election process has also been an important factor.

One of the members who had been elected in general seats, he told me that she had been out in some of the villages before the election and she was overwhelmed by all the women in groups she saw in the villages, moving from house to house, and from village to village campaigning. The work in the union has also developed a lot of new knowledge about Union Parishad, how to prepare a budget, how to pass and implement public works like roads etc.

All of the women members also mentioned about their new role in *shalish*. As mentioned before *shalish* has been closed for women but the new regulation with reserved seats for women has opened up this traditional village court for women. The women however, were very proud over the fact that they were to be able to conduct a *shalish*, judge and implement the judges a judgment that is supported and sanctioned by the whole Union Parishad.

Their new role as members of Union Parishad have also made them well known in the village and given them a larger social network than before. Many women come to their houses when they want help to solve disputes and quarrels. One woman told me that she and her husband together had been able to solve a dispute between two people in the village.

Another woman told that she heard that there were problems between a son and his mother – the son was beating the mother. The Union Parishad woman told him to stop but he did not listened to her. Then she sent for the police who sentenced him to jail for one month. After that he was very gentle and polite to his mother. One woman told that her work was previously concentrated on the family level as a housewife. Now she can talk with confidence to different people in a meeting and with high officials, something that was unthinkable before her

membership. Her social status has changed and she is honored by the local people.

5.29. To make changes at the structural levels

The woman in the reserved seats seems to have higher socio-economic status and belongs to a more influential family than the average rural woman. There are also indications that the elected women depend on the opinions of their families when they making decisions in UP.

According to my findings, the support from NGOs and capacity-building strategies to overcome this problem seems to be important. First, the NGOs seem to be important for the women and their self-esteem, something that can encourage them to run for election. Second, support from some NGOs can help women from lower socio-economic levels to be elected.

The support from NGOs also seems to be important in the work in UP if the elected women lack support from the chairman. Here the importance of capacity-building is also crucial. In order to make the women less dependent on their families, I think it is necessary to make distinctions between different strategies.

According to my findings, the most effective training was distributed locally and involved the whole union (both men and women) and the people in the village. When it comes to the concerns and priorities among the elected women who had been able to do things, I had found a discrepancy between what they wanted to do and what they had been able to do.

Most of the projects that were implemented were some kind of roads or culverts despite the fact that most of them mentioned other priorities like school, water and so on. Focus on development projects related to infrastructure seems to depend on regulations from the government that prescribes how the financial resources are supposed to be used.

Here the new role for women in *shalish* is important. Issues handled in *shalish* can be disputes over property, family, marriage, divorce or inheritance matters

but also violation of moral or religious codes and honor of the village community. Even though as a researcher I was not able to visit any *shalish* directly or know what kind of judgments the women had passed through, it is very interesting that women now conduct court and pass judgments in *shalish* as the issues handled by the local representatives, often affect the lives of women in a very distinct way.

May be this is an opportunity for women to change strong structural relations. Here the NGOs and the training also seemed to have importance. The women active in Nijera Kori were very conscious about political issues like power relations in the village and so on, and the women who had received training seemed to be more self-esteem and confident than those who had not received any training.

At the same time the training or the NGO involvement was not a guarantee that the elected women had other priorities and concerns as some of the women also seemed to be very dependent and influenced by their relatives. It was also clear that their new role had changed a majority of the women's social status - both in their family and in the village. They could talk publicly, people listened to them, they could move more freely and so on. As elected members in UP, their social empowerment had increased.

5.30. Insights from the women members: local governance

More than 50% of the participants thought that they had lack of knowledge on several issues, like, socio-economic problems of the poor, the amount and category of the local resources, condition of women in society, laws in favor of women, etc.

They also reported lack of knowledge on government resources, such as, allotment and distribution system of relief, food for work, VGD cards, old age allowances and health, and agriculture facilities at the union level. Rest of the 50% women members were not agreed by the statement.

All women members agreed that they should know in more detail about their responsibilities as well as be better informed about government facilities and how they could access them. More than 65% interviewees said that they could not explain Union Parishad and its functions were not aware of their exact position in the Union Parishad, weak in communication, linkage, liaison and co-ordination. 60% percent of participants said that they were afraid of solving problems and resolving conflicts because they were not experienced enough to handle problems and conflict; and they were not skilled enough to develop any income generating project.

Over 60% of interviewees expressed their views that they lacked the skill to conduct meetings or shalish. In fact, most of the time they were dependent on male members present in the shalish. They also spontaneously admitted that the women Union Parishad members talk a lot but without much effect as they are not well informed. On the other hand, it was also revealed that more than 60% of interviewees thought that they had good leadership qualities.

Women's empowerment is a precondition to empowered women in a least developed country like Bangladesh. A just social status and a rightful economic role of a woman cannot be achieved without commensurate political empowerment.

Bangladeshi women need to strengthen their political participation at the grassroots level and to live safe in the world of global democracy. An effective local governance mechanism plays a critical role in economic development and social justice. In the institutionalization of governance, in Bangladesh, local government suffers from negligence and is most often lost in the shadow of national policies, practices, and efforts at economic growth and social and political development as well as political empowerment of women.

The only elected local institution, the Union Parishad still remains weak due to the overshadowing dark cloud of inefficiency, lack of resources and political corruption resulting in a low level of confidence of people in it.

5.31. Quota in local governance: Empowerment of women representatives

The ‘quota system’ is often not a result of national demand from women’s organizations in the countries but rather due to populist politics by governments to gain international or national political status. It is also important to mention gendered norms, cultural patterns and pre-determined social roles assigned to women and men. Still, in many countries, women's primary roles areas mothers and housewives and not as politicians. In some developing countries, men even tell their woman how to vote (Shvedova, 1998:33).

According to Nadezhda Shvedova this also becomes a psychological barrier for women in that they lack confidence. “A certain culture of fear prevents women from contesting elections and from participating in political life” (Shvedova, 1998: 34).

Dahlerup 21 and Freidenvall claim that a new international discourse on women in institutional politics is an important factor behind recent introduction of quotas all over the world (Dahlerup and Freidenvall, 2003:3).

The one third of quotas for women representatives in grassroot level is certainly an important drive to women’s empowerment in Bangladesh. It becomes obvious that the process will take a certain time and the objective of women’s empowerment will not be secured by the quota system alone. Without women’s needs and interests being taken into account in the decision making process development interventions and planning sustainable results will not come.

Empowerment is a meaningful concept accepted by the scholars because it emphasizes the idea of women as active agents in, rather than passively recipients of development strategies. Therefore, participation is considered as an essentially first step in order to empower women.

Chapter 6

Data analysis of the Research Area

Women of Bangladesh have acquired a legitimate space in rural political institutions. This is a change in scenario which may raise their marginalized position in the society, as they are no longer a minority population in the country.

Merely, having women representation in local government does not automatically mean that the interests of women in the community are represented. Without consideration of women's needs and interests being taken into account and without any opportunity to participate and influence in policy decision-making, development interventions and planning will not bring sustainable outcome. Yet, having women representation and leadership positions in the local government is an important step in changing the male-dominated political agenda.

This study paper is a result of two years initial field study and research for another year in the seven district of Bangladesh. This was followed by another year of extensive research and data analysis in the lab. I have discussed the problems, constraints and performance difficulties faced by the women representatives at local government. In order to fulfill of the purpose of the study I had to face a lot of limitation of the time and particularly of the resources available. There were no authentic available resources; as such lot of time was spent to accumulate information on the subject from the field data collection.

The scope of the study is thus limited to the local level women in politics in Bangladesh. Therefore, other urban local level has been excluded. This study has also chosen to focus on elected women to the reserved seats even though there are a few women elected to general seats as well as the post of Chairman since these are open for both men and women.

Due to the time limitation the study covered seven Upazila selected randomly from the seven districts of the seven divisions in Bangladesh, thus maintaining

the diversity and representation of qualitative data from the interviews with the women representatives along with local peoples from different section of the society.

The study had chosen 36 (thirty six) Union Parishad from the seven Upazila of the 7(seven) districts in Bangladesh. Two sets of interview of two different types were conducted as follows: (a) interview with the women members in reserved seats and (b) a selection of the local people of the concerned areas. The local women representatives of the selected Union Parishad selected for the interviews were very happy and glad to express about their mind and in the present political and socio -economical position. They also expressed their expectation of the future of the local government.

The respondent's names and identities had been kept confidential for obvious reasons. While asking the questions, for the better understanding the interviews were conducted in Bangla language. Thus the English questionnaires were translated into Bangla for the sake of convenience and better understanding as the local language is Bangla.

The summery of the findings are as follows:

6.1.1 .Profile of the women representatives:

The local women representatives' socio-economic profile helps the study to understand the background the representatives. Taking gender perspective in political representation, the socio economic profile becomes even more important as a standard to analyze the impact of women's political leadership, and to understand whether their background is a reason for barrier or major obstacles for quality performance and functioning in the jobs.

The following table gives an overall educational scenario of the local women representatives in the study areas.

Table: 1**Educational Qualification of women representatives**

Level of Education	Women representatives	Percentage
Primary (i-v)	2	5.55
High School (vi-viii)	9	25
SSC	12	33.33
HSC	6	16.66
Graduation	6	16.66
Masters	1	2.77
Total	36	100

Source: Field survey

6.1.2. Educational Qualification

Analysis of the table -1, it is evident that the level of education of the female members were quite average, there were hardly any Union Parishad members who have not completed at least five years of schooling. It is observed from the above table that out of 36 women members, 2 women (5.55%) have completed their primary level education. 9 women (25%) have completed their secondary level education (class v to class viii).

Many of the 36 women from the study area have passed SSC level. The percentage of SSC exam (12 women) is 33.33%. Of the study group 6 women had received HSC exam that is 16.66%. There are six women who have graduated and the percentage is 16.66%. Only one woman was found who hold a Master degree, the percentage is 2.77%. The women representatives are young and moderately educated. It was found that education is the strongest single factor influencing women's control of their own position in the society.

The study also revealed that those women are on an average educated family and

financially quite well off due to their marital background. Though these women are educated they are unemployed leading to dysfunctional educational system in the rural area. All of them had gone to the local primary schools, but in high school level, 80% of the respondents said that they went to the government high school of their locality and the rest 20% went to the private high schools.

Improvement in the percentage of women education is the result of the increased enrollment in the primary level education. As a result, all women members were found to have completed their primary education. This increase in the enrollment of female may be attributed to certain initiatives of the government that include female stipend programme, media outreaches, satellite and village based schools and recruitment of female teachers in the primary schools. Some of the Union Parishads campaign has also played a significant role.

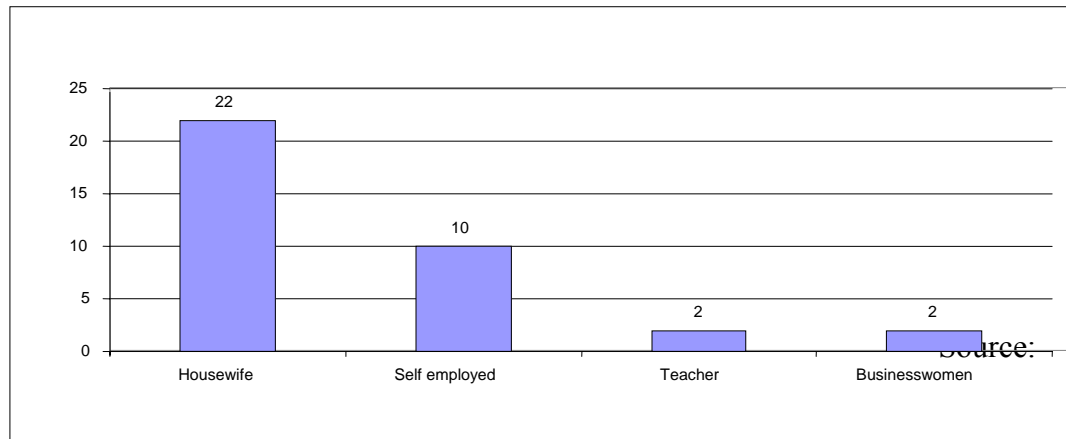
It is to be noted that as per findings, female Union Parishad members are coming from families where 30% percent of the spouse and guardian are illiterate. This is one of the major reasons for lack of effective participation among those women in Union Parishads. On the other hand, the women who had made a mark in the Union Parishad have come across the barrier of gender class traditional male bias dominated society.

In spite of vast progress in the social position of women, their poor status in family and society still are continued to exist even now. This is due to the strong patriarchal structure of the society. This poor socio economic status of the women might not only affect the social synchronization but also social interests in various dimensions as well.

6.1.3. Occupation of women representatives

The following graph-1 shows the occupational profile of the women representative at a glance.

Graph:1
Occupation of women representatives



Field survey

Most of the people under study were from the age group of 25-50 years. There was no significant difference in occupation level of the local peoples of the many Unions under the study. Of the thirty six local women representatives in the study there were 22 home-makers (61.11%) and no women was found as service holder. 2 women (5.55%) were teacher, 2 women (5.55%) were small businesswomen, 8 women (27.77%) were self employed in agriculture. There were 2 as a service holder in primary health and family planning within the group of thirty six. Economic condition through the occupation is one of the very sensitive indicators, which can be measured in various ways. The study had found that most of the female Union Parishad members have come from relatively disadvantaged low-middle class income groups.

However, a comparison of the present and past occupation status of the female members of the Union Parishad indicates some interesting changes. There have been some minor changes in the occupational profile of the female Union Parishad members before and after assuming of the member position at the Union Parishad. Some 25% percent of the Union Parishad female members are now involved in small agro based farming and taken it as profession; who were actually house-wives. While another 20% percent of the total respondents got

into the business setting up of handloom or handcrafts or dress making shop. There is another significant change in the occupational status; about 40% of the respondents become dedicated fulltime Union Parishad members after being elected to the Union Parishad. 10% of the Union Parishad members have left their previous jobs/employment due to increase of unemployment in the local area.

Our society is generally a male dominated society; most cases about 9 of every 10 households are headed by males. The study found, some changes have taken place in the headship of the household. Furthermore, the percentage for female generated households during the last five years *(2005 - 2010) has increased at an annual rate of increase of 4.81 percent. This indicates that female empowerment and awareness about women's rights in Bangladesh has been higher in recent years than before.

Increasing occupational sectors indicates that females are more likely to come out from their traditional family household work and want to engage themselves in other work like agriculture, industrial, transport & communication and business in order to generate their income along with their family responsibilities. Their economic freedom helps them understand about their social, political, economical rights.

6.1.3. (a) Income:

Most of the female Union Parishad members have come from relatively mid-lower income groups. Average family income of the Union Parishad female members is Tk. 5000, while 50% percent of the sample respondents have an income less than Tk. 4000 per month. Only about 3.6 percent of the respondents have a monthly family income of Tk. 10000 or above.

*Bangladesh Demographic and Health Survey (BDHS). 2011 ,Preliminary Report. National Institute of Population Research and Training, *Mitra and Associate*, Dhaka, Bangladesh.

6.1.4. Behavioral pattern: Male members

Behavior of the male counterpart as revealed by the thirty six women representative which is presented as follows:

Table: 2
Behavior of the male members towards women members

Category	Women members	Percentage
Not fair	2	5.55
Fair	6	16.66
Satisfactory	10	27.77
Good	18	50
Total	36	100

Source: Field survey.

Women representatives who had given their opinion regarding the attitude and behaviors of the male counterparts towards the women representatives are being stated here. 2 women members about 5.55% informed that their behaviors towards women were “not fair”. 6 women 16.66% informed “fair”, 10 women 27.77% had told “satisfactory, and rest of them 18 women (50%) had mentioned , “good”. However, these women members often encountered discrimination from the male members.

The male dominated and male-biased environment within political institutions in the local government deters women participation. The fact that there are few women on decision-making bodies means that these women have to work within their limitation of acceptance by the male dominated society. Sometime they are ignored and ill treated by their male colleagues. Most of the men believe that women should not run for general seats, they also denigrate the value of the reserved seats.

Lack of cooperation by men in the local government level is a significant barrier to women's effectiveness in decision-making. As a result, women cannot give attention to their genuine issues. Their behaviors to women were manifested in many ways, for example by showing lack of respect and honor, ill manner, laughter etc. Some women also reported that the chairman and male members had been unhappy when they had demanded fund for development projects. On the other hand, in most cases the elected women members are systematically discriminated by male, verbally abused, always assigned to specific development committee and excluded from arbitration committee, etc.

Most of the female members noted that in general they have a confrontational relationship with their respective Chairman and male members. They hardly get support, sympathy and or cooperation from their male counterparts and the Chairman.

6.1.5. Women member's experiences of participation

The following table shows the experience of participation scenario of women in the local government elections.

Table :3

Women members' experience of participation in local level election

Category	Women members	Percentage
First time participated in LG politics	30	83.33
Previously participated in LG politics	6	16.66
Total	36	100

Source: Field survey.

6.1.6. Experience of participation

Analysis of the findings shows that 30 women (83.33%) members have participated in first time in local level election and rests of the 6 women (16.66%) were re-elected in local level election. The study had found that number of women contesting in general seats is poor and the number is low. How

the communities had viewed these women representatives has affected those women who have created greater social legitimacy for women.

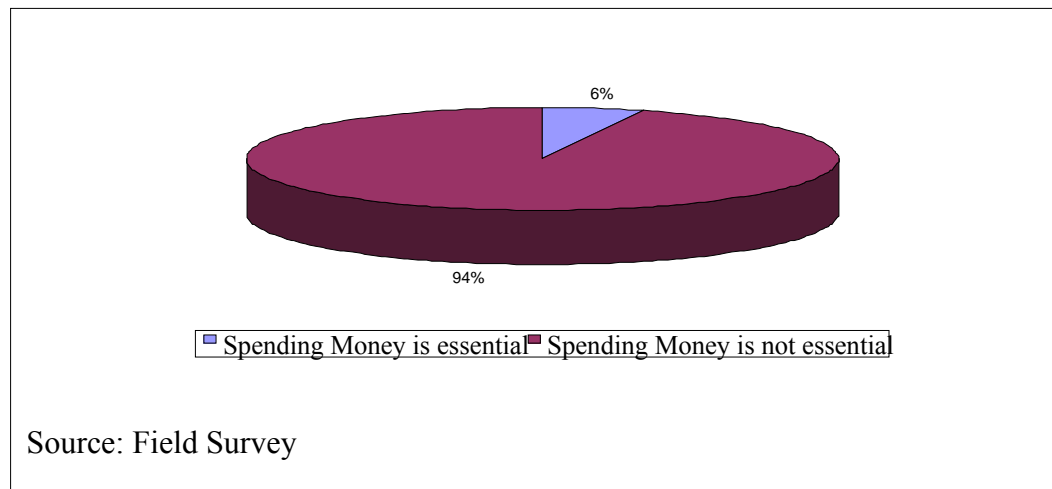
Most of the female members have been elected for the first time acknowledged that the training is important and necessity for them. The training has developed their understanding of the role and function of Union Parishad, and improved basic managerial skills.

6.1.7 Expenditure of the election

Women in the society are economically not solvent particularly in the local areas where they operate due to the poor socio-economic condition. Therefore, they have depended to their families for the finance of the election expenses.

The following graph shows the influence of strength of expenditures in the local government elections:

Graph:2
Expenditure of the election



Expenditure of the election

When asked whether “Spending huge amount of money in the election is the barrier for the participation in politics for women, what is your opinion regarding this issue”, 2 women 5.55% informed that money is important and is a strength in the election campaign. They also informed that they were some cases offered good amount of money by their opponent for not running for re-election. They informed that spending huge amount of money in the election is a barrier for

women, because women are not economically sound in the present socio-economic condition of the country. Others 34 women 94.44% have answered that they did not face many difficulties as they had got help from various sources, including family, relatives, local NGOs and others. This indirectly supports the statement of the small group of 5.55%.

The electoral system, with expensive election campaigns makes women dependent on their family members. This may also confine the elected women's ability to make their own decisions in the local level politics. Others 34 women (94.44%) had answered that they did not face much as they got help from various sources, including family, relatives, local NGOs and others.

6.1.8. Removal of barriers: women representatives' opinion

Women representative are of the opinion that there are many barriers for the women to effectively participate and function properly in the activities of the local government. Following table gives an impression of the views expressed by them to alleviate the barriers:

Table: 4

Removal of barriers: women representatives' opinion

Category	Number	Percentage
Remove quota system	9	25
Specific duties to be given to Women members	10	27.77
Free from political influence	4	11.11
Active participation as an elected representatives	3	8.33
Equal distribution of work	10	27.77
Total	36	100

Source: Field survey

In reply to the question “what is your opinion regarding the removal of barriers of the women representatives.” Among 36 women members 9 women (25 %) members are in favor of Government removal of the quota system. It is mentionable that the implementation of quota system in Bangladesh (1997) has

been regarded as a historical step, not only to increase the number of women in formal politics but also when it comes to political empowerment for women in the region. However, no doubt, as a step of women empowerment, the elected reserved seats for women helps to promote participation and women access to the decision-making process numerically, though not practically much ensured. That is why these women do not agree fully on quota system.

10 women (27.77%) reported that specific duties to be given to women members so that women member can meaningfully participate in all type of functions. Roles and responsibilities of the women members should be clearly defined in the manuals and ordinance of local government. 4 women (11.11%) suggested for the local body to be free from political influence. It is stated that, the elections to Union Parishad are technically non-party based. Despite this, there are informal/direct connections to national parties and the election often mirrors the support for the ruling party and the opposition.

The political parties sometimes control and decide who will represent the local community at the local level. A strong connection to a party is one of the basic requirements for nomination of a candidate. One can also 'buy' the support from a political party by offering the right amount of money in certain cases. These types of unfair issues of unfair political transactions influence the local level politics badly. Active participation as elected representatives is important. 3 women (8.33%) representatives had emphasized the fact that when women are directly elected by the constituency can also legitimizes their right to act on behalf of other women. The women roles cannot be performed, unless their duties and responsibilities are clearly mentioned in the manuals of the ordinance of local government.

Rest of the 10 women (27.77%) asked for equal distribution of work and responsibilities. They had claimed that work should be fairly distributed among the male and female members and this be incorporated in the manual.

Another problem is the division of the different wards in the Union. As illustrated earlier that the Union is divided into nine Wards and a member elected as a general member has to look after one Ward. But the women elected to the reserved seats have three Wards to cover which means that their Wards are three times larger than those of the general members. That is, the women member should be given three times more fund allocation for development work as compared to a member from a general seat.

6.1.9 .Responsibilities of a woman Union Parishad member

Another problem identified is the division of the different Wards in the Union. As illustrated earlier that the Union is divided into nine Wards and a Ward member elected as a general member has to look after only one Ward. But in case of the reserved seats, one women member is elected from three Ward; which means that their Wards covers three times larger areas than those of the general members. Therefore the women member should get three times the money allocation as compared to a member from a general seat.

Following table is an information of the responsibilities rendered by the women representatives of the study areas.

Table: 5
Responsibilities of a woman Union Parishad member

Category	Number	Percentage
Attending meeting	30	83.33
Participation in development of own area	6	16.66
Total	36	100

Source: Field survey.

All the respondents informed that they were only attending the monthly meeting. 30 women or 83.33% said that there are no jobs for them to do. In decision making issue, no women can give their opinion (06 women: 16.66 %) as it is mostly absent from their duties.

There is apparently no law or like the quorum of the parliament that all of the members of the union have to be present to make decisions.

Instead some of the women members reported that they were sometimes not even informed about meetings which dealt with the allocation of the money.

Active participation in the various Union Parishad meetings is an important factor for the female member's effective participation at local government and this may be assessed by the monthly meeting attendance. Though, over 83.33% of the women reported that they usually attended the monthly-meeting, rest of them reported that they do not attended the monthly Union Parishad meetings regularly.

As we have already known that in the Union Parishad system three women members were directly elected and each of these women's constituencies consists of three wards for the general seats. Therefore, women have a larger constituency and are responsible to a large number of populations.

However, there were still some constraints which women Union Parishad members encountered in performing their roles, some of these problems were related to their gender identity which the study had found. It is evident that women's voices were not heard and options were not accepted.

Moreover, male colleagues showed a negative attitude towards women members. Also, in this system there was no specific job description for elected women members. As a result, chairmen and male members were reluctant to hand over any job to their women colleagues.

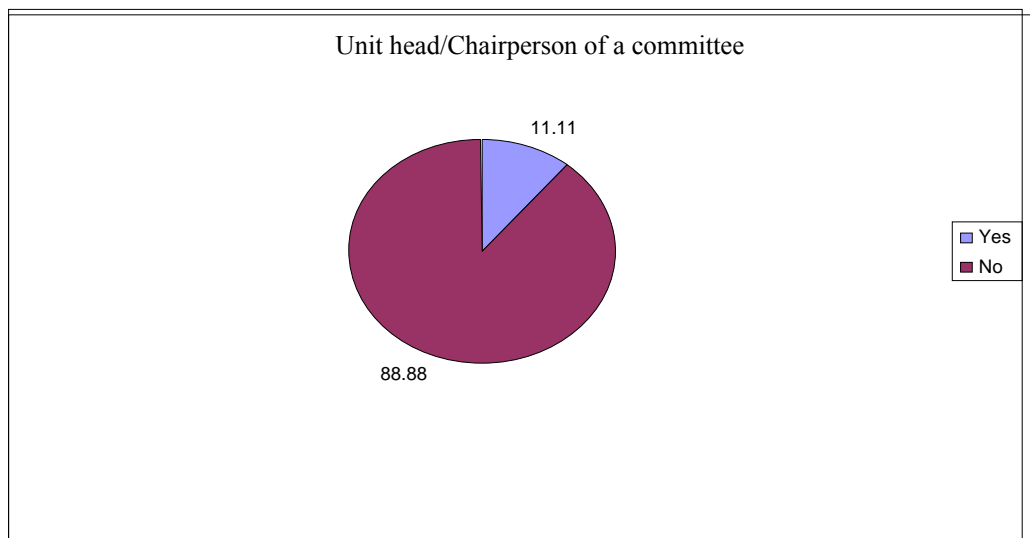
Recently the government circulated by-laws indicating few specific activities for women members. These circulars helped women Union Parishad members to prove their credentials in the local bodies though they are not sufficient.

6.1.10. Unit head/Chairperson of a committee

The following graph shows a poor picture of the women representative selected as unit head and the head of a committee:

Graph : 3

Unit head/Chairperson of a committee



Source: Field survey.

Among 36 women representatives 4 women (11.11%) were not involved directly in any committee, as well as 32 (88.88%) women members were Unit Head of different committee, but their activities are low in number. The study examines the participation of women representatives in the activities from two perspectives, informal involvement and more formal involvement through the various relevant committees.

These committees are :

1. Finance and establishment committee.
2. Education committee.
3. Mass education committee
4. Health, family planning and epidemic control committee.
5. Audit and accounts committee.
6. Agriculture and other development works.

7. Social welfare and community centers committee. 8. Cottage industries and cooperatives committee. 9. Committee for welfare of women and children.10. Fisheries and livestock committee. 11 Committee for conservation of the environment and tree plantation. 12. Union public works committee.13.Rural water supply and sanitation committee.14. Law and order committee. 15. Committee for sports and culture.*

From the field survey, the study found that women members are involved in various public and social activities, though not equally in all domains. However, their involvement is mostly informal and they tend to be excluded from the various formal committees of decision-making.

Even in instances that they are involved in the committees, their position is marginal. At least they have the opportunity to attend the meetings, interact with the officials and take part in important discussions. It also ensures their mobility across the social hierarchy.

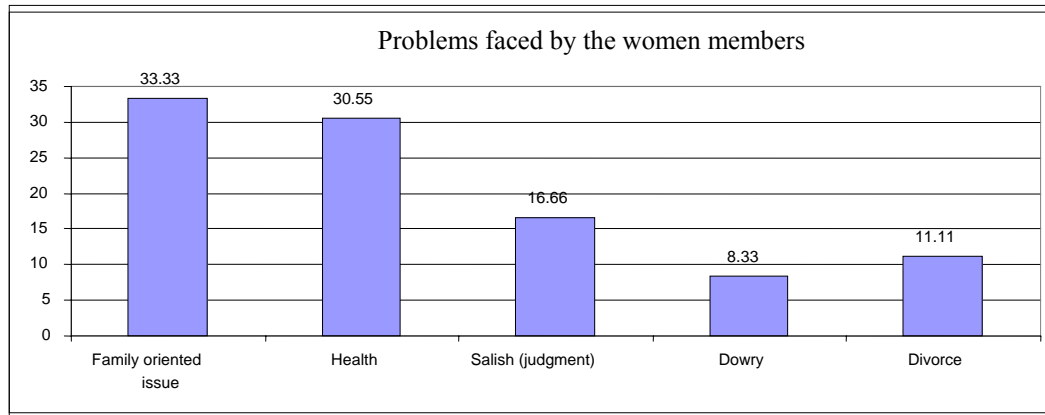
During the field visit Nagorpur Union from Tangail Zila, one of the women members said that “I had elected for the five years, but I have no duty to carry on as my tenure is going on” She also added that “Once in a month a general meeting held but there are no specific work plan for us so that we always present there with some gossiping.” The male members and Chairman are not interested to talk with any other issue among the women members.

6.1.11. Problems faced by the women members

The following table shows the problems which is mainly faced by the women members in the Union Parishads.

*In addition to seven standing committees, five more standing committees were constituted to ensure effective participation of women as members or chairs of those committees. Activities of these committees relate to water sanitation, identification of poorest of the poor women and men for safety net programs, and primary and mass literacy programs. Women members also chair the social development committee, which undertakes activities related to education, health, water, sanitation and environmental protection, employment growth and law and order (Khan , N.2006).

Graph :4
Problems faced by the women members



Source: Field survey

It has been observed that women representatives are facing many problems and have been doing their active roles through barriers. They are committed to do so though many obstacles are there which they faced everywhere. Having a tough situation, women representatives are really gaining lots of experience.

Counseling and providing motivational support were the prime role for women in the health and environmental activities. Awareness creation among the people for hygienic toilet, set up and safe water drinking habits were the most important involvement of the women members in the Union Parishad.

A large proportion (30.55%) of the women leaders were involved in setting up and building awareness for hygienic toilet.

Environmental activities for the safety of the environment, plantation and awareness creation about the danger of arsenic contaminated water were also reported as a very important work for them. Shalish, or village court, is a pre-colonial traditional institution of conflict resolution through mediation which passes informal judgments seeking compromise solutions on the village level.

These can be disputes over property, family, marriage, divorce or inheritance matters. They can also punish men and women for violating the moral or religious code and honor of the village community. 6 women members (16.66%) were involved in the above mentioned Shalish organized by the local community though decisions are all made by the male members.

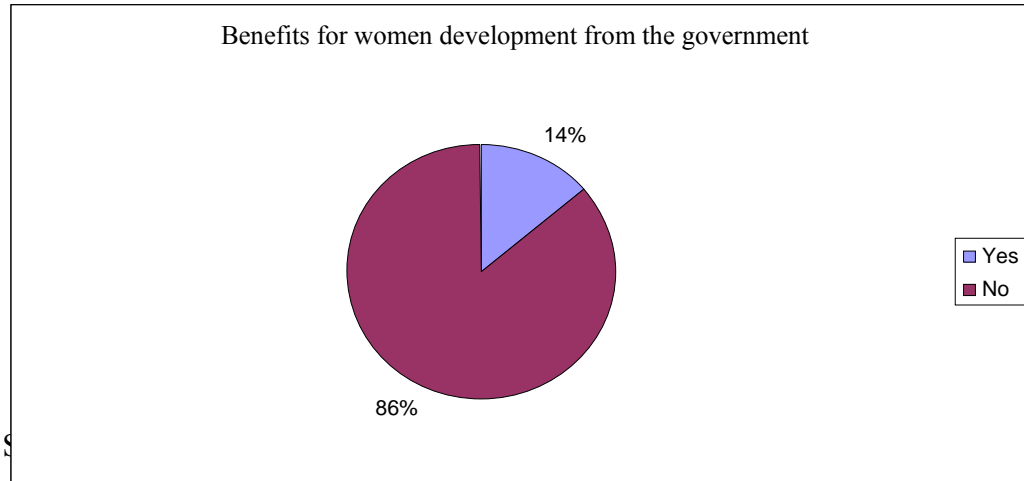
In family oriented issue 12 women (33.33%) said that different issues had come out in different ways. They have been trying to solve the problems through their limited resource. Only 3 women (8.33%) of the members reported taking part in activities to prevent violence against women.

One-fourth of the women conducted meeting with both parties in preventing violence.

Besides these, other activities that the members were involved into prevent violence against women, arbitration or *Shalish. Only 4 women members (11.11%) were trying to boosting up awareness through meeting, conducting case or informing police. Most of them reported they were being involved in mobilizing financial assistance for the vulnerable women.

The women members prefer to settle disputes related to marriage, divorce, polygamy and dowry. The general perception is that women members are more likely to relate to the difficulties faced by women in their locality.

*In the 1970s the government regulated the jurisdictions and activities of the *Shalish* courts to handle minor civil matters and petty criminal offences. The *Shalish* cannot pass any sentence of fine or imprisonment but may order the guilty person to pay a compensating amount of money (not exceeding 5000 taka) to the aggrieved person (Khan , N.2006).

Graph: 5**Benefits for women development from the government**

Source: Field survey

6.1.12. Earned benefits for women development from the government

The study found the quota for women members provide three additional seats within each Union Parishad and potential women representatives of these seats are elected and responsible for three wards. Therefore, those women members oversee an area three times the size of the area covered by a general member. Women members are further disadvantaged by resource constraints. Although they receive the same budgetary and other resources as general members, women have a wider area to cover.

There is also role conflict as the role of women representatives in given constituencies, also have three general members is often ambiguous. 5 women (14%) had agreed that as a women they are getting allocation from government but most of them 31 women (88%) had reported due to above mentioned reason they are not getting enough allocation from government for the development of the locality.

6.1.13. Initiatives taken by the women members for local peoples

On the issue to raise participation of women in local politics; 4 women (11.11%) had expressed with dissatisfaction that they had not been able to do anything as per their abilities and they have not participated in the meetings in Union Parishad (showed in the table below).

Table:6
Initiatives taken by the women members for local peoples

Category	Number	Percentage
To raise political empowerment	4	11.11
To aware on women rights	12	33.33
To increase women education	6	16.66
To safe womanhood	10	27.77
To generate decision making policy	4	11.11
Total	36	100

Source: Field survey.

Initiatives taken by the women members for local peoples

How to increase participation of women in local politics, 4 women (11.11%) had expressed with sorrow that they had not been able to do anything as per their abilities and they had not participated in the meetings in Union Parishad. They told that sometimes they had been able to do the development work for the local roads, culverts, bridges and distributing VGF (Vulnerable Groups Feeding) cards.

12 persons (33.33%) had reported that they had helped to improve the situation for divorced women and widows, provided necessary assistance, safe drinking water facilities to the primary school and water and sanitation facilities,

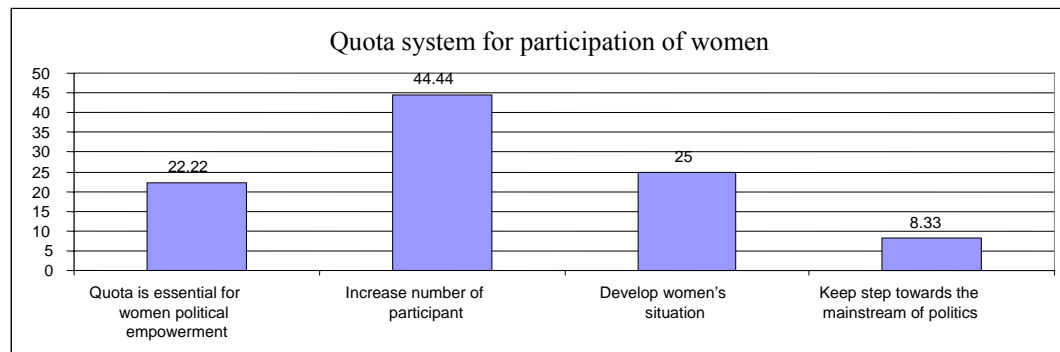
awareness against the practice of dowry and early marriage etc. To improve female education, 6 persons (16.66%) were involved in education committee run by the community. 10 persons (27.77%) were committed to safe motherhood and 4 persons (11.11%) were involved in decision making policy. It was quite clear that there was a discrepancy between what they had done and both their knowledge about local problems and what they wanted to do about these problems.

6.1.14. Quota system for participation of women

Quota system is essential for ensuring participation of women representatives at local governance. It is reported by the 8 women (22.22%) that quota is necessary for women political empowerment.

Graph: 6

Quota system for participation of women



Source: Field survey

Quota system is essential for ensuring participation of women representatives at local governance, reported by the 8 women (22.22%). It was clear that their new role through reserved seat had changed a majority of the women's social status - both in their family and in the village. They could talk publicly, people listened to them.

As elected members in Union Parishad their social empowerment had increased. 16 people (44.44%) said that increasing number of participant in local level has been significantly improving. This system can develop women's situation in

formal politics, said 9 women (25%). Through this system keeping step towards the mainstream of politics is increasing, reported by 3 women members (8.33%).

Only 5 women (13.88%) representatives among 36 have got an office place to carry on their jobs. Rest of the representatives 31 (86.11%) did not get any places to work separately.

Here it is mentionable and is widely reported that the women quotas are not met or that even where they are met, women representative are perceived as appointees representing political interest groups and often adopt a passive role.

The quotas tend to act as a ceiling on women's representation, rather than a minimum and may thus have a negative impact on women's representation in the long run. Therefore, it has been considerable debate in the women's participation issue, and most of the women had opposed the quota system.

6.1.15. Fulfilling the Election manifesto

2 (5.55%) women told that they could fulfill their given election manifesto, they were committed to improve the life style of the community. As per the commitment they are working. 20 women (55.55%) said they were happy that they could fulfill their election manifesto gradually. 10 (27.77%) women said they could complete a few, and rest of the 4 (11.11%) women said that most of the issues they are trying to complete.

The study has found out that corruption is one of the major domestic problems in local level politics. Political parties' involvement is also a major problem to act the role of the local representatives. Therefore; the local representatives are unable to fulfill the commitments which were given to the local people by them during the election period. That is why the local representatives are not able to

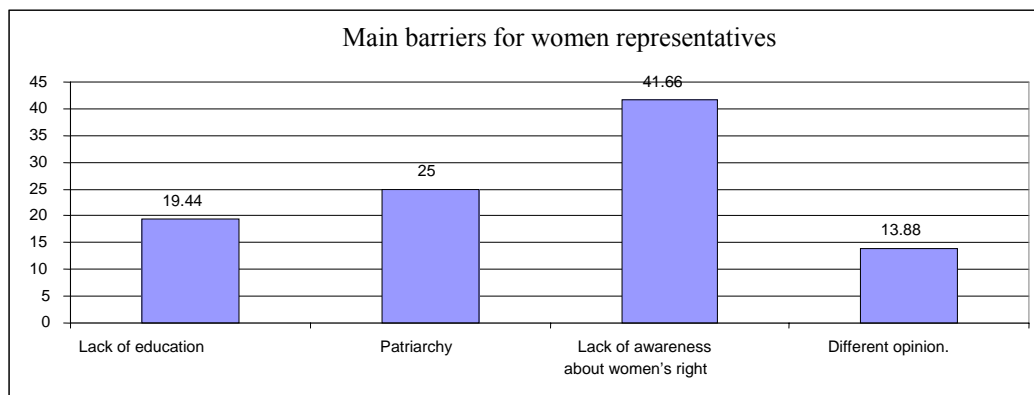
fulfill the local requirements which were given by them as word during election period. The local representatives have to have those responsibilities to ensure about what they had promised to do in their manifesto.

6.1.16. Main barriers for women representatives

Following graph shows the main barriers for the women representative in discharging their duties while in office.

Graph: 7

Main barriers for women representatives



Source: Field Survey

7 women (19.44%) had said that lack of education is the major barriers for less number of participation of women in local government. Education is the strongest factor influencing women's control of their own destiny. Women are furthermore poor in a scene because of lower educational achievements and the prevalence of social norms that severely restrict their freedom of movement in the public place. Therefore they do not show interest in participating in local government activities.

9 women (25%) reported that patriarchy system of Bangladesh was one of the the major factor. Patriarchy as a system, an ideology and practice impacts in different ways on the lives of women wherever they are. Patriarchal attitudes become so embedded that they are taken as normal. Even where there is supposed equality, these attitudes tend to prevail in the society. Socio- cultural

norms and religious misinterpretations are used frequently for challenging and reinterpreting women's rights and create insecurity for women.

The patriarchal society enforces rules and laws in such way that affect the self-confidence of women, limit their access on resources and information and thus keep them in a lower status compared to men. Although women have equal political rights to participate as voters and representatives, in reality they can be actively discouraged to do so.

15 women (41.66%) thought that lack of awareness about the women's right which is ensured by the constitution, was the one of the main reason for less participation. They explained that priority must be given to monitoring the status, conditions and rights of women. There must be a sustained campaign for women mobilization, regular reporting and monitoring, public information and advocacy in this realm. Rest of the 5 (13.88%) women members could not specify any particular reasons.

6.1.17. After nomination difficulties created by the male counterparts

In many cases it was found that the male counterpart creates unwanted situation after the women members filed the nomination to deter them from the election.

Table :7

Facing difficulties by the male counterparts: After nomination

After receiving nomination faced difficulties by the male counterparts	Number	Percentage
In some cases	8	22.22
A lot	6	16.66
Never	2	5.55
Frequently	20	55.55
Total	36	100

Source: Field survey.

At the local level the nomination procedure gave rise to allegations of manipulation by the social elite as well as by the civil administration.

The local women members obviously did not have the same weight and social status as the male members as they were not directly elected. The study found that nominated women came from the rural elite and that they were quite inactive in their role as members. The most important factor in being nominated was their kinship or social status.

After getting nomination, 8 women (22.22%) elected members have faced difficulties in some cases by their male counterparts. 6 women (16.66%) had been faced a lot of difficulties as the male counterparts did not want them to stand for election. 2 women (5.55%) expressed with simplicity that they never got any problems during the election period. 20 women (55.55%) frequently had faced problem by their male counterparts as the males always the critics of their roles. Few women representatives mentioned that they had been facing different types of problem. TNO sometimes causes problems for the women who wanted to run for election.

For example there have been cases where the TNO have told the women indirectly that they are only allowed to run for the reserved seats. He refused to give them the nomination papers for the general seats. Some have refused to accept their application since they have not been able to show any proof of their age certificate. They also faced these types of unusual problems during the election period.

6.1.18. Discharging of duties and responsibilities

61% of women are involved in this various activities, they can take initiative when it is necessary but their roles in development are marginal. Violence against women, distribution of relief, and development of women, road construction, educational activities, child and women health care in all these

issues all of them agreed that they can perform their duties but only passively. Dowry, acid violence, child marriage and girl's education are another issue in which they got involved as women representatives.

Before participation in the local level election there were male members standing in the position of the concerned Union Parishad. Among 36 members, 16 women said they had got trouble and 20 women said that they did not face problems which can be defined. Therefore it can be said that the positive attitude was the outcome of the total situation. In brief, most of them expressed that they are really facing difficulties during discharging their duties. Their success depended on the activities of their role, which is really difficult to achieve.

6.1.19. Family Support

In most cases women members were encouraged to participate in Union Parishad election largely by their husbands, fathers and relatives. 10 women have given their opinion regarding family support. During election period they had got family support and 24 women expressed that they had got partial support from the family. Those who were previously active in local politics they did not face difficulties but among those who are new had trouble. Their family members also told they will not let her out from the house or their husband will divorce them, etc. 65% of the women noted that they were encouraged by the local members to run for election while 30% noted that they were encourage by their respective family members like husband, brother, sisters, mother or father and so on.

The study found few women who told that the people in the village had requested them to run for election. This can also be seen as some kind of nomination of course where people in the village promise to vote for them if they contest. Often they mentioned that they were well-educated, which people considered an important criteria for getting things done.

4 of the elected women mentioned that it was their family who had encouraged them to run for election. 3 women told that their husband told them to run for election, another that it was family tradition to be an elected member of the Union Parishad. Even if it was only these 4 women who specifically told that it was their family who had encouraged them.

All of the women told that they were supported by their family in their decision to run for election. Rest of the 6 women could not give specific reason for their inspiration to be the representatives of local level politics. Although the women themselves are not active in any political party, their relatives are involved in local and national politics.

66.2 percent of the respondents said that they were encouraged by the community members to run for the election. While 29.3 percent noted that they were encouraged by their respective family members (mostly husbands). While only 1.3 percent Union Parishad Female members acknowledged that they were motivated by the local NGO.

30 women members had male relatives (husband, brother, father, uncle) who was/is politically active in local politics. Two of the women interviewed by the interviewee told that they had been nominated and encouraged by their local NGO and support to stand for election. These women had also received help during the election campaign from other members of the particular organization. Although NGOs have had limited influence on voters to vote for or against any candidate or party despite all the positive works about their success.

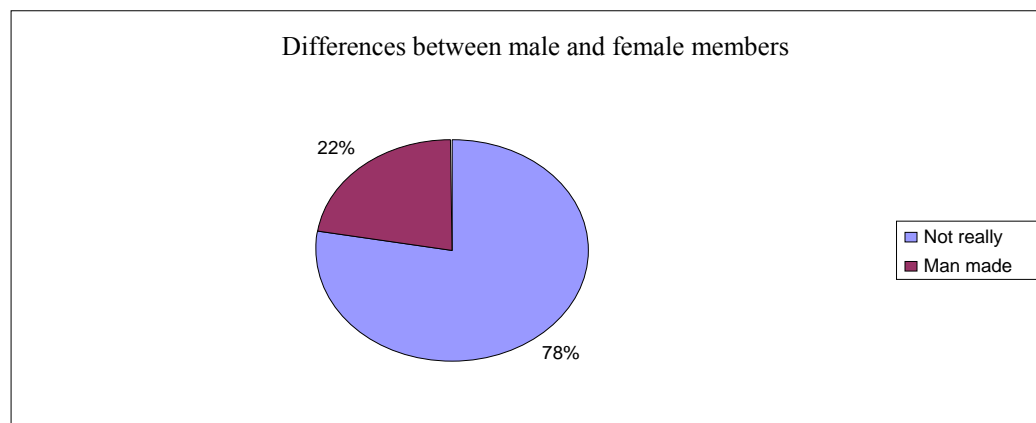
6.1.20. The situation of women in local level politics

Women's participation in local government system remained very minimal. The number of women in elective positions of chairperson and members in the Union Parishad was abysmally low and practically insufficient. At present the situation

of women in politics is good, commented by 14 women, 12 women said that the situation of women is better than before. 4 women said as per inequality their situation is not good and rest of the 6 women brief that the process of upright situation of women is being improved day by day.

It is difficult to say that a significant success has been achieved regarding the status of women in politics. Hence, the position of women in local level politics has changed a bit. Furthermore, increasing rate of female education has a positive influence to break down the social barriers for women by taking part in different economic, social or political activities in the society.

Graph :8
Differences between male and female members



Source: Field Survey

6.1.21. Differences between male and female members

Actually there is no difference between male and female representatives on the distribution of work division, reported 28 women (77.77%). 08 women (22.22%) said about that their roles are not the same as like male members. Sometimes male counterparts are non cooperative, said 8 women. They do not want to listen even what they want to tell.

Most of the times they are non cooperative said 3 women .Sometimes they are helpful expressed 28 women. When it comes to the concerns and priorities among the elected women who had been able to do things, the study found a discrepancy between what they wanted to do as women representatives and what they had been able to do when they are not male members.

6.1.22. Political party connection

As mentioned earlier that the elections to Union Parishad are technically non-party based. Despite this, it is open secret, there are informal connections to national parties and the election often mirrors the support for the ruling party and the opposition. The political parties control and decide who will represent the party in the elections both in national and at the local level. By doing so, they can play an important role in shaping up women's representation in formal politics.

A strong connection to a party is one of the basic requirements for nomination as a candidate. Therefore every one reported that, ruling party taking advantages or to making influence in local level politics. Though local level politics is not out of the influence of the party connections, therefore political influences is always there.

All the political parties forming government after coming to power with motive to hold power as much as possible that can easily secure their vested own political interests.

Political parties come to power and leave but only a handful of revisions have been helpful so far, but not enough to take the administration close to the local people and make it accountable and transparent.

6.1.23. Resources of the Union Parishad

Union Parishad also has limited financial resources. The money that comes from the government is not sufficient for the union to fulfill all its responsibilities. The

union's ability to collect its own revenues through taxes is limited since the people in the rural areas are very poor.

As per the study, Union Parishad collecting their own revenues is becoming further constrained since more and more of the financial resources now go first to the Upazila/Thana level; which they are supposed to distribute the money to the Unions in the area. For example they are not allowed to collecting leasing fees from market places. This has become the duty of the administrative personal at the Upazila/Thana level.

6.1.24. Special Findings

Some important findings have been revealed after systematic analysis of the field level survey data's. These are summarized as follows:

1. There is no separate office room for women members, as well as no separate toilet for women use.
2. There are no specific duties or responsibilities for newly elected women members. Elected women representative without any specific responsibilities and job is meaningless. They only attend monthly meetings, thus this is the only thing they can to do. Thus their contribution in the union Parishad is very limited.
3. One women member is elected from the three wards though and they have large area to cover but the get only allocation from one ward. They are not the members of "Thana Development Committee". There is provision for male members to be a member of "Village Court" but no provision for women to become a member of the "Village Court" in the local government ordinance.
4. In "Village Police" sector women members should be included. This will

allow women to exert more strength in performing their duties in the Union Parishad.

5. There is a provision in “Prime Minister’s Relief Committee” that 30% women should be involved but some cases there are no women member in that position (www.enescap.org).
6. Women were unaware about their duties, and responsibilities. There should be orientation and training for the women representative after they are elected.
7. They sometimes lack education and proper training and experience to perform efficiently, which should be strengthened by training and orientation.
8. Women were treated with disrespect and disregard by male members, not informed of meetings and given agendas of meetings, budgets or assigned committees, decision were made without consulting them, they had to sit separately from the men, and males attended in their place. Proper ordinance should be enacted by the Government to address this situation.
9. General observation: Women should not be considered to belong be concerned with only family and less important social welfare issues. They should be involved /encouraged to participate in the policy decision making and more importantly in fund allocation meetings.

According to the study the following summery have been made.

All of the respondents tried to explain that local government implies active participation of the citizens in local affairs is both a goal in itself and an instrument for strengthening women participation in society at large. From the

field work, the study found that most of the Union Parishad women members are not aware about their specific responsibilities. “Rules, regulations and ordinance of Union Parishad are not specifically divided among male and female members”. The executive power of the Parishad is admissible for the Chairman.

Chairman himself or his nominated persons can carry on the duties but women representatives are not considered for this position due to gender discrimination .In the manual of Union Parishad there are no provisions for specific duties for the elected women representatives.

On the other hand male counterparts of the local level politicians think that there is no need for women’s involvement in local governance. Elected Women members are sometimes frustrated by the ill treatment and negligence of their counterpart male members and 18.3 percent responded said that behavior of male colleagues is not fair and sometimes objectionable.

The Union Parishad women members are involved in distributing VGD and VGF card (18.3%) among the poor, distributing honorarium of widow’s (8.9%) and ensuring law and order (8.5%) within the Union Parishad.

About 75% women member’s endorsed that they are acting as chairperson of project implementation committee, but they do not get any opportunity to work with male members. Women members mostly act as a chairperson of certain committee which is: Law and Order committee, Family Planning committee, Women and Children committee, etc.

As per findings, there is no administrative provision for the distribution of work among women members, source from Local government rural development authority says. It should be understood by every one that women members are elected from the three unions but one male member is elected from only one

union Parishad. Therefore naturally their duties of work should not be considered as the same nature and structures of other general members.

About 73.4 percent Union Parishad women members reported that they do not face any obstruction to work with Union Parishad. The rest of 26.6 percent women members faced difficulties from their colleagues and Union Parishad people to work with the Union Parishad activities.

Regarding allocation of work, about 50 percent women members do not get their allocation to work properly. The rest of the women members get their work allocation but in that case also they do not have any active role to implement the project in most cases.

It is evident that the status of Women Union Parishad representatives in each Union Parishad is not very satisfactory. The civil society and government should understand the real dilemma of local level politics especially at local government.

Although Bangladeshi women do not hold key positions during the electoral process, they render significant contributions during election campaigns by taking part in organizing public meetings, processions, and rallies. Women leaders and party workers engage in the task of mobilizing and canvassing votes, particularly women, for their party candidates. By making special arrangements such as separate election booths for women and female presiding as polling officers and turnout rate of women voters may be increased.

6.2. General peoples (female) experiences on local representatives

Union Parishad is a very old institution and the only elected level of local government, it seems to be a weak institution since all important decisions are made at the national level.

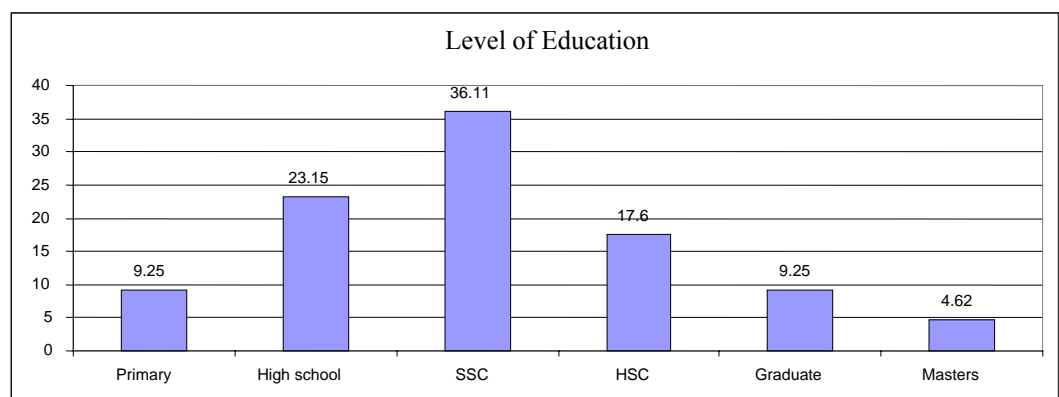
In fact Union Parishad plays a minor role when it comes to development planning of the Union. They do not have any authority to take any substantive or policy decisions without the approval of the controlling authority.

The responsibilities of the Union Parishad go beyond the legal, managerial and financial capacity of the body. Instead the work is directed by laws and regulations from the government.

Apart from this, all the work in Union Parishad is supposed to be conducted through 12 standing committees; most of them are often not functioning. These problems were also illustrated by informants as the study has revealed.

Graph: 9

Level of Education



Source: Field survey

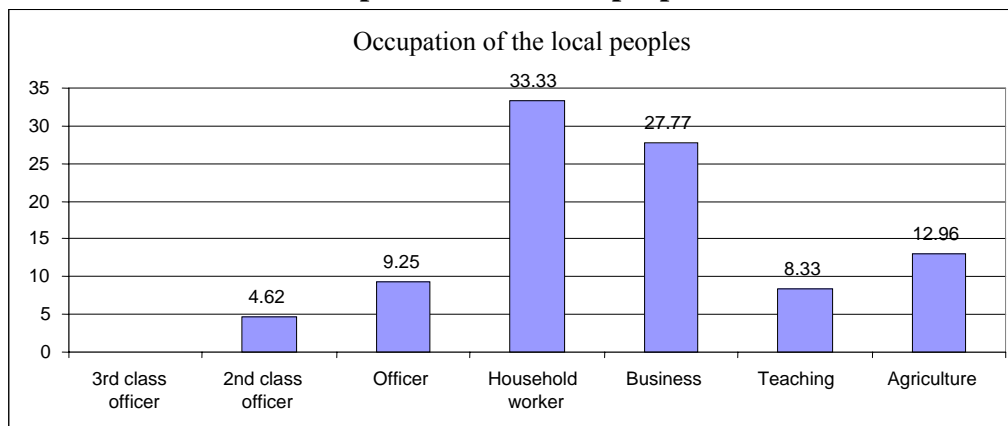
6.2.1. Level of Education of the local people

The levels of education of the local peoples interviewed were quite good, though

very few had continued their education up to the tertiary level. The study did not consider anyone who had not completed five years of schooling. It is observed from the above table that among 108 peoples, 10 persons (9.25%) had completed their primary level education. 25 respondents (23.15%) had been completed their high school level education. 39 persons (36.11%) had SSC certificate. 19 persons (17.60%) had received HSC certificate. 10 people (17.6) have graduated. Only 5 persons (3.62%) were found to have Master degree. The people interviewed are typically of mixed age group including senior and young and moderately educated.

Graph: 10

Occupation of the local peoples

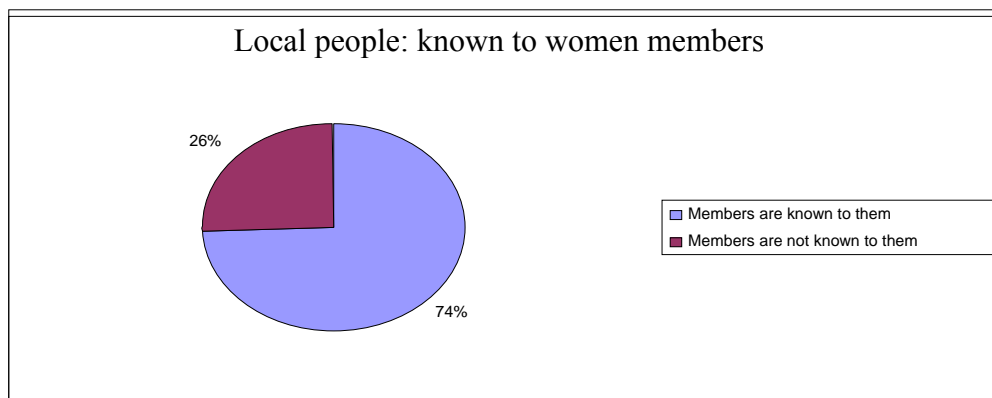


Source: Field survey

6.2.2. Occupation of the local peoples

In the study area among 108 respondents their age limit was 25 to 50 years and their socio economic status was average. Among them 4 persons were found as 2nd class officers, 9 persons were found as officer.

36 persons were involved in household work. 27 peoples were businessmen, and 08 were primary school teacher, 14 persons had been involved at agricultural work directly or indirectly.

Graph: 11**Local people: known to women members**

Source: Field survey

6.2.3. Local people: known to women members

Union Parishad is mainly responsible for economic, social and community development. These are the implementation of development area in the field of education, agriculture, fisheries, health, irrigation sanitation, and flood protection, family planning, protection and maintenance of infrastructure, motivating people to use latrines, the registration of births, marriages, deaths etc. 80 persons (74.07%) of the respondents stated that they are known to their local representatives as they are modest and humble. 28 persons (25.92%) informed that they did not meet them and don't have any clear idea about them.

Table 8**Male Union Parishad members: working for the development**

Male Union Parishad members working for the development	Persons in number	Percentage
Yes	72	66.66
No	36	33.33
Total	108	100

Source: Field survey

6.2.4. Male Union Parishad members: working for the development

The local representatives are supposed to reflect the social composition of the electorate in terms of presence. The local representatives can speak and act for the local groups because they share common experiences and therefore also hold common commitments and value. However, male Union Parishad members are working for the development of the locality, 72 (67%) persons gave positive information on these ground. 36 (33%) persons had very little idea about the local representative's activities.

Table 9

Female members: working for the community development

Female members :Community development	Persons	Percentage
Yes	23	21.29
Most of the times	19	17.59
Not really	28	25.92
Some times does	38	35.18
Total	108	100

Source: Field survey

6.2.5. Female members: working for the community development

Most of the women who are interested in politics have theoretically a possibility to stand for election but at the same time this possibility is constrained due to existing ill structures of the local government ordinance which requires a review as soon as possible. Therefore, quotas become a compensation for structural barriers that make it possible for fair competition.

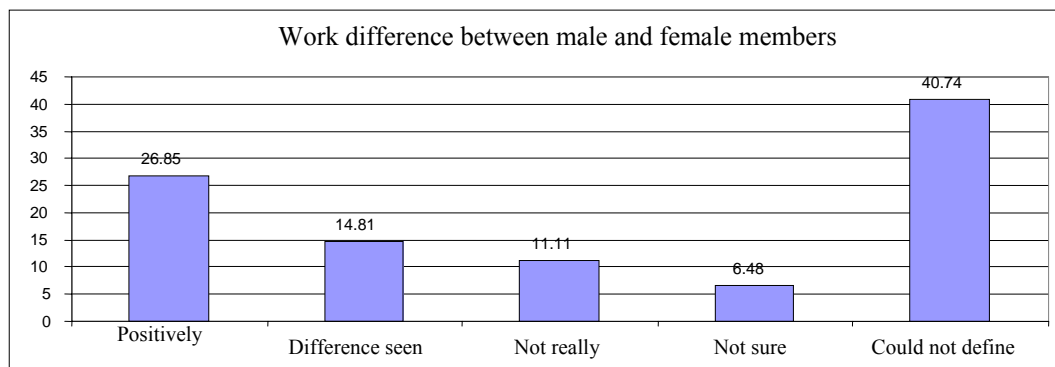
That is why female Union Parishad members were working for the development of the locality with limited scope expressed by 23 (21.29%) people. Most of the

times they are unable to do their jobs as reported 19 people (17.59%). 28 persons (25.92%) informed that their work and roles are unclear. 38 persons (35.18%) opined they are doing their jobs but sometimes they are also reluctant.

As elected representatives they wish to work for the development of their Union infrastructure and supervise other works run by local NGOs. They are eager to work for the destitute women by providing micro credit so that they can invest in various income generating activities and thus become self sufficient.

Graph: 12

Work difference between male and female members



Source: Field survey

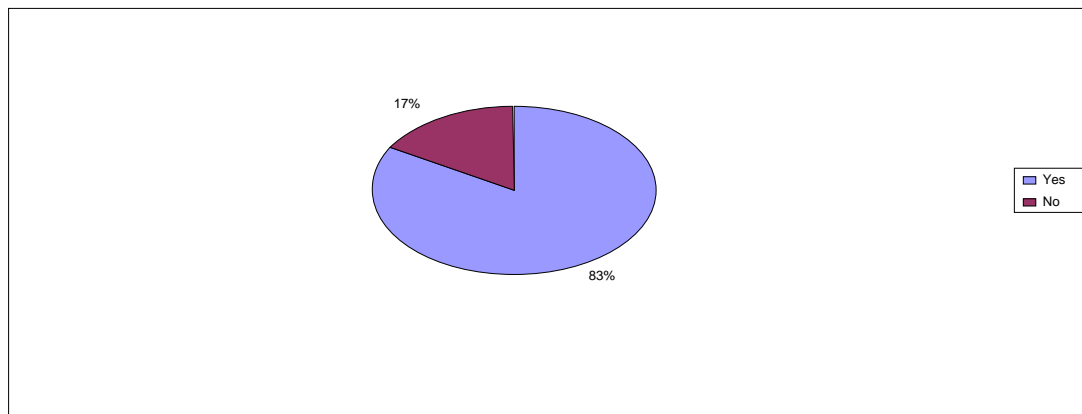
6.2.6. Work difference between male and female members

Most women are not used to being active and participating in the public sphere, and lacks confidence. This was a problem mentioned by 29 persons. 16 women representative mentioned that many women of the local level think it is difficult by male to accept a woman as a representative; as this is not the traditional role of a woman in the local society.

12 people have given positive answers as they have not found any work difference between male and female members. 7 people did not have any idea on that and rest of the 44 peoples could not define anything clearly.

Work difference between male and female members at local governance is mentionable. Most of the time there are difference between them said 12 persons and 7 persons reported that sometimes there is difference. 44 persons could not define any difference.

Graph 13
Participation of women: increasing rate



Source: Field survey.

6.2.7. Women Participation in the local government activities

90 (83%) persons said that in their own union, women are participating in local level politics more than ever before and 18 (17%) persons had given the negative answer.

They were saying that women's participation is not increasing. But practical scenario is that the participation of women is increasing due to more and more awareness about the women right due to government educational policy and the activities of various NGOs.

6.2.8. Women: Progressive part of the society

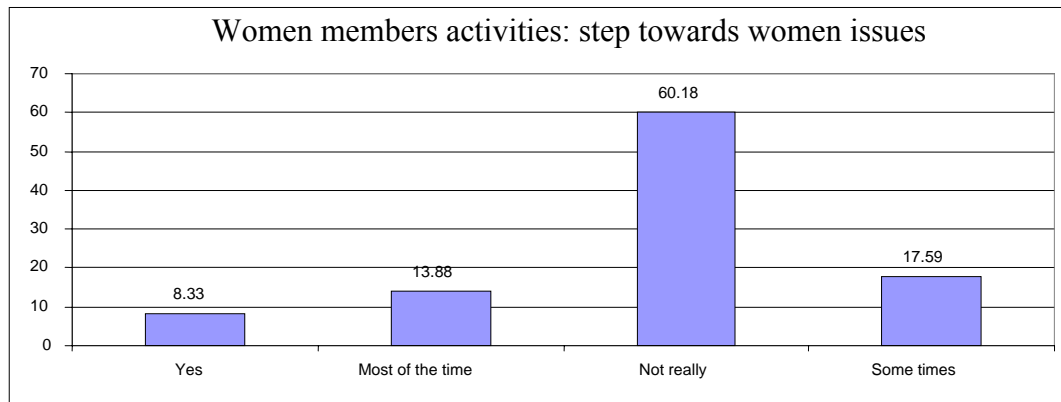
In socio economic perspective of Bangladesh, the women representatives are the progressive part of our society because the women are voice of the half the country's total population.

Table :10**Women: progressive part of the society**

Are women progressive part?	Persons	Percentage
Yes	87	80.55
No	21	19.44
Total	108	100

Source: Field survey

On the other hand, the local people interviewed expressed that they could be the part of development but opportunities are limited due to limitation and various barriers and problems. Therefore, 87 women (81%) strongly believe that women are the progressive part of the society, their participation ratio proofs that and rest of the 21 (19%) women could not mention anything about that.

Graph 14**Women members activities: step towards women issues**

Source: Field survey

6.2.9. Women member's activities: step towards women issues

When the local government institutions will be able to plan, manage and generate additional resources, then their capacity to deliver services will improve and their relationships with local people will enhance. A brief summery may be made in terms of taking initiatives towards local people. 8.33% of the local peoples have

the experiences to have assistance when asked for help from the local representatives. 13.88% had got assistance in several issues from the local women members.

As women members are not able to perform specific duties due to unspecified work distribution so that 60.18% local people had said that their local representatives are not much helpful to produce any assistance while they asked for. 17.59% mentioned that they are sometimes helpful.

6.2.10. Personal problems: Assistance from women members:

The following table shows a scenario of the assistance seeker from the local women representatives. This is discussed below:

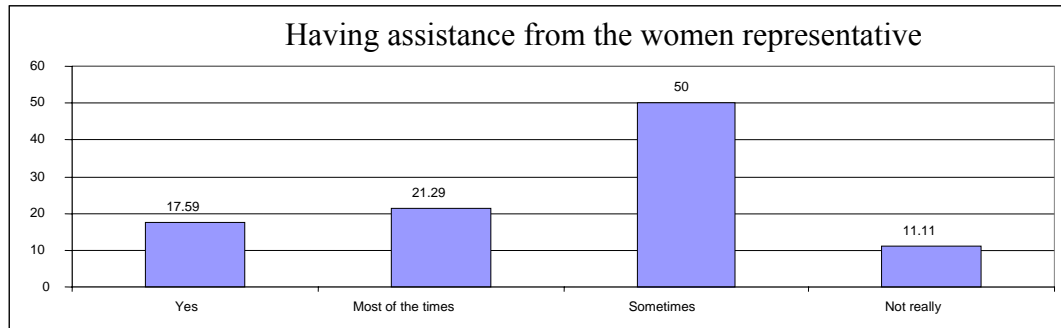
Table :11

Personal problems: assistance from women members

Asking helps from the women members?	Persons	Percentage
Yes	87	80.55
No	21	19.44
Total	108	100

Source: Field survey

The local people, 87 of them (80.55%) stated that they have been to their local women representatives for their personal problems which they are facing. Rest of the 21 persons (19.44%) said that they did not ask for any help/ went for any assistance.

Graph 15**Personal problems: assistance from women members**

Field survey

Among 108 respondents 19 persons (17.59%) stated that they always get support and assistance from their local representatives. 23 persons (21.29%) informed that most of the times they get support from their local representatives. 54 persons (50%) informed that sometimes they get assistance from them. Rest of the 12 persons (11.11%) said that they did not get any support from them.

6.2.11. Personal qualities of the women representatives

The following table shows the personal qualities of the local women representatives which were expressed by the local people during interview.

Table 12**Personal qualities of a woman representative**

Quality of a woman representative	Persons	Percentage
Honesty:	37	34.25
Dutifulness	9	8.33
Punctuality	9	8.33
Responsibility	53	49.07
Total	108	100

Source: Field survey

37 persons (34.25%) of the local people reported about the main qualities that women representatives should be honesty, 9 persons (8.33%) informed that dutifulness is most important, 9 persons (8.33%) informed that punctuality and 53 persons (49.07%) emphasized the responsibility is one of the main qualities. The real outcomes from the local representatives for the local peoples interest have been far less than satisfactory, because of many factors which the study have found out are explained here in.

The following summary of the study have been made on this study.

1. Scope for participation for development need assessment in Union Parishad is limited. About 75 percent of the Union Parishad women members feel they have limited role to play in Union Parishad affairs.
2. As high as 70 percent of women members have no idea as to how the development needs of the Union Parishad are assessed.
3. As high as 80 percent of the women members seem to be less concerned and aware about their individual role and direct responsibilities.
4. 72 percent Union Parishad officials seem to have no clear idea about the role of the Union Parishad and its development commitment as per the Local Government Ordinance.
5. 78 percent members of the local government have very low level of expectation from the Union Parishad as well as 85 percent are not aware of its major functions.
6. About 90% female elected members, who were interviewed, are unaware of the different government bodies and their functions which indicate the need for training.

The study found that some of the NGOs such as CARE Bangladesh, Khan Foundation, Nijera Kori or PRIP Trust provide training to both male and female Union Parishad members; their projects were designed to raise cross gender awareness among Union Parishad members and empower female members by informing them of how Union Parishad function and what their roles are as political activists.

The training initiatives and the approach of the training projects from different organizations were more effective in creating a level of acceptance for women in the wider community and allowed them to function more effectively.

Women members do not get equal respect and power at work. The general people have no access to Union Parishad budgeting, planning and implementation process.

Union Parishad office does not work properly; different standing committees of Union Parishad are ineffective. Performances of village court and village police are insufficient and continuous rights violation is common scenery. However women who received training reported that it allowed them to change the attitude of male members who assumed they were unaware about various issues.

The study strongly characterize that local governance is not limited to the provision of local needs but is a device for the engagement of the community in local affairs. Within this context, women's representation in policy-making bodies is imperative since it contributes to redefine political priorities by placing new items on the political agenda, as well as, new perspectives on mainstream political issues. During the field work, it was found that the use of quota system (reserved seats) in Union Parishad is an instrument for women political empowerment.

Chapter 7

Conclusions and Policy Recommendations

7.1 Conclusions

Local government would never be effective unless it is empowered politically, socially and economically. Local government is the most viable vehicle in the evolution of the democratic process and participatory development. However, accountability and transparency are the preconditions of empowering local government system; the study found that government intervention often hindered transparency and accountability. As a result, Union Parishads could not operate as independent bodies.

After two years of extensive field work for data collection based on a comprehensive study and review of literature and an extensive and sincere data analysis, it was possible to come to the conclusion. These are made in consideration of the basic problems at the field level faced by the women representatives as well the local people. These are also in line with the objectives of this study. In such light, the study has revealed the following conclusions.

Local government is a political institution. It is to ensure participation of the local people in development activities of the rural areas. Local government is struggling to take a proper outline in Bangladesh. Since in 1971, every successive government tried to use the local government system for their own political interest and under all regimes had attempted manipulating and retaining power to exercise its control over the local government.

The intention of the successive government was clear and straight forward therefore, no serious attempt was made by successive governments to take effective steps for a powerful and viable local government system. The party or regime in power only wanted to make the local government representatives as their power base and manipulated the system whenever possible.

Other way, political parties are exploiting local government for their narrow partisan benefit. Therefore, actual reform of local government is not taking place. It is also been observed that local government was dominated by the elite who were obstructing the smooth functioning of these bodies at the grassroots level. It is needed badly that the political parties to work cohesively in order to empower local government.

It requires commitment of all parties, in government as well as opposition, towards making the reform process meaningful and effective. In future, strengthened and decentralized local governance in Bangladesh is depended on political commitment and people's participation.

With a brief history of the evolution of local government in our country, we have found different forms of local government were shaped at various levels Union Parishad (UP), District (Zilla), Thana (Upazila). Actual, effective power, however, was always vested in the Centre and therefore, the objectives of local government were never achieved properly in the past.

The first and basic objective of the study was to understand the grassroots level politics of local government where women fit into their lives along with their family responsibilities. In fact the position of women in the local government institutions has been evolving over long periods of time.

Dismissing the reforms as another addition of documents would definitely be undermining and disrespecting the gradual changes that are silently happening at the grassroots level and the long term effects will be reflected more coherently with future elections and time. As a result, the understanding of growing frustration, cynicism among the proponents and well-wishers about the future of local governance, is ill founded, mislaid and too impulsive.

In Bangladesh, women have very low political status as compared to men. The participation of women suffers from their low socio-economic status arising from social norms of a male dominated society confining women to the household. Their unequal status in society gives them unequal access to the educational, economic, socio economical and other opportunities offered by the society and state.

All these factors contribute to reinforce each other to keep women's political participation poor. But women's adequate political participation is a precondition for bringing women in the mainstream of development arena and thus empowering them more than ever before.

In the revised Union Parishad system; three women members were directly elected for the first time in 1997. Each of these women's constituencies comprised of three wards for the general seats, women have a larger constituency and are responsible to a large number of population. This has brought about a significant change in the local government bodies in Bangladesh. However, there were still some constraints which women Union Parishad members encountered in performing their roles, some of these problems were related to their gender identity.

It is evident that women's voices were not heard and options were not accepted. Moreover male colleagues showed a negative attitude towards women members. Also, in the new system there was no specific job description for elected women members. As a result, chairmen and members were reluctant to hand over any job to their women colleagues. However, recently the government circulated by-laws indicating specific activities for women members. These circulars helped women Union Parishad members to prove their credentials in the local bodies.

When selection was the only way to elect members, women representatives were nominated and elected by the Chairman of the concerned Union or members of the Union and most of the members were their relatives. At that time women

representatives were convinced by their male relatives mainly to nourish their own interest. Presence of women representatives was there but very few could go and put up their voice and their presence was like a dummy member. Male counterparts do not agree most of the times with their female members in any decision making issues where are raised.

Actually women representatives had no active participation in the meeting. Now the Women representatives are more aware and efficient than ever before in their participation, finalization of the nomination, election campaign or election manifesto. In these cases they have been doing their election related task as women representatives and are more conscious about their political rights.

The result of the study shows that most of the women are interested to participate in the elections according to their male counterpart's agenda. Women representatives were convinced by their relatives (husband, father, uncle, brother) while they submitted the nomination paper. Finally some of them quit from the general seats and continued to go for reserved seats.

The study had identified the barriers of the Union Parishads. It is to be mentioned that the Union Parishad is basically a one-man Parishad that contradicted the classification of a Parishad which is actually a team. The study had also identified that, separating the jurisdiction of the local government and administration, may permit the Union Parishad which should perform as a self-reliant body.

All women representatives of local government institutions need to provide training which will improve their efficiency and awareness. Ensuring good governance through women's participation in different development projects at local level will help women's advancement and accessibility.

Moreover, to strengthen local governance at local level, the efficiency of the elected representatives and employees of the local government institutions will be improved through training. This will enable them to provide more effective services.

In addition direct financial assistance and training provided to 4,498 Union Parishad through different projects under the **“Local Governance Support Project”**. The attainment and achievement of good governance at local level through increased efficiency and direct financial assistance will help in reducing poverty.

The study had identified some of the institutional problems and pointed out that the Union Parishads cannot operate factually as in a democratic manner. This is because of an ineffective committee system and lack of community participation. On the other hand, absence of accountability and transparency, proper utilization of manpower, poor resource mobilization and absence of coordination with local and international NGOs are the common phenomena prevailing in the Union Parishads.

Thus, it is observed that in reality, women are not getting the opportunity to prove their capability. As a result, women potential is not being properly harnessed; therefore they are unable to contribute in the greater socio economic development of the society.

The elected women members of each Union Parishad in general seat or in reserved seats do not have much history of formal involvement in activities pertaining to the public domain. Subsequently, it is not surprising that they had weak performance in many public activities, such as infrastructural development, relief and rehabilitation activities, women and child development and communication and linkage with others. But the women members of the Union Parishad are more active in setting up hygienic toilet, tree plantation, awareness for arsenic contamination, attendance of social justice etc.

The nomination system or indirect election of women does limit the involvement and power base of qualified women leaders. Elections rules and regulations should be restructured in the light of facilitating women’s participation in the electoral process. The study observed that women members are lagging behind from the men in terms of socio-economic status. The general view states that

lower access of female in the employment sector makes it difficult to establish gender equity.

Despite the overall progress made in narrowing gender gaps, the position of women in Union Parishad remains unequal compared to that of men. It is clear that there is a vital need for a gender-specific development paradigm into all areas of policy making and planning so that women's needs can be met and their participation to be ensured.

As a step towards achieving women empowerment, the elected reserve seats for women helps to promote participation and women's access to the decision-making process numerically and gradually, though not practically much ensured.

Due to socio-political and religious bindings, elected women cannot play their role and thus people's aspiration and expectation to them were not met. Local government still only have limited autonomy and control over revenues and resources to implement their plans.

A lack of decision making space undermines the integration of local people's priorities, in particular women's interests that may also undermine local government legitimacy in the long run.

According the study findings, the problems related to the quota system with reserved seats have put focus on problems regarding Union Parishad as such which have led to important national discussion about the need of a more decentralized local government. This is why further research is imperative and essential in order to get enhanced the system with reserved seats in Union Parishad.

Citing the barriers and problems in the local government, faced by the Union Parishads women members, this study had pointed that the local bodies had been suffering from basic structural ambiguity. The Union Parishad budget is

examined at different levels and the system suffers from lack of monitoring and assessment process.

Predominant authority of the Union Parishad chairman, absence of financial authority of women members, lack of people's participation and vaguely defined circulars at times hinder the effective operation of women Union Parishads.

Most of the women members of the Union Parishads are not aware of their responsibilities; some Union Parishad offices work only for two days a week. The women representatives could not fulfill the public need due to lack of significant authority.

On the basis of experience of elected women members in the Union Parishads, it is also found out that elected women members are receiving a remuneration of taka 200, whereas the male Chairs, elected from one ward are also being paid the same. This discrimination should be removed and re-structured by the government as soon as possible.

The study found that the present system of local government in Bangladesh is thus still under heavy control of the central government. It is hoped that the ongoing process of empowering local governments will be able to bring about significant change in the structure.

Even if it were a partial success, this would be some gain in favor of local body autonomy. There have been significant advocacy activities by civil society organizations in favor of local government strengthening. Environment of politics of Bangladesh for women today is much different from that of the past. Throughout the history of political relationships women has always been involved in politics, although their participation has been obscured. Now a day, women's active political participation is appearing at an ever-increasing rate.

7.2. Recommendation(s)

Decentralization of local government has been identified as one of the important precondition to ensure gender balance in the society into development process. Empowerment is a multi dimensional process which enables individuals or a group of individuals to comprehend their full identity and power in all spheres of life.

There is a crucial need for further research to find out women's participation role in local government . However, in the context of local government politics, women's participation, their marginal condition and the change of the situation in the mainstream politics to ensure their participation and to remove all forms of discrimination on women in politics, as well as the overall situation of women in Bangladesh is essential.

In this regard, there are some recommendations which the study could gather while conducting the field survey which would be helpful to the society.

- The government should establish a permanent **Local Government Commission** where the Commission could play a coordinating role between the central administration and the local bodies in terms of carrying out the development activities.
- There is also crucial need for the establishment of a **Local Government Finance Commission** to mobilize resources for local government which may resolve many of the financial issues.
- Union Parishad women members should get exclusive training on their specific roles and responsibilities on a regular basis from the government and non government organizations.

- Women who are elected from reserve seats should not be neglected and should be included in mainstream activities.
- Transparency and accountabilities should be monitored by the government. Therefore a **Monitoring Center** should be established to assess the Union Parishad members' activities on a regular basis. Print and electronic media can also play a vital role to improve the quality of the Union Parishad women members.
- To build up local government as a viable and participatory institution, Chairmen of the Union Parishads and members may be given the responsibilities of the task of the enlistment of voters of their locality. This will ensure transparency at all levels of the Union Parishads.
- Media should come forward to disseminate local government news more objectively. Local successful initiatives should be publicized. Local Government Commission should ensure the participation of the women members in the Union Parishads by giving them actual position in their agendas. Mass media should play a significant role to make mass-population aware about the potentiality of women's identical involvement in local level government.
- Women members are elected from the three wards but are getting allocation from one ward. For this reason their roles sometimes become controversial among the general people. Government should take initiative to resolve this matter.
- Held election in a friendly environment and keep at least 50% seats reserved for women members.

- Gender awareness training, gender sensitization for attitude change among all members is an immediate necessity. The orientation should be arranged immediately after they are being elected. Coordination between government and non government initiatives should also be addressed.
- To assist the Union Parishad members (both men and women), to disseminate relevant information, a **Resource Center** * with adequate print and electronic information is required in every Union Parishad. Government should take initiatives to build a digital Bangladesh plan from the grassroots level; however, this government has taken various initiatives in this regard.
- Initiatives should be taken into account to inform people on underlying laws, ordinances, policy and public affairs circular related with Union Parishad function through the national broadcasting system. Besides, local government activity should be publicized by Zilla administration, Upazila Parishad and Union Parishad.
- Women member's decision on local issues should be given equal value in times of taking any decisions or in policy interventions which will enhance their confidence level. Their decision making power will improve gradually.

*Union Information and Services Centers (UISC) are newly established one-stop service outlets operating at all 4,501 Union Parishads (UP, lowest tier of local government) of the country. Through use of ICT, UISC is able to bring various types of information related to government, livelihood and private services to the doorstep of citizens in rural areas. It ensures services providers and users to save time, cost and has made operations hassle free. Operating under the Public-Private-Peoples' Partnership (PPPP) modality, these centers are run by local entrepreneurs, hosted by UPs and supported by central administration. - See more at: <http://a2i.pmo.gov.bd/content/union-information-and-service-centres-uisc#sthash.rPv6F2bS.dpuf>

- Candidates should be nominated on their eligibility (education, honesty, punctuality etc. s/he is) rather than their ability to spend huge amount of money in the time of election.
- Every year campaign should be conducted to inspire more educated women members to come up and participate in the next Union Parishad election.
- Necessary steps could be taken to implement Right to Information act 2009 in Union Parishad including all government and non government institutions at the grassroots level.
- Specific policy should formulate regarding people's participation in Union Parishads activities. Government should take initiatives to generate a comprehensive database of women, children, disabled people and destitute of Union Parishads.
- Sustainable development projects should be adopted in order to ensure socio-economic development of the people and the allocation distributed directly to the Union Parishad. All kinds of bureaucratic hazards should be abolished in project approved.
- In order to reduce dependency on central government local resources (Hat bazaar, Jal Mahal, Ghat, Ijara) local authority should be handed over the institutions and build the capacity for imposing and collection of local taxes. Positive competition among the Union Parishad may be taken into serious consideration through rewarding best works.
- The study recommends, that the method of reserved seats provision for women member needs to be changed. Selection criteria is nothing but interference, therefore, selection process should be changed into direct election. To get elected representatives through direct election is a

demand of time. Therefore, there is a demand to elect local representatives by the election with quota system in future but the reserved seats should be increased in number, and the number may be 50% of the total. There should be specific duties and responsibilities for the local representatives that they might be able to do and their election manifesto towards the local people can be fulfilled. The specific duties and responsibilities for the local representatives are totally incomplete at present which is to be specified in the coming future.

- Development strategy, structure of the society, local government ordinance, judicial right, population related issues, health issues, environmental issues, modern technology, international politics can be put up for workshop and training program. Their skill and potential have to be upgraded at any cost. Their role in the society or locality may be examples to others. They can be the progressive part of the society.
- Women's education is the major component to better their position in the society. Education is emancipation; a large number of educated women can raise their voice up. Academic and non academic learning, opportunity to work, right to property and belonging can ensure women's voting rights. Corruption and system loss could only be stopped by mass participation of educated and honest people in the election process.
- To establish specific women's department and plans like **Gender Responsive Development Plan** for 25 to 30 years, blue print of policies, programmes, projects and strategies where women are both major participants and beneficiaries in national development may be given.
- Women's budget should direct all government agencies to allocate five percent of their budgets to address gender issues.

- In Bangladesh is it required to set up forums for dialogue between elected women representatives and youth and other women groups, and there is a requirement that women and youth are included on various committees and provided with opportunities to contest local level elections.
- Local bodies are required to publish annual plans, detailing their policies, activities, performance targets and costs and a special consultative procedure requires local authorities to call for submission from the public.
- Efficiency of local government could only be established if the Union Parishad is given proper power to perform independently.
- Referring to the recent explosion in the *Information Technology (IT)* sector, local government bodies could be made more effective through the use of IT. These bodies could run regularly websites and update their database - birth-death record, land record, voter list and many other local informative features-on their web pages. The central government would be able to successfully need with the challenges of an ever-changing world along with digitally strong local governments which is destined to play an important role in this regard.
- Particular focus on creating accountability and transparency of Union Parishads, need to be established a committee for monitoring. The committee will also monitor awareness rising among the citizens at Union level, mobilizing other stakeholders and initiating campaign for ensuring people's participation in Union Parishad activities like budgeting, planning, implementation and monitoring. The committee should also monitor role of Union Parishad and government officials in public service delivery management and handle the law and order situation, especially violence against women and children.

To ensure a meaningful participation of the elected women members as an essential step to empower them, the following **policy prescriptions** may be taken into considerations.

1. Specific functions and financial policies have to be developed in the Union Parishad for effective performance. Roles and responsibilities of the women members in local government should be clearly defined in the manuals and orders of local government. Work and activities should be fairly distributed among the male and female members in such a way that women members can meaningfully participate in all type of activities. The non conducive environment for the women can only be removed in a strong self sustaining unit.

2. On a regular basis Women Union Parishad members should get training on their specific roles and responsibilities from National Institute of Local Government and Non Government Organizations. Women should be given various opportunities for leadership training, training regarding the activities of Union Parishad and education in order to encourage them to take up political and leadership position. Supportive services like information manuals, mobile training programmes through audio visual mediums, should be provided to allow women participate in these training courses which may be mandatory. Only training is not enough for ensuring women's participation. This study also recommends that a proper evaluation of the whole process is a demand of time.

By the next fiscal year training should be provided on various subjects to the elected representatives and relevant employees of the approximately 4,500 Union Parishads of Bangladesh. After receiving training each Union Parishad will receive direct lump sum allocations. With the lump sum allocation, Union Parishad will take up and implement appropriate development projects based on local needs. In this connection, this study suggested comprehensive training for creating awareness among the Union Parishad women members for effective office maintenance and also for diminishing gender conflict.

3. Each Union Parishad women members are being elected for three wards of a Union but are getting allocation for one Ward. Due to this, their roles have sometimes become controversial among the general people. Government should take this into consideration to resolving this issue by providing equal allocations for all the three wards.

4. To create greater awareness among the rural women about their status in society and the need to improve it, motivational programs along with programs for expanding opportunities for education, health care and employment should be initiated.

5. A campaign should be conducted to inspire more educated women to come up and participate in the elections and play a significant role in local level politics.

6. Specific programs should be undertaken by the government and Non Government Organizations for creating an awareness among the women at the local levels that political participation would give them an access to the political decision making process relating to the allocation of resources.

7. Very often we watch some programs in electronic media on local governance issues which is really not sufficient. Media can play a vital role in this regard. Mass media should be used to educate and mobilize public opinion from the local people in such a way that the realization about the benefits of women's full participation in the national development efforts is created among the people.

8. Sometimes an organized campaign may be conducted to inspire more educated women to come up and participate in the election and play a significant role in local level politics. Priority must be given to monitoring the status, conditions and rights of women. There must be a sustained campaign for women mobilization, regular reporting of monitoring, public information and advocacy in this realm. To create greater awareness among women about their low status in society and their need to improve it by giving motivational programmes for expanding opportunities for education, health care should be launched.

9. There is an urgent need to undertake more research work on women's participation in politics, their voting behavior, consciousness and participation in the political parties.

10. At least one women representative should be included in the village court. This will create an environment for building confidence in the rural women.

11. A resource center should be formed in every Union Parishad to assist Union Parishad members to disseminate relevant information. Digital information may be got available.

12. In increasing the number of women in decision making positions does not in itself refer to higher empowerment for women. Measures to increase the quantity of women representatives need to be accompanied by measures to improve the quality of participation.

13. Ensure the allocation of funds and projects to the women members through enforcement of the current orders by the Upazila Officials and Union Parishad Chairs.

14. Provide honorarium and others benefit to the women members in consideration of the larger constituencies they have to serve.

15. The structural anomaly of women's seat overlapping that of general seats should be removed and a new structure put in place.

16. Pointing the inconvenience faced in attending meetings at distant locations by the women member may be provided with transport facilities. All women members should be provided with a motor cycle etc for easy movement around in three wards under their charge.

17. Government should include minorities or tribal be represent in the decision making process, which could be facilitated by the assistance of reservation or through fair entry basis in the tribal areas.

However, the weakest involvement of the women representatives has been in formal committee meetings where policy decisions are being made and very importantly fund and resource allocations are made. Planning and decision making committees should comprise of 50 percent women members.

Local governance is not limited to the provision of local needs but is an instrument for the engagement of the community in civic affairs. Within this context, women's representation in policy-making bodies is vital since it contributes to the redefining of political priorities by placing new items on the political agenda, as well as, new perspectives on mainstream political issues.

It is clear that the status of women Union Parishad representatives in Union Parishad is not very satisfactory. The civil society and the government now understand the real dilemma of union Parishad especially in women representatives' perspective.

Local government as a political institution to ensure public participation in development activities is yet to take proper shape in Bangladesh. Since, independence in 1971, successive governments have tried to use the local government system for their own political interest. The party or regime in power has wanted to make the local government representatives their power base and manipulated the system to this end.

The existing administrative structure and elected local bodies do reach the grass-roots level and have almost all the features necessary for participatory decentralized administration. But this structure has failed so far to perform efficiently mainly for two reasons.

Despite the strong support for local government enshrined in the Constitution, the central government has compromised these advantages by exercising control over local government and starving these agencies of resources.

Most administrative decisions still remain to be taken centrally. Frequently they involve top-level officials in the secretariat; even some ministers are also

involved depending on the subject. Several abortive attempts have been made at decentralization, but the system has remained highly centralized.

As of such, local bodies are characterized by weak administrative capacity, a limited financial and human resource base and little public participation. Aware of the above problems, government set up a high powered Reform Commission. The objective was formulated by establishing truly representative democratic local bodies entrusted with administrative and financial powers with a view to expedite decentralized development process and ensuring spontaneous people's participation in planning and management of local level development.

7.3. Policy Recommendations

Affirmative action clearly helps women to access local and national power structures. The credibility and legitimacy of elected women as political actors can also be undermined by policy design issues or the partial implementation of affirmative action measures.

Affirmative action will only succeed in getting more women into local politics if more attention is focused on three levels of policy:

- The clear definition and formulation of affirmative action policy which will be determined by the quality of quota system.
- The translation of the law into regulations, procedures and accountability mechanism.
- The actual implementation of the policy which was formed.

Women's empowerment is a precondition to achieve a sustainable development in our country. A just social status and a rightful economic role of a woman cannot be achieved without commensurate political empowerment. Local

Government Amendment Act 1997; provided direct elections to reserved seats for women in Union Parishad elections. However there is some lacking in gender balancing both in terms of governance policy and reform agenda.

Women of Bangladesh have acquired a legitimate space in grass root level that can raise their marginalized position, though they are under-represented. Simply having women in certain number (Quota) in the Union Parishad through direct elections does not mean that the interests of women in the community are properly addressed. Without women's needs and interests being taken into account, with opportunity for them to participate in development interventions and planning; sustainable outcome will not be achieved. However, having women in these leadership positions is an important step in changing the male-dominated political agenda.

Finally it can be said that provision of inclusion of direct election of women local representatives, have created a new possibility for the women in grass root level to participate in the decision-making process in the only democratic local institution like Union Parishad.

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Annexure 1

Questionnaire for Union Parishad women members

Gender and Local Governance:

Experiences of Women Representatives in Bangladesh

(All information from the survey will be confidential and will be used only in this research purpose)

1. What is your name please?
2. What is your educational qualification? Please specify:
 - (a) Primary
 - (b) Below secondary
 - (c) SSC
 - (d) HSC
 - (e) Bachelor
 - (f) Masters
 - (g) Others
3. What is your occupation?
 - (a) Farmer
 - (b) Service holder
 - (c) Self employed
 - (d) Teacher.
 - (e) Business
 - (f) Others
4. Is this the first time that you have participated in local level election?
 - (a) First time participated in LG politics
 - (b) Previously participated in LG politics

5. Spending huge amount of money in the election would be the barrier to participate in politics for women, what is your opinion regarding this issue?

- (a) Spending money is essential
- (b) Spending money is not essential

6. What is your opinion regarding the removal of barriers?

- (a) Remove quota system
- (b) Specific duties to be given to Women members
- (c) Free from political influence
- (d) Active participation as an elected representative
- (e) Equal distribution of work

7. What are the responsibilities of a women member in Union Parishad?

- (a) Attending meeting
- (b) Decision making
- (c) Participation in development of own area

8. What are your responsibilities as a Union Parishad member?

- (a) Attending meeting
- (b) Take part in decision making
- (c) Participation in development of own area(no provision)

9. Are you the Unit head/Chairperson of a committee? If yes, please specify.

- (a) Yes
- (b) No

10. Which type of problems actually faces the people of your union?

- (a) Family oriented issue
- (b) Health
- (c) Salish
- (d) Dowry
- (e) Divorce

11. What type of problems women are facing in your union parishad ?

- (a) Family oriented issue

- (b) Health
- (c) Salish
- (d) Dowry
- (e) Divorce

12. Do you think that you are privileged to get extra benefits as a woman from government for women development?

- (a) Yes
- (b) No

13. If government gives extra priority to you, what initiative you will take for the women?

- (a) To raise political empowerment
- (b) To aware on women right
- (c) To increase women education
- (d) To safe womanhood
- (e) To generate decision making policy

14. General seats and reserved seat, what is the difference between them?

15. "Quota system is essential for participation of women" Give some reasons if your answer is positive.

- (a) Quota is essential for women political empowerment
- (b) Increase number of participation
- (c) Develop women situation
- (d) Step towards the mainstream of politics

16. Have you got any government place to carry out your jobs?

- (a) Yes
- (b) No

17. Did you fulfill your electoral manifesto given to the people?

- (a) No
- (b) Yes

(c) A few

(d) Most of all

18. Women will be aware more for participating in the union parishad election, what is your opinion?

(a) Yes

(b) No

19. What are the main barriers for non participation of women representatives in local government?

(a) Lack of education

(b) Patriarchy

(c) Lack of awareness about women's right

20. After getting your nomination have you faced any problems or difficulties by the male counterparts?

(a) In some case

(b) A lot

(c) Never

(d) Frequently

21. In decision making, do your male counterparts estimate you like a human being or only as women? Or underestimate as women?

(a) Yes

(b) No

22. For the development of your locality can you take initiative whether it is necessary?

(a) Not very much

(b) Sometimes

(c) Not really

23. Can you signify any of these jobs that make you satisfied as well as your community?

- (a) Violence against women
- (b) Distribution of relief
- (c) Development of women,
- (d) Road construction
- (e) Educational activities
- (f) Child and women health care
- (g) Dowry
- (h) Acid victim
- (i) Child marriage
- (j) Girl's education

24. Before your participation was there any male members standing in the position of any Union Parishad?

- (a) Yes
- (b) No

25. You are an honorable woman member of a Union Parishad. Would you please brief about your experience as a woman?

26. After getting nomination is there any help have you got during your election period from your family?

- (a) Fully
- (b) Partially

27. To be educated as a politician did you receive any multi chance from your family? What is your opinion?

28. What was your inspiration to become a people's representative?

- (a) Family members

(b) Childhood dream

(c) Not specific

29. As a women candidate have you faced any difficulties before election?

(a) Yes

(b) Sometime

(c) Partially

(d) Not at all.

30. At present what is the situation of a women in politics?

(a) Good

(b) Better than before

(c) Improving

31. What general acceptance are you getting as women representatives?

(a) Sometimes are getting

(b) Sometimes are ignored.

32. Is there any difference between male or female representatives?

(a)Yes

(b) No

33. As a woman have you felt that male counterpart is non cooperative?

(a)Yes

(b) No

(c) Sometimes

34. Are women representatives ignored by their male counterparts in decision making? If 'yes', why?

(a) All the time

(b) Sometimes

35. Are women potential/ skilled like men?

(a) Yes

(b) Not all the time

36. Did your family members help you when you participate in the election?

(a) Sometimes

(b) All the time

(c) Sometimes helpful

37. Women participation are upgrading nowadays, what is your opinion?

38. What is your role for the development of your locality?

39. What is your advice for the women who will be participating in the next election?

ENDING QUESTIONS

Do you want to add anything to this interview?

Do you want to be anonymous?

Annexure 2

Questionnaire for the local peoples: Female

(All information from the survey will be confidential and will be used only in this research purpose)

1. What is your name? What is your union name?

2. What is your educational qualification?

(a) Primary

(b) Below secondary

(c) SSC

(d) HSC

(e) Bachelor

(f) Masters

(g) Others

3. What is your occupation?

(a) 3rd class officer

(b) 2nd class officer

(c) Officer

(d) Household worker

(e) Business

(f) Teaching

(g) Agriculture.

4. Are you known to your woman Union Parishad member?

(a) Yes

(b) No.

5. Are male Union Parishad members working for the development of your locality?

(a) Yes

(b) No.

6. Are female Union Parishad members working for the development of your locality?

(a) Yes

(b) Most of the times

(c) Not really

(d) Sometimes does.

7. Do you see any difference between the work of a male union parishad members and female Union Parishad members?

(a) Positively

(b) Difference seen

(c) Not really

(d) Not true

(e) Could not define

8. Do you think that Union Parishad female members can do better than the Male Union Parishad members?

(a) Yes

(b) Most of the time

(c) Not really

(d) Some times

9. What do you think that in your union Parishad women should participate more than ever before?

(a) Yes

(b) No

10. What do you think in socio economic perspective of Bangladesh, the women representatives are the progressive part of our society? Why or why not?

(a) Yes

(b) No

11. Do you think that to participate in the election, women society will be inspired by women?

(a) Yes

(b) No

12. After winning have Union Parishad female members taken any step towards women issues?

(a) Yes

(b) Most of the time

(c) Not really

(d) Some times

13. Have you ever gone to any women representatives for your personal problems?

(a) Yes

(b) Most of the time

(c) Not really

(d) Some times

14. When necessary have you got any assistance from the women representative?

(a) Yes

(b) Most of the time

(c) Not really

(d) Some times

15. Had she given suggestions towards solution?

(a) Yes

(b) Most of the time

(c) Not really

(d) Some times

16. Do you think that the women representation in local level politics should increase?

(a) Yes

(b) No

17. What are the main criteria that women representatives should have in local level politics?

(a) Honesty

(b) Strength

(c) Punctuality

(d) Responsibility

18. In our socio economic perspective do you support women's participation in politics?

(a) Yes

(b) Most of the time

(c) Not really

(d) Some times

19. Do you think if women come more than ever before in politics, women can carry on their political activities smoothly or safely?

(a) Yes

(b) Most of the time

(c) Not really

(d) Some times

20. To confirm or ensure women participation what are your suggestions?

21. Besides carrying out your responsibilities what are the other things that can help increase women development?

22. According to law there has one elected woman representative from three Union Parishad, have they got extra benefit as women?

(a) Yes

(b) Most of the time

(c) Not really

(d) Some times

23. Is there any social change to be done through the election of local level politics?

24. In the last electoral campaign what have you seen regarding the change of political activities?

25. Before election did the present women representative come to ask for vote?

(a) Yes

(b) No

26. Did she give any word to develop your community?

(a) Yes

(b) No

27. Women related issues were there because she was a woman, what is your opinion?

28. After winning did she keep her words?

(a) Yes

(b) No

29. If the answer is 'no' why do you think she could not?

30. Have your Union Parishad member got any government office for their jobs?

(a) Yes

(b) No

31. Can she work safely in her work place?

(a) Yes

(b) No

32. If answer is no what type of security does she need?

33. How can the participation of women increase?

34. Are women representatives skilled? What kind?

35. From this election what new observation did you find?

36. Do you think that local level election should be party based?

(a) Yes

(b) No

37. Are women representatives more efficient or honest than male representatives?

(a) Yes

(b) Most of the time

(c) Not really

(d) Some times

ENDING QUESTIONS

Do you want to add anything to this interview?

Do you want to be anonymous?

Thank you.

Signature:

Annexure 3

Profile of some NGO working with the local peoples of the study area

BNPS - Bangladesh Nari Progati Sangha

E-mail address: bnps@bangla.net

BNPS is a national women's organization that has been working with social, political and economic empowerment of women since 1986.

CARE Bangladesh

E-mail address: anwar@carefdo.dhaka.net

CARE Bangladesh is a part of CARE International and has operated in Bangladesh since 1955. It is an independent humanitarian organization, focusing on poverty. CARE run projects in agriculture and natural resources development, institutional strengthening, health, family planning and improving rural infrastructure.

Nijera Kori

E-mail address: nkshrimp@agni.comp

Nijera Kori, founded 1974, translates as 'we do it ourselves' and is an organization targeting poor people through self-helping groups. Nijera Kori has almost 200 000 members, both men and women. They are active in different parts of Bangladesh, for example in the western part of Bangladesh, north of Dhaka and in the area of Chittagong.

Khan Foundation

E-mail address: khanfoundation@bd.drik.net

Khan Foundation started 1988 with the objective to strengthen and sustain democracy at both local and national level. The strategy is to promote a democratic culture in the country and to improve the living conditions of the

countries disadvantaged groups, in particular women, children and the poor, through launching of effective social and economic development programs. The focus of the major programs of Khan Foundation is on capacity-building and local government. These projects are focused on the elected women members of the Ups which are trained and educated on their rights and responsibilities in workshops. The aim of the project is to ensure their effective participation in local government and development. In the basic training Khan Foundation aim to annually reach 5000 members. In the follow-up in-depth training they aim to reach 3000 elected women.

Annexure 4

Interview date with the key persons

Name	Date
Dr. Tofail Ahmed	24/6/ 2010
Dr. Salahuddin M. Aminuzzaman	20/9/ 2010
Dr.Zarina Raman Khan	23/4 /2011

Interview date with the key persons of the following NGO

Ms. Kushi Kabir (Nijera Kori)	26/4 /2011
Ms. Aroma Dutta (Prip Trust)	15/5/ 2011
Mr. Hare Krishna Das (Care Bangladesh)	22/6/ 2011
Ms.Rokeya Kabir (BNPS)	22/4/ 2012