

Participation of Women in Rural Local Government - A Socio-Economic Analysis

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Abstract

The study was undertaken to analyze the involvement of women members in Union Parishad, a local government unit. It reveals that the effective role of women members in Union Parishad passed through an evolutionary process. Even today they do not get their reasonable share in the decision-making process. Analyzing their socio-economic features, the study found that the majority of the women members belonged to the young age (26-35 years). Only one third of the total sampled women members completed their SSC to HSC level education and 21.79% studied up to class V. Majority of the women members were housewives and 16.67% was service holders. It is interesting that 11.54% of husband of the women members were illiterate and 60.26% of them belonged to single family. Only 24.14% of women members were involved in different local-judicial affairs in the localities. The average income of the women members in Chittagong Division was higher than in Dhaka and Sylhet Divisions. It was found that 35.89% of women members belonged to landless category compared to 6.41% in very large farmers category. The study showed that the problems of women members were multidimensional such as lack of sufficient legal provisions, suitable socio cultural support, proper knowledge about rules and regulation and coordination from male members etc. The study suggests that the government should come forward to create a congenial atmosphere for the women members of Union Parishad for their effective functioning in the locality.

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1. Introduction

Women play a pivotal role in the subsistence-based economy of Bangladesh. At present among the 135 million populations, more than 66 million are women of which around 45 percent live below the poverty line. It is also worth mentioning that the women folk are lagging behind men in every aspect of socio-economic and public life though the Constitution of Bangladesh has ensured equal rights as well as role of women in the overall development of the country. As part of the global movement for women development, Bangladesh government has undertaken massive affirmative policy measures and strategies for developing the socio-economic condition of women. Despite that women's access into the public life especially into the political arena and decision-making in national affairs is still a far cry, which needs to be further strengthened.

Some of the government's affirmative actions for women development such as food for education, free education up to S.S.C level, stipend programme up to H.S.C. level, provision of one-third seats reservation for women in the local government since 1997 are note-worthy. In the wake of the reservation system, a huge number of women have come to the leadership position, which have ushered enormous interest and enthusiasm into the minds of professionals, academicians and policy makers of the country. Keeping this view in mind, an attempt is made in this paper to identify the socio-economic, familial, demographic and political profiles of the women members *vis a vis* their problems and solution thereof in the context of rural society of Bangladesh.

2. Objectives of the Study

The general objective of the study is to ascertain the socio-economic profile of the elected women leaders in the rural local government *i.e.* Union Parishad.

In specific terms, the objectives of the study are:

- i) to evaluate the policies and programmes of involving women in the local government;
- ii) to analyze the socio-economic characteristics of the elected women members;
- iii) to identify problems faced by the women members in performing their statutory activities and
- iv) to suggest ways and means to solve those problems.

3. Materials and Methods

The study is based on both secondary and primary data. The secondary data were collected by consulting various documents such as research reports, periodicals, gazette notifications, journals and so on in rural local government system. Furthermore, some rare publications of the World Bank and different foreign universities were consulted for further clarification of the issue.

The data collected from primary sources were entirely based on interviews of seventy eight women representatives of Dhaka, Sylhet and Chittagong Divisions who undertook training at the Bangladesh Academy for Rural Development (BARD) during 2002-2003 financial years. The training course was organized under a research project on “*Participation of Women in Local Government Institution*”, funded by UNDP in which women members of Union Parishad all over the country participated. Due to time and fund constraints, only representatives of the three divisions were interviewed in the study. Among the 78 respondents, 35 were from Dhaka Division, 14 from Sylhet Division, and 29 from Chittagang Division, The Opinions of the respondents were obtained through a structured questionnaire and then processed and analyzed by using simple statistical tools in the light of the objectives of the study.

4. Results and Discussions

4.1 Policies and Programmes to Involve Women in Local Government

The international donor and aid agencies played a crucial role in the upliftment of the overall socio-economic condition of women through imposing some policies, legal measures, strategies and conditionalities favoring the cause of their development. With the prescription and persuasions from the donor agencies the national government are to take measures to increase participation of women in development activities through undertaking various development projects by national development organizations and institutions. The impact of global developmental strategy of women has created a platform for political movement for women development. In line with that political movement a socio-economic movement for women development started in the developing countries.¹

The issue of women’s political participation in Bangladesh has developed within the ambit of broader global perspective. The process started with the Universal

¹ For details please see Hossain (1999); Chowdhury, Nazma (1994a); Chowdhury, Nazma *et al.*(1994b); Chowdhury, Nazma.(1994c) and Chowdhury, Farah Deeba (1994).

Declaration of Human Rights of 1948. It was followed by the adoption of a UN Convention on the Political Rights of Women in 1952, which emphasized on women's participation in all spheres of life. After that the first UN Conference on Women, held in Mexico City in 1975, declared the decade between 1975 and 1985 as the "International Women Decade", and provided suggestions for the recruitment, nomination and promotion of women in various branches of the government, public bodies, trade unions, political parties and pressure groups. This was followed by the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) declared in 1979 that laid down the importance on equality of rights in every sphere of society. Again, the World Conference on Agrarian Reform and Rural Development (WCARRD) in 1979 gave strong support for the integration of women in agrarian reform and rural development. It viewed women not only as contributors but also as beneficiaries and active participants in development efforts.

Following the first one, all subsequent UN Women's Conferences *i.e.* the second, third and fourth respectively held in Copenhagen in 1980, Nairobi in 1985, and Beijing in 1995 and several other international conferences such as the Women's World Conference on Human Rights held in Vienna in 1993, the International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD) held in Cairo in 1994; the Economic and Social Commission For Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP) Conference held in 1995, and Women Conference held in New York in 2000 - have emphasized for women's civil, socio-political and legal rights and empowerment. The documents and strategies of all the international conferences on women stressed for creating a strong platform for action and advocacy for women (The Hunger Project, India and Hossain, 1999: 178). Governments of third world countries have to devise suitable strategies to achieve the goals set by those international conferences, which in the long run helped to emerge WID Policy in their respective countries. Bangladesh Government has made formal commitments to women's political participation through all those important international documents.

As a part of WID policy, women's representation to local bodies was for the first time ensured by two Presidential Ordinances- the Local Government Ordinance of 1976 and Pourashava (Municipal) Ordinance of 1977, which made provision for nomination of two women members to Union Parishad. Afterwards Preseident Zia in his Swanirvar Gram Sarker Programme in 1980, kept provision for nomination of two women in its composition. Following that some changes took place in the number as well as in the procedures of nomination of women members through

the promulgation of the Local Government (Upazila Parishad and Upazila Administration Reorganization) Ordinance 1982 and the Local Government (Union Parishad) Ordinance 1983. After that, nomination system was changed in 1997. A system of three reserved seats for women to be filled up through direct adult franchise in both Union Parishad and municipalities was enacted in the same year. Recently promulgated Gram Sarker Act (Law No. 6 of 27th February, 2003) has endorsed women members as advisers in the overall composition of Gram Sarker system² at the ward level.

At national level favourable legislations and policy directives of governments have also buttressed the cause of women development. Government policy specially, policy measures for education have also influenced the emergence of women leadership in Bangladesh. Non-formal education, adult education, total literacy movement (TLM), food for education, free primary education and scholarship for girls' students are some of such strategies through which women's development issues were addressed by the governments.

To enhance women's status and participation at national and sub-national level, another positive attempt was the establishment of the Ministry of Women and Children Affairs. Furthermore, creation of focal points for women in every Ministry, Divisions and Agencies and making WID as a strong component of the development projects are both salutary steps towards women's development. At present, the Ministry of Women and Children Affairs is involved in implementing different projects related to the development of women. All these legal provisions contributed positively in bringing women members in the local government bodies.

4.2 Women Members in Union Parishad: A Chronology

Most of the Local Bodies in Bangladesh had their origin during the British days but there was lack of involvement of women members in the local bodies. The Calcutta Municipal Act, 1923 allowed women for the first time to exercise their franchise. But following independence in 1947 the Pakistan Government did not

² Gram Sarker means village government at ward level. Jurisdictionally there is Gram Sarker at every ward of Union Parishad. It is composed of One Chief, One Adviser and other 13 members including different occupational groups and organizations which are selected as per consensus derived in presence of one tenth voters of the respective ward under the Chairmanship and supervision of the directing authority, Upazila Nirbahi Officer. Male and female member of the ward will act as the chief and adviser of the Gram Sarker, respectively. It is not a formal unit of local government rather it is an auxiliary organization of Union Parishad. The main function of the Gram Sarker is to play a helpful role in the affairs of Union Parishad.

allow female voters to cast their votes in election to rural Local Bodies until 1956. Bangladesh inherited the local government structure from the Britishers through Pakistan regime.

Through two Presidential orders no. 7, 1972 and no. 22, 1973, Local Government system started functioning in Bangladesh. In the recent past, the statutory representation of women was for the first time provisioned in the lowest tiers of local government *i.e.* Union Parishad in 1976. At that time two women members were nominated by the Sub-divisional Officer in the Union Parishad. After that, Ziaur Rahman, the then President of Bangladesh, introduced Swanirvar Village Programme and Gram Sarkar. According to the Government Order 1980: A Swanirvar Gram Sarkar shall consist of a Gram Pradhan *i.e.* Village Chief and eleven other members of which not less than two shall be women. Regarding women's participation in Local Bodies important development took place during Ershad regime. Following the passage of the Local Government (Upazilla Parishad and Upazila Administration Reorganization) Ordinance 1982 and the Local Government (Union Parishad) Ordinance 1983, changes took place in the number as well as in the procedures of nomination of women members. In addition to elected male members and one Chairperson, in 1983, the number of nominated women members was raised from 2 to 3. Here one woman was nominated from each ward. Thereafter, government made a provision for raising the number of wards and instead of 3 wards, 9 wards were created in 1993³. The system of nomination of women members in Union Parishad was changed to indirect election. According to this system, three women members were elected by the 9 elected members and the elected Chairman. A major breakthrough regarding the process of representation of women members in Union Parishad was made as per suggestion of the Local Government Reform Commission in 1997. In this system, indirect election for women members was withdrawn. In each Union three seats are reserved for women dividing nine wards into three units. One third of the total membership was reserved for women members. One woman is elected from three wards through direct male and female adult franchise in Union Parishad.

In Union Parishad, representation of women members has been made in different standing committees. Now the number of standing committees in UP has been raised from 7 to 12 so that all three women members can be the chairman of at least one standing committee. The women members get one-third of the total Annual Development Programme (ADP) project in a financial year. Women members are playing role as chairman in some committees *i.e.* Committee on Selection of Women for Vulnerable Group Development (VGD) programme,

Committee for Distribution of Old Age Allowances, Primary Education Committee, Committee for Selection of Women in Rural Maintenance Programme (RMP), and Social Development Committee. Apart from this, women members will be made chairman of one third of the Project Committees for undertaking various development projects by the Ministry of Relief and Disaster Management. In five standing committees such as i) Women and Children Welfare; ii) Fisheries and Livestock; iii) Tree Plantation; iv) Union Works Activities; and v) Mass education, at least one woman member will have to be included.

Again at least one woman member is ensured in the committees like i) Food for Works Program; ii) VGF Program; iii) Test Relief Program; iv) Old Age Allowance Program; v) Committee for selection of place for setting up tube well at the Union Level; vi) Union Family Welfare Center Management Committee; vii) Union Population Control Committee; viii) Union Disaster Management Committee; ix) Union Committee for Checking of Oppression on Women; x) Union Tender Committee; xi) Union Hut-Bazar Management; xii) Upazila Development and Coordination Committee. A woman member is nominated by the Upazila Nirbahi Officer as member of that committee.

According to memo No/Prajai-3/Micellaneous-14/2001/80/(5500), dated 10-9-02 (M/O. LGRD&C), the women members are advised to take necessary actions regarding women and children oppression and case against dowry and acid throwing, controlling of child marriage and ensure registration of marriage. They will act chairman of such committee and they will take necessary measures regarding the welfare of women and children (provision No. 13 of that circular - Paripatra). One third of the members of all the standing committees will be filled up by women members. One third of the total standing committees will be Chaired by the women members. But the Chairman of Union Parishad will also act as the Chairman of the standing committee on finance and establishment (Provision no-14). Women members will act as Chairman of one third of the project committees of Union Parishad (Provision no- 15).

4.3 Socio-economic Characteristics of Women Members of Union Parishad

Socio-economic and political background of the women leaders of Union Parishad is an important factor, which helps them performing their leadership

³ In 1993 with the recommendation of local government reform commission the number of ward was increased from three to nine. At present there are nine wards in every Union Parishad. Actually, ward is the lowest unit of Union Parishad, which is composed of some villages.

role. The better socio-economic status may have positive impact on the performance of the Union Parishad. The socio-economic and political profile of women leadership such as age, education, income, marital status, land ownership and political affiliation etc. may be very useful in analyzing their status and role in UP. In the present study, some socio-economic characteristics of sampled members of Union Parishad are analysed to support changes occurred in relation to other studies over time.

4.3.1 Age Distribution

In all three Divisions, only 8.97% women members belonged to the age group of 21-25 years. Majority of the respondents (67.95%) belonged to the age group of 26-35 years. Very few women members (3.85%) belonged to the age group of 40 and above (Table-1). Findings of the age distribution of respondents revealed that the young age women members assumed the responsibilities of the Union Parishad in large number which correspond to earlier studies of Quadir and Islam (1987), WFP (1998) and Quddus *et. al.* (2001:8). The young age women generally welcome challenging tasks, enthusiastic and had enterprising capacity to assume responsible duties in public life at the grassroots.

Table 1: Distribution of Age According to Division

Age Group (in years)	Name of the Division						Total	
	Chittagong		Dhaka		Sylhet		No.	%
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%		
21-25	2	6.90	3	8.57	2	14.29	7	8.97
26-30	17	58.62	11	31.43	8	57.14	36	46.15
31-35	4	13.79	12	34.29	1	7.14	17	21.80
36-40	5	17.24	7	20.00	3	21.43	15	19.23
40 & above	1	3.45	2	5.71	0	0	3	3.85
Total	29	100.00	35	100.00	14	100.00	78	100.00

Source: Field Survey

4.3.2 Educational Status of the Women Members

Educational attainment of the women encourages them taking participation in various activities of the Union Parishad. In Table-2 educational status of the women member of the Dhaka, Chittagong and Sylhet district is explained. It was found that in all three Divisions, highest percentage (41.03%) of women members had education level of class VI-X, which is also followed by Dhaka and Sylhet

Divisions. But in Chittagong Division, the highest number of women members had education up to SSC level. Very few women members had education more than SSC level. In total women members owning HSC and Graduate plus education was about 13%. In all the three Divisions 41% women members belonged to the educational qualification of class VI-X and 37.18% had education ranging from SSC to graduate and above level. The findings of the above data did not corroborated with the earlier study conducted by Quadir and Islam (1987), WFP (1998) and Quddus *et. al.* (2001:8) which showed that more and more educated women got involved in the affairs of UP. This is an indication of the emerging role of education in general and for women in particular in local level development through Union Parishad.

Table 2 : Distribution of Education According to Division

Level of Education	Name of the Division						Total	
	Chittagong		Dhaka		Sylhet		No.	%
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%		
1. Cannot read & write	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
2. Can read & write only	2	6.90	-	-	-	-	2	2.56
3. Read up to class V	5	17.24	5	14.29	5	35.71	15	19.23
4. Class VI-X	8	27.58	18	51.42	6	42.86	32	41.03
5. S. S. C	10	34.48	6	17.14	3	21.43	19	24.36
6. H. S. C	2	6.90	5	14.29	-	-	7	8.97
7. Graduate & above	2	6.90	1	2.86	-	-	3	3.85
Total	29	100.00	35	100.00	14	100.00	78	100.00

Source: Field Survey

4.3.3 Marital Status of the Respondent

Marital status of the respondents according to Division was shown in Table-3. From the above table it is evident that 83.33% of women members were married, followed by separated/widower (12.82%) and unmarried (3.85%). Among three Divisions, the percentage of married women was the highest (93.10%) in Chittagong Division. On the other hand, except Chittagong Division there were separated women members in Dhaka and Sylhet Divisions. This finding corroborated with the findings of the earlier studies conducted by Quadir and Islam (1987), WFP (1998), and Quddus *et. al.* (2001:8) which indicated that women members in spite of their traditional role in family life came forward to serve the rural society through Union Parishad.

Table 3 : Marital Status of the Respondents According to Division

Marital Status	Name of the Division						Total	
	Chittagong		Dhaka		Sylhet		No.	%
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%		
Married	27	93.10	27	77.14	11	78.57	65	83.33
Unmarried	2	6.90	-	-	1	7.14	3	3.85
Separated/ Widower	-	-	8	22.86	2	14.29	10	12.82
Total	29	100.00	35	100.00	14	100.00	78	100.00

Source: Field Survey

4.3.4 Occupation Status of the Respondents

Occupational status of the women members represents their economic as well as social status in the society. It is observed from the Table-4a that 70.51% women member's main occupation is housewife, 16.67% women leader's main occupation is service, which is followed by tailoring (5.13%), agriculture

Table 4a : Occupational Status of the Respondents According to Division

Occupational Status	Name of the Division						Total	
	Chittagong		Dhaka		Sylhet		Main	Sub-sidiary
	Main	Sub-sidiary	Main	Sub-sidiary	Main	Sub-sidiary		
Tailoring	-	3	3	5	1	-	4	8
		(37.50)	(10.35)	(33.33)	(7.14)		(5.13)	(30.77)
Housewife	25	3	21	5	9	3	55	11
	(71.43)	(37.50)	(72.41)	(33.33)	(64.29)	(100)	(70.51)	(42.30)
Service	6	-	4	3	3	-	13	3
	(17.14)		(13.79)	(20.00)	(21.43)		(16.67)	(11.54)
Agriculture	1	-	1	2	-	-	2	2
	(2.86)		(3.45)	(13.34)			(2.56)	(7.69)
Student	1	-	-	-	1	-	2	-
	(2.86)				(7.14)		(2.56)	1
Business	-	1	-	-	-	-	-	-
		(12.50)						(3.85)
Midwifery	-	1	-	-	-	-	-	1
		(12.50)						(3.85)
Livestock Rearing	2	-	-	-	-	-	2	-
	(5.71)						(2.57)	
Total	35	8	29	15	14	3	78	26
	(100.00)	(100.00)	(100.00)	(100.00)	(100.00)	(100.00)	(100.00)	(100.00)

Source: Field Survey; Figures in brackets indicate percentage.

(2.56%), student (2.56%) and livestock (2.57%). Except Sylhet district 37.50 percent women members in Chittagong and 33.33 percent in Dhaka division are involved in tailoring in addition to their main occupation. Very few women members, which ranges from 3 to 17 percent are involved in service, agriculture, business and livestock rearing respectively. This indicated that the mobility of women have increased as compared to before because of diversification of their occupation in addition to their role in the family.

4.3.5 Occupational Status of the Family

From Table-4b, it is evident that majority (38.46%) of the respondents family members' main occupation was agriculture. Subsequently it was followed by business (28.21%), service (20.51%), Housewife's (5.13%), Tailoring (2.57%)

Table 4b : Occupational Status of the Family According to Division

Occupation	Name of the Division						Total	
	Chittagong		Dhaka		Sylhet		Main	Sub-sidiary
	Main	Sub-sidiary	Main	Sub-sidiary	Main	Sub-sidiary		
Agriculture	13 (37.14)	2 (25.00)	9 (31.03)	3 (30.00)	8 (57.14)	-	30 (38.46)	5 (22.73)
Service	7 (20.00)	2 (25.00)	7 (24.14)	4 (40.00)	2 (14.29)	3 (75.00)	16 (20.51)	9 (40.91)
Business	9 (25.71)	1 (2.50)	10 (34.48)	2 (20.00)	3 (21.43)	1 (25.00)	22 (28.21)	4 (18.18)
Housewife	2 (5.71)	-	2 (6.90)	-	-	-	4 (5.13)	-
Carpenter	1 (2.86)	1 (12.50)	-	-	-	-	1 (1.28)	1 (4.54)
Electrician	1 (2.86)	-	-	-	-	-	1 (1.28)	-
Toutiony	1 (2.86)	-	-	-	-	-	1 (1.28)	-
Driver	1 (2.86)	-	-	-	-	-	1 (1.28)	-
Tailoring	-	-	1 (3.45)	-	1 (17.14)	-	2 (2.57)	-
Livestock Rearing	-	2 (25.00)	-	1 (10.00)	-	-	-	3 (13.64)
Total	35 (100.00)	8 (100.00)	29 (100.00)	10 (100.00)	14 (100.00)	4 (100.00)	78 (100.00)	22 (100.00)

Source: Field Survey Figures in brackets indicate percentage.

and very few family members were involved in carpentry, electrical technician, tutiony, driving and livestock. In case of subsidiary occupation the percentage distribution of the family members showed that the majority (40.91%) belonged to service holder, which was followed by agriculture (22.73%), business (18.18%), livestock (13.64%) and carpentry (4.54%). The findings of the study indicate that the traditional bondage of family with agriculture as a livelihood strategy is now diversified to other livelihood outcomes for better income earning and economic solvency.

4.3.6 Husband's Education of the Women Leaders

Educational profile of the husband of the married and guardian of the women members is presented in Table-5. It was found that highest number (34.62%) of respondents fell in the category of SSC +HSC group which was followed by education level of VI-X class (25.64%), above graduate (15.38%) up to class five (12.82%) and illiterate (11.54%). Percentage distribution of above SSC educational level constituted the highest majority in Dhaka and Chittagong Divisions *i.e.* 34.29% and 37.93% respectively. The only exception was in Sylhet Division where majority respondents (35.72%) had education up to class VI-X. The findings of the earlier studies conducted by Quadir and Islam (1987), WFP (1998) and Quddus *et. al.* (2001:8) showed that education profile of the husbands of the women members were getting better trends which had a similar trends of educational status of women members of UP. It indicates that the better the education of the husband, the better the well being of the family as a whole.

Table 5 : Husbands' Education of the Women Members According to Divisions

Level of Education	Name of the Division						Total	
	Dhaka		Chittagong		Sylhet		No.	%
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%		
No. Education / Illiterate	2	5.71	6	20.69	1	7.14	9	11.54
I-V	4	11.43	3	10.35	3	21.43	10	12.82
VI-X	11	31.43	4	13.79	5	35.72	20	25.64
S. S. C + H. S. C	12	34.29	11	37.93	4	28.57	27	34.62
Graduate & above	6	17.14	5	17.24	1	7.14	12	15.38
Total	35	100.00	29	100.00	14	100.00	78	100.00

Source: Field Survey; Figures in brackets indicate percentage.

4.3.7 Types of Family of the Women Members

Types of family of the women members are presented in Table-6. Out of total respondents single family constituted the highest majority (60.26%). The rest of the respondents (39.74%) belonged to joint family. In all, same trends were visible in three Divisions but in Chittagong Division percentage distribution of single as well as joint family was approximately equal where joint family still prevails in a significant percentage other than two Divisions under study. This indicates that the tradition of joint families are gradually transforming to nuclear or single families. This also indicates that with the changes in family structure, women's role in family and outside is changing because women in single family are less likely needed to have permission for engaging herself in outside their family affairs. This might also mean less security for women because joint family system provided child care facilities in mother's absence.

Table 6 : Division-wise Types of Family of the Women Members

Types of Family	Name of the Division						Total	
	Dhaka		Chittagong		Sylhet		No.	%
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%		
Single	22	62.86	15	51.72	10	71.43	47	60.26
Joint	13	37.14	14	48.28	4	28.57	31	39.74
Total	35	100.00	29	100.00	14	100.00	78	100.00

Source: Field Survey Figures in brackets indicate percentage.

4.3.8 Engaged in Local Judicial Roles by the Family Members of the Women Members

Engagement in local judicial role by the family members of the women leader was presented in Table-7. Percentage distribution regarding the engagement in judicial

Table 7 : Family Member Engaged in Local Judicial Role

Name of the Division	Engaged in		Total
	Engaged	Not Engaged	
Dhaka	14(45.16)	21(44.68)	35(44.87)
Chittagong	13(41.94)	16(34.04)	29(37.18)
Sylhet	4(12.90)	10(21.28)	14(17.95)
Total	31(100.00)	47(100.00)	78(100.00)

Source: Field Survey; Figures in brackets indicate percentage.

role by the family members of the respondents indicated that around 40% of the family members were involved in local judicial activities while the rest 60% were not doing the same thing. This implied that 40% the women members became the leader of the Union Parishad by using family heritage.

4.3.9 Types of Housing Status/Residence of the Respondents

Housing status of the respondent is given in Table-8 which shows that in total 87.18% respondents have had tin-shed house which is followed by building (10.26%) and thatch (2.56%) respectively. In Dhaka Division none have buildings and in Sylhet Division none have thatched house, which implies that respondents of Sylhet Division have better economic and housing condition.

Table 8 : Types of Residence According to Division

Types of Residence	Name of the Division						Total	
	Dhaka		Chittagong		Sylhet		No.	%
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%		
Tin shed	34	97.14	23	79.31	11	78.57	68	87.18
Building	-	-	5	17.24	3	21.43	8	10.26
Thatch	1	2.86	1	3.45	-	-	2	2.56
Total	35	100.00	29	100.00	14	100.00	78	100.00

Source: Field Survey; Figures in brackets indicate percentage.

4.3.10 Average Monthly and Annual Income of the Respondents

Income of the respondents was an important indicator for measuring economic and social status. Through economic status individual could exert influence in the

Table 9 : Division-wise Distribution of Annual Income of the Family from Various Sources

Name of the Division	Annual Income				Total of Average Income	
	Agricultural		Non-Agricultural		Annual	Monthly
	Average of Annual Income	Average of Monthly Income	Average of Annual Income	Average of Monthly Income		
	(Fig. in Tk.)					
Dhaka	33592.86	2799.40	42600.00	3550.00	6349.41	76192.86
Chittagong	34404.55	2867.05	94168.15	7847.35	10714.40	128572.70
Sylhet	17020.00	1418.33	64763.64	5396.97	6815.30	81783.64

Source: Field Survey;

society. In Table-9 income from agricultural and non-agricultural sources of the respondents is presented. It is found that average monthly income of women members of Chittagong Division was the highest, which accounted for Tk. 10,714.00. The average monthly incomes of the women leader of Sylhet and Dhaka Divisions were Tk. 6812.50 and Tk. 6349.41 respectively. In case of average annual income of the women leaders of Chittagong, Sylhet and Dhaka Divisions it was found Tk. 128572.70, Tk. 81783.64 and Tk. 76192.86 respectively which implied that most of the elected women members belonged to well off family.

4.3.11 Do you Support Any Political Party

Percentage distribution for supporting political parties by the respondents is shown in Table-10. It was found that except 57.14% respondent from Sylhet Division, 80% respondents from both Dhaka and Chittagong Divisions supported political party. In total at least eighty percent of the respondents had hidden support or affiliation to any political party.

Table 10 : Do You Support Any Political Party

Name of the Division	Responses in Favour of Support	Do not support	Total
Dhaka	31(88.57)	4(11.43)	35(100.00)
Chittagong	23(79.31)	6(20.69)	29(100.00)
Sylhet	8(57.14)	6(42.86)	14(100.00)
Total	62(79.49)	16(20.51)	78(100.00)

Source: Field Survey; Figures in brackets indicate percentage.

4.3.12 Distribution of Respondents According to Political Party and Division

Table-11 reveals that about 71% respondents of Dhaka Division had affiliation to Awami League, which was followed by about 87% in Chittagong Division. All the respondents of Sylhet Division had supports for AL. About 29% and 13% women leaders of Dhaka and Chittagong Divisions respectively had supports for political parties other than AL.

4.3.13 Linkage of Women Members with Organizations Other than Union Parishad

In Table-12 it is found that women members had linkages with a number of organizations like Cooperatives, NGOs, Local Clubs, Relief Committees, VDP,

Table 11 : Distribution of Respondents According to Political Party and Divisions

Name of the Political Party	Name of Division						Total	
	Dhaka		Chittagong		Sylhet		No	%
	No	%	No	%	No	%		
AI	22	70.97	20	86.96	8	100.00	50	80.64
BNP	5	16.13	3	13.04	-	-	8	12.90
Jamat	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
JP	4	12.90	-	-	-	-	4	6.46
Others	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Total	31	100.00	23	100.00	8	100.00	62	100.00

Source: Field Survey; Figures in brackets indicate percentage.

School Committees and Insurance Companies. In all the Divisions most of the respondents had linkage with NGOs for more than 4.5 years on an average. In Dhaka and Chittagong Divisions some women members had also linkage with

Table 12 : Linkages of Women Member with Organizations Other than UP

Name of the Institution	Dhaka Division		Sylhet Division		Chittagong Division		Name of the Position Occupied by the Women Members
	No. of Members Involved	Average Year of Involvement	No. of Members Involved	Average Year of Involvement	No. of Members Involved	Average Year of Involvement	
Co-operative	5	9.60	-	-	9	3.56	Manager, Secretary, Member
NGO	14	4.50	3	4	10	2.4	Co-operative Member, Health Workers, Teacher, Workers, Manager
Local club	1	9	-	-	6	4.67	Convener, Manager, Member
Relief Committee	-	-	-	-	5	2.6	Advisor, Member
VDP	1	4	1	2	1	1	Member
School committee	14	4.36	2	2	5	2	Adviser, Member
Social welfare sangha	1	8	-	-	3	2.33	Secretary, Manager
Insurance company	2	4	-	-	2	3	Worker, Member

Source: Field Survey

cooperative organizations, local club and insurance company. In all three Divisions it was found that women member were also involved in VDP and school committees. The positions occupied by women members in the organizations were Member, Secretary, Manager. The findings of the study indicated that linkage and experience with different socio-economic organizations helped women to become members in Union Parishad.

4.3.14 Did Any Relatives of Your Family Serve as UP Leaders

In Table-13 information regarding having leadership tradition in UP in the family of women members is presented. It was found that about one third of the women leaders came to UP leadership by their hereditary line. The positions held by them were members and chairmen of UP. In some cases position occupied by the family members were more than once. Holding of leadership position in UP by the family members indicated that very few women in UP had come into leadership position through using their family heritage.

Table 13 : Did Any Relatives of Your Family Serve as UP Leaders within Last 15 Years

Did any relative of Your Family Serve in UP	Serve as UP leader within last 15 years		Name of position occupied by the Family Members	
	Yes	No	Member	Chairman
Dhaka	7	28	5 times	2 times
Chittagong	5	24	2 times	3 times
Sylhet	2	12	1 time	1 time
Total	14(17.95)	64(82.05)	-	-

Source: Field Survey; Figures in brackets indicate percentage.

4.3.15 Position Previously Held by the Women Members Themselves

In response to a question asked whether women member occupied any position in the Union Parishad they informed that none of them held any positions in UP through direct election but 7, 2 and 3 women members from Dhaka, Sylhet and Chittagong Divisions previously became UP member through nomination process more than once, which are given in Table-14.

Table 14 : Did You Hold Any Position in UP Before Yourself

Did You Hold Any Position in UP	Yes	No	In Which Capacity		How Many Times
	Elected	Nominated			
Dhaka	7	28	2	7	9 times
Sylhet	2	12	0	2	2times
Chittagong	3	26	0	3	3 times

Source: Field Survey

4.3.16 Ownership of Owned and Operated Land by the Women Members

Land ownership is an important factor for socio-economic status. In rural society land is a source of power and influence. In Table-15 land ownership pattern of the women leaders is presented. Ownership of land have been classified in five categories *i.e.* landless having land area below .50 acres, small farmers having land of .50-1.50 acres, medium farmers having land area of 1.51-4.99 acres, large farmers having land of 5.00-7.49 acres and very large farmers having land above 7.50 acres. From the Table-18 it was found that more than one third women leaders of UP do not have any land. Whereas about forty percent women leader of Union Parishad belonged to the small farmers class with an average land size of .75 acres of land. About 13% women leaders owned average land of 2.9 acres who

Table 15 : Division-wise Ownership of Own and Operated Land of The Members

Categories of Land	Division wise Land Ownership Pattern of the Members							
	Sylhet		Chittagong		Dhaka		Total	
	No of Res.	Total Land	No of Res.	Total Land	No of Res.	Total Land	No of Res.	Total Land
Landless Farmers								
< .50 Acres	4	00	11	00	13	00	28(35.90)	00
Small Farmers								
(.50-1.50 Acres)	3	3.17	13	10.93	14	8.41	30(38.46)	22.51
Medium Farmers								
(1.51-4.99 Acres)	4	13.02	2	3.60	5	12.38	11(14.10)	29.00
Large Farmers								
(5.00- 7.49 Acres)	1	5.00	1	6.00	2	11.00	4(5.13)	22.00
Very Large Farmers								
(7.50+ Acres)	2	28.74	2	19.00	1	14.00	5(6.41)	61.74
Total	14	49.93	29	39.53	35	45.79	78(100)	135.25

Source: Field Survey; Figures in brackets indicate percentage;

belonged to medium farmers group. Only 12% women leaders belonged to the large farmers group having average land size of 9.30 acres. In general most of the women leaders belonged to medium farmers group, which implied that women leader might have less influence in the overall affairs of the Union Parishad.

4.3.17 Division-wise Election Cost of the UP Members

In Table- 16 Division-wise breakup election cost of the women members is presented. The election cost is calculated using some overhead component of cost such as printing of posters, entertainment, conveyance, publicity and miscellaneous cost. It was observed from the details of election cost scenario that in all the divisions women member invested higher amount of money which included development cost given to mosque, madrasa and milad-mahphil and special banquet to the villagers etc. The table showed that the highest response of election cost belonged to Tk. 10,001-30,000 group, which was followed by Tk.50,001-1,00,000. The average election costs of Dhaka, Chittagong and Sylhet Division were Tk. 61,724/-, 41,210/- and 30,248/- respectively, among which women members spent the highest amount of money for winning the election of Union Parishad. It was also revealed that very few women members spent more than one lacks in the election.

Table 16 : Division-wise Election Expenditures of Women Members of Union Parishad

Election Division-wise Expenditure	Election Expenditures of Women Members of Union Parishad							
	Sylhet Division		Chittagong Division		Dhaka Division		Total	
	No of Res.	Total Cost	No of Res.	Total Cost	No of Res.	Total Cost	No of Res.	Total Cos
Below 10,000	2	11,850	1	5,000	3	9,500	6	26,350
10001-30000	6	1,10,225	9	1,68,250	12	2,56,850	27	5,35,325
30001-50000	4	1,72,700	9	3,82,100	5	2,12,450	18	7,67,250
50001-100000	2	1,28,700	10	6,39,750	11	8,22,200	23	15,90,650
100000-200000	-	-	-	-	2	2,65,500	2	2,65,500
200000+	-	-	-	-	2	5,93,850	2	5,93,850
Total Cost:	14	4,23,475	29	11,95,100	35	21,60,350	78	37,78,925
Average Cost:	-	30,248	-	41,210	-	61,724	-	48,448

Source: Field Survey

5. Problems Faced by the Women Members in Performing their Statutory Duties

In our society, the involvement of women in public activities is an emerging issue and they have to face many internal as well as external problems both from their families *vis-a-vis* from the outsides. The details of the problems as recorded from the interviews of the women respondents are depicted as under:

5.1 Legal provision

Women leadership emerged at the grassroots through an incremental process. After being elected in 1997 for the first time women members faced legal problems, which ranked first in the hierarchy of the total problem. At that time job description, duties and responsibilities of women members were not very clear in the legal framework. They were utterly frustrated to get any remedy for their constant complains and grievances from any corner. Though in some cases women were vociferous enough to exert their due rights in the Parishad. In the beginning, these problems were much acute but most of the problems have already elapsed due to creation of a number of legal provisions for women members. Despite that some problems are still existent. There is inequality in the mode of representation between male and female members. Male members are being elected from one ward but women members are being elected from three wards. Women members are representing three wards whereas male members are representing one ward. But both are getting same amount of allowance, which is not justified from the viewpoint of rationality.

5.2 Sex Discrimination

Women members in Union Parishad suffer much from massive sex discrimination which is found in the behaviour, attitudes and treatment of the UP functionaries *i.e.* Chairmen, male members, secretaries and government officials. Chairmen and male members do not want to involve the women members in implementation of projects, judicial activities, distribution of VGD cards and VGF programmes, old age pensions schemes, formation of various committees. Chairmen and male members always try to avoid women members. The Chairman and male members do not want to involve women members in any project arguing that these are difficult tasks and they will have to face a lot of problems during project implementation.

Chairman and Secretary try to hide the Office Order, Circular etc. regarding the duties and rights of women members in UP. Chairman, in connivance with the

Male members and Secretaries, decides which male member should be given which project but they do not consider women members capable of implementing any development project. They forget that women members have come to Parishad through direct adult franchise. Sometimes Chairman gives project to that woman member who maintains a good contact and relationship with chairman and other woman members are thus being deprived by not having any responsibility of project implementation.

5.3 Knowledge and experience

Women members suffer from lack of sufficient knowledge of rules, regulations, circular and legal provisions of local government. Even they are not aware of their own legal rights in Union Parishad. Owing to their lesser involvement in the overall activities of the Union Parishad women members are deprived of acquiring required skill and experience as compared to their male counterpart.

5.4 Urban biasness

There are other limitations behind the underdevelopment of women leadership at the grassroots. Most of the efforts or movements for women development in the sphere of political, economic, social undertakings are basically urban biased and encircled in the urban areas. Urban-based women activists are not much aware about the problems of the women members of the Union Parishad. Such elitist and urban-based movement for the cause of women development has failed to contribute much for development has of women leadership at the grassroots.

5.5 Unity among women members

There is lack of unity among the women members in UP. They could enjoy their rights better if women members were united for their common cause. They could prevent many unusual activities of the Chairmen and Male members if women members could fight against them unitedly.

5.6 Enough official arrangement

In some Union Parishads, a complete Union Parishad Complex has been built. But in most of the Union Parishads, the female members do not have any separate sitting arrangements to work in the office. They do not have any place to say their prayer in the UP. There should be sufficient physical facilities so that women members do not have to face any problem in the Parishad.

5.7 Socio- cultural Problem

In the traditional society like Bangladesh, women have to face some basic socio-cultural problems, which emerge from lack of education, consciousness and cultural backwardness. These are causing problem for natural growth of women leadership at the grassroots level. Patriarchy and male domination are rampant in rural society. The women members disclosed that the Chairman and Male members tried to exert domination on women in every affair of the UP. Actually in a patriarchal society it is not so easy to accept women leadership by the male partners. They are but to accept male domination. As a matter of fact, in such a situation, effective women leadership is not possible. The total control is still in the hands of male leadership. In the macro-level where patriarchy prevails in the society, natural, real and automatic women leadership cannot grow easily.

5.8 Proxy problem

There is problem of proxy leadership in the sphere of Union Parishad too. Due to lack of education and experience, the women members play a titular role in Union Parishad. It is observed that sometimes women members send their husband or father or father-in-law to meet the need of the Union Parishad. Due to lack of enough knowledge, skill and experience, women are to play a proxy role in Union Parishad, which are harmful for the development of women leadership.

5.9 Lack of cooperation from the administration

In case any confusion or dispute arises with any legal implications, women members try to get remedy from the Upazila administration with a view to getting remedy for that. But it is noticed that they do not get enough cooperation and support from the local administration.

5.10 Avoidance of women members

Generally Chairmen and male members do not want to involve women members in any activity of the Parishad. It is observed that meeting of the Parishad is convened all on a sudden so that they can avoid women members. Sometimes meeting is called in a time, which is not convenient for women members to participate in it. Despite women members' keen interest to take part in every activity and meeting, Chairmen and Male members thus bypass the women members, which is unethical and undesirable for democratic governance.

6. Suggested Measures to Overcome the Problems

In this section, an effort has been made to suggest some measures to overcome the problems faced by the women members of the Union Parishad.

6.1 Stop discrimination: The Constitution of Bangladesh grants women equal rights that the state shall not discriminate against citizen on grounds only of religion, race, sex etc. and some special laws exist to protect women from discrimination and violence but jurisdictional infringement of such legal provisions are rampant in our society. To overcome the problems of women leaders in Union Parishad, all types of sex discrimination should be eliminated. In order to ensure women's rights in the Union Parishad affirmative actions and strategies should be taken from the government so that there should be no legal barrier between male and female members in any activities of Union Parishad.

6.2 Training for awareness building: After entering into the public life and being elected as women members in the Union Parishad, they should be well groomed and equipped about their jurisdictional rights and privileges in Union Parishad along with all relevant Rules, Regulations, Office Order, Gazette Notifications, Circulars, Ordinances and other legal provisions of Union Parishad. The training programme should be designed in a way so that women could clearly understand their rights, duties and responsibilities. Well planned capacity building and development programme through regular and frequent training program could help immensely to strengthen the roles and position of women members in Union Parishad. Proper training and exposure can also help women members to be empowered to work with various women's issues and represent women's needs and concerns in the most effective way.

6.3 Reform in socio-cultural system: It is emphasized that greater participation of women in politics is a pre-requisite for establishing women's rights and development in the society. But participation of women in politics has remained by and large confined to a small group of women who come from well-to-do urban and educated background. In fact most of the problems faced by women for getting involved in politics are embedded in the socio-economic, religious and cultural system, which have given women a subordinate status in the family, the society and State. Reform in the socio-cultural system could help women to be active in politics, for which education and employment opportunities should be broadened to a great extent.

6.4 Reservation of seats: Nomination of women for the reserved seats cannot ensure empowerment of women. In the elementary stage out of twelve male members the provision of nomination of three women member could help

recognize their rights in the local government but it could not give them their equal rights. Gradually provision of reservation of one-third position in the general seats through direct election of women members was introduced to facilitate women's effective participation at local levels. Still women members cannot ensure their due rights and share in the Union Parishad. To strengthen their role, it needs to enlarge the participation of women in the leadership position such as the Chairman. Therefore, efforts should be made to reserve one-third seats for women in the Chairmanship position too.

6.5 Consensus of all political parties on reservation of seats: All political parties must introduce affirmative action measures to enhance participation of women in politics and thus empower them. In addition to the reserved seats for women in the parliament, all political parties should give nomination of a certain percentage preferably at least 10%-15% seats to women candidates to run for the general seats in the parliament through direct adult franchise. In course of time, provision of direct election should be introduced for the reserved seats for women in the Parliaments.

6.6 Role of women's organization: Women activists and women organizations should come forward to help the cause of women members at the grassroots level local government system. Urban based women activists and organizations should be aware of the problems of women members at the local level. On the basis of proper diagnosis of these problems, sustained efforts should be made to overcome these problems and lobby or create pressure on government for required policy changes. Local level women leaders should be integrated with the national network of women movement or development, which will facilitate local level women leaders to play their effective role in the Union Parishad.

6.7 Curtail proxy role: In the beginning some women members may play a proxy role but with understanding of their rights, roles and duties, achieving knowledge skill and experience of the same, women can play an effective role and do no more remain proxy leader. To get rid of the proxy problems, it is essential to change patriarchal social values and encourage women toward leadership roles and activities. In order to overcome this, it needs to build suitable as well as favorable values and cultural norms in the society, through spread of education via an effective role of media.

6.8 Administrative Cooperation: To strengthen the role of women in the Union Parishad, the Administration should extend their all out support and cooperation to them. The office bearers of the Union Parishad should also come forward to work hand in hand with women members for the development of the locality.

7. Conclusion

The study has analyzed the status of women's participation in the functioning of Union Parishad. It observes that the variables like age, education, family background, land ownership pattern, income and political affiliation have a direct effect on the performance of women members in rural local government. It reveals that the women members face different problems in discharging their duties in the locality. The findings suggest that the society as a whole should come forward to help women members to work with other male members of the Union Parishad for a balanced development of the country in general and rural areas in particular.

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