

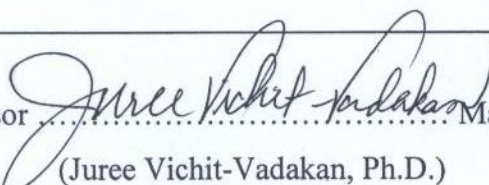
**UNHEARD VOICES AND GRIM REALITIES OF THE
CHALLENGES, COPING STRATEGIES, AND
GOVERNANCE OF WOMEN LEADERS:
THE CASE OF THE UNION PARISHAD
IN BANGLADESH**

Md. Mizanur Rahman


**A Dissertation Submitted in Partial
Fulfillment of the Requirements of the Degree of
Doctor of Philosophy (Development Administration)
School of Public Administration
National Institute of Development Administration
2013**

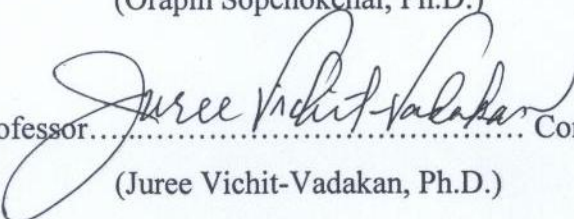
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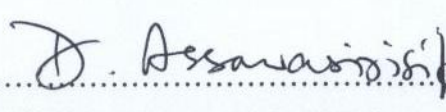
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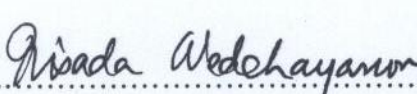
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ABSTRACT

Title of the Dissertation	Unheard Voices and Grim Realities of the Challenges, Coping Strategies, and Governance of Women Leaders: The Case of the Union Parishad in Bangladesh
Author	Md. Mizanur Rahman
Degree	Doctor of Philosophy (Development Administration)
Year	2013

The purpose of this study was to delve into the research questions: 1) Do women leaders help promote governance in the Union Parishad (UP) of Bangladesh? If so, how?; and 2) How have women leaders perceived and defined their roles and coped with the realities in the UP? The objectives were to: 1) unravel the leadership process of the women leaders in the UP; 2) uncover the perceptions, dynamics, realities, and challenges of participation of women leaders in the UP of Bangladesh; and 3) explore the coping strategies of women leaders in the UP. This study was based on qualitative methods. To fulfill the research questions and objectives, case study and phenomenology were used, which were substantiated by FGDs, content analysis, and observation methods. Primary data were collected from 19 UPs covering different socio-cultural zones of Bangladesh.

The study revealed that the women's leadership in the country developed through various socio-cultural, political, economic, and legal contexts, and structures. Liberal values, democratic movements, the positive role of education and women's organizations, etc., helped women's leadership to flourish. Empirical evidence showed that in the UP some women leaders (WLs) were the product of the family legacy, while some WLs emerged as leaders using social capital gained through NGO involvement. Most of the WLs were moderately educated; all were married and received the required family support. The socio-economic condition of the women Chairpersons was relatively better compared to the women members in the UP. The WLs were found to be sympathetic to women's interests. With a strong community mind some women leaders emerged as supra-social workers in the UP.

The WLs have been struggling to ensure their participation in the UP during the last two decades. WLs have identified 3 major challenges in their participation in

the UP: male domination, corruption, and faulty legal provision. Following some formal and informal strategies, some of the WLs were able to overcome their problems of participation. Having ensured their limited rights, some WLs contributed to governance in the UP through ensuring transparency, accountability, enhancing social justice, and expanding pro-poor benefits. The WLs were also able to change rural governance by instilling a culture of integrity, honesty, sincerity, commitment, and following a participatory management style in the UP.

To overcome the challenges of the participation of the WLs in the UP, among several recommendations cited in the study, a few are suggested here. 1) The problems of patriarchy, purdah, religious superstitions, etc., can be addressed through the expansion of education facilities and democratic governance with a view to changing the value system. 2) In strengthening the women's role in the UP, the existing political parties should introduce a quota system for women. 3) To manage the autocratic rule of the male Chairman and members, the UP structure should be reorganized with one woman Vice-Chairman. To combat male domination and corruption, the women's reservation quota can be raised from 33% to 50%. To ensure equal rights for the male and female members, necessary legal provision is needed. 4) As women are sympathetic to women's interests, in order to expand the role of women, 60% of all of the safety net programs at the UP level should be allocated to them. 5) To enlarge the scope of the participation of WLs, one-third of the total Chairmanship positions should be reserved for the women Chairpersons in all of the UPs in Bangladesh and these positions should be changed every five years. 6) To be WLs in the UP, family support is needed. Therefore, to translate such family support a "child care home" can be introduced at the community level for taking care of the children of the WLs during their work time in the UP. 7) WLs with a low level of education perform excellently and emerge as supra-social workers with a strong community mind. Therefore, efforts should be made to create a congenial atmosphere by the elected and appointed functionaries relating to UP governance.

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Md. Mizanur Rahman
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ABBREVIATIONS

ADB	:	Asian Development Bank
ADC	:	Additional Deputy Commissioner
ADP	:	Annual Development Program
ASA	:	Association for Social Advancement
BA	:	Bachelor of Arts
BAL	:	Bangladesh <i>Awami</i> League
BARD	:	Bangladesh Academy for Rural Development
BARI	:	Bangladesh Agricultural Research Institute
BBA	:	Bachelor of Business Administration
BNP	:	Bangladesh Nationalist Party
BRAC	:	Bangladesh Rural Advancement Committee
BRDB	:	Bangladesh Rural Development Board
BTV	:	Bangladesh Television
CARE	:	Cooperation for American Relief Everywhere
CCDB	:	Christian Commission for Development in Bangladesh
CDA	:	Community Development Association
CEDAW	:	Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women
CPI	:	Corruption Perception Index
CVDP	:	Comprehensive Village Development Program
DANIDA	:	Danish International Development Assistance
DC	:	Deputy Commissioner
ESCAP	:	Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific

FAO	:	Food and Agricultural Organization
FGD	:	Focus Group Discussion
FIVDS	:	Friend's in Village Development Society
FOWSIA	:	Forum on Women in Security and International Affairs
FPAB	:	Family Planning Association of Bangladesh
GID	:	Government and Institutions Department
GO	:	Government organization
GSS	:	<i>Gono Sahajjaya Sangstha</i>
HSC	:	Higher Secondary Certificate Examination
IA	:	Intermediate in Arts
ICPD	:	The International Conference on Population and Development
ICT	:	Information and Communication Technology
IGAs	:	Income Generating Activities
ILO	:	International Labour Organization
IULA	:	International Union of Local Authorities
JP	:	<i>Jatiyo Party</i>
KARITAS	:	Catholic Church Based Organization
LGED	:	Local Government Engineering Department
LGRD&C	:	Local Government, Rural Development and Cooperative
LGI	:	Local Government Institution
LGS	:	Local Government System
LGSP	:	Local Government Support Program
MBBS	:	Bachelor of Medicine, Bachelor of Surgery
MOU	:	Memorandum of Understanding
MP	:	Member of Parliament

NBDs	:	Nation Building Departments
NGO	:	Non-governmental Organization
OECD	:	Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development
PIC	:	Project Implementation Committee
PRA	:	Participatory Rural Appraisal
RDRS	:	Rangpur Dinajpur Rural Society
SDC	:	Swiss Development Corporation
SP	:	Superintendent of Police
SSC	:	Secondary School Certificate
TIB	:	Transparency International Bangladesh
TLM	:	Total Literacy Movement
TR	:	Test Relief
TV	:	Television
UDCM	:	Upazila Development and Coordination Meeting
UN	:	United Nations
UNDP	:	United Nations Development Program
UNO	:	Upazila Nirbahi Officer
UP	:	Union Parishad
UZP	:	Upazila Parishad
USAID	:	United States Agency for International Development
USD	:	United States Dollar
VCR	:	Videocassette Recorder
VGD	:	Vulnerable Group Development
VGF	:	Vulnerable Group Feeding
WCARRD	:	World Conference on Agrarian Reform and Rural Development
WEINIP	:	Women's Education, Income, Nutrition Improvement Project

WFP	:	World Food Program
WID	:	Women in Development
WINGOs	:	Women's International NGO
WLs	:	Women Leaders
WMs	:	Women Members

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction

This research study is about women leaders at the grassroots-based local government level, i.e. the Union Parishad. In Bangladesh, women's entry into local government has been ensured through affirmative action by the government in 1997, but since inception they have been struggling to strengthen their role in the Union Parishad. Before and after they were elected through adult franchise, much research has been conducted with women leaders, mostly relating to their socio-economic characteristics, but few studies have recorded the lessons learnt regarding the perception, dynamics, and challenges of women's participation, coping strategies, and contribution to overall governance in the affairs of the Union Parishad. It is expected that from this study, some policy interventions can be suggested to be adopted for the women leaders of the Union Parishad in Bangladesh.

1.1.1 Statement of the Problem

In the context of globalization, nation states strive for their socio-economic development, adopting principles of democratic governance. In a pluralistic society qualitative, meaningful, and equal political participation of both men and women is deemed the sine qua non of achieving social justice, ensuring women's empowerment, delivering developmental goals, and strengthening the process of democratic governance (UNDP, 2013, p. 4). Paradoxically from time immemorial women's participation in the political arena has been found quixotic and abortive, whereas women's participation in politics is a prerequisite for human development and democratic governance (UNDP, 2013, p. 2).

Women make up half of the population of every country in the world. However, the worldwide average percentage of women in national parliaments is only 16%. Of more than 190 countries in the world, a woman is the head of the

government (president or prime minister) in only 7. Women make up 9% of the ambassadors to the United Nations, 7% of the world's cabinet ministers, and 8% of world mayors (Paxton and Hughes, 2007, p. 1). Of all countries of the world, 73% have fewer than 20% women in their national legislatures and 10 countries have no women representatives at all (Paxton and Hughes, 2007, p. 3). Although women have made remarkable achievements in education, employment and all sectors of development with males but in the political sphere women are far lagging behind. Altogether, taking cognizance about the real fact of women and politics, women remain just a “blip on the male political landscape” (Reynolds, 1999, p. 547).

Axiomatically, judged from the global scenario, women's participation in the decision making of the country's political structure is essential. According to the international conventions and treaties relating to women's development, most governments across the globe are now committed to removing all obstacles facing women's active participation in all spheres of public and private life through a full and equal share in economic, social, cultural and political decision-making process (UNDP, 2013, p. 4)¹. The rationale behind women's access to political structure is straightforward, as politicians hold power over other social institutions, they are able to create and recreate new rules and regulations, laws, and legislations, and also codify and modify existing conventions and practices into law (Martin, 2004). Therefore, having a fifty percent female population in Bangladesh, without integration of women into the country's political structure, the overall development of the country in general and women in particular will be thwarted and minuscule. Furthermore, an equally-important argument is that being the nearest government, the local government has the prerogative to render various services, i.e. education, health care facilities, safe drinking water, poverty-reduction programs, etc., which have a direct bearing on women's life and it also helps groom local politicians, so research on women leaders in the UP demands renewed focus and attention. The Millennium Development Goals (UNDP, 2006), Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (GOB, 2004), and the Five Year Plans of Bangladesh also reiterate policies for women's development (Akhter, & Chowdhury, 2005). Against this backdrop, study on women's political participation will be of paramount importance.

¹ UNDP (2013) as cited in <http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/beijing/platform>

In the Asia Pacific region, women's representation in local governments has ranged from a low 2% (e.g. India, Bangladesh) to a high 30% (e.g. New Zealand). The reason behind the low women's representation in public office is that there are obstacles that remain to women's full and equal participation in politics. Globally it has been found that many of these barriers are deeply rooted in patriarchal structures, which are "manifested in the structures and processes of political parties, unfair electoral voting systems, high costs of elections, and lack of access to training and education" (Reyes, 2001). Likewise, in Bangladesh, "women's political participation is directly or indirectly linked to patriarchal values and male kinship ties" (Rahman and Sultana, 2005; Aminuzzaman, 2011). It has been observed that women's political empowerment is limited to the upper educated class and most of them come from urban backgrounds (Murshed, 1983 cited in Quadir, 1994, p. 22). In Bangladesh, the women's role is mainly confined to the four walls of traditional activities like house keeping, child bearing, reproductive roles, and they are excluded from the mainstream of socio-economic development and the political decision-making process. The andocentric biases of the profession of politics and male networking in the political arena have also kept women excluded or marginalized from the political structures and processes (Chowdhury, 1994a). Despite all these limitations and problems, women's political participation in recent times in Bangladesh has increased a lot due to affirmative actions or policies of the government.

The activities performed by the Union Parishad cover a wide range of community services, such as maintenance of law and order, promotion of cottage industries and family planning, protection and maintenance of public property (roads, bridges, canals and culverts), maintenance of birth and death registers; lighting of public ways, public streets and public places; plantation and preservation of trees; maintenance and regulation of cattle compounds; maintenance of UP records; maintenance of huts and bazaars; issue of various kinds of certificates and licenses; settlement of petty disputes; excavation of derelict ponds for pisciculture; building and development of physical infrastructure; regulating community behaviour; improving environmental, forestry and disaster mitigations, etc.

At present, Bangladesh has a three-tiered local government system with the Zila Parishad (64) at the district level, the Upazila Parishad (490) at the sub-district level,

and the Union Partishad (4498) at the village level. With the enactment of a reservation provision of 3 women members, the political participation of women leadership in the Union Parishad (UP) has been ensured. Including 3 women members, each UP is composed of 12 members headed by a Chairman, elected by the voters of the Union. Each UP is divided into 9 wards and 9 male members are elected from the 9 wards and 3 female members are elected from each of the three wards that comprise a cluster of the whole Union. According to the Union Parishad Ordinance of 1997, one-third of the total seats (i.e. 33.33%) are reserved for women members in the UP and accordingly as per the recent UP election in 2011, a total of 13,506 women members were elected from 4498 UPs all over Bangladesh.

In the socio-political milieu of Bangladesh, the quota system has enhanced the opportunity for women's participation in politics at the local level. Hossain (1999) found that the provision of direct election for the reserved seats members has boosted women's confidence and capability, but due to lack of opportunity to play an effective role these women members have become frustrated. In the overall structure of the UP, subordinate position female members cannot express their views as forcefully as their male counterparts. The male colleagues have a propensity to ignore their development proposals on diverse socio-economic issues. In addition, it is observed that many women elected through quotas are subjected to sexual harassment by their male counterparts and are looked down upon as "second category" members (The Daily Star, May 8, 2003). Women members are excluded from important areas of participation in the UP, which include infrastructure, budget decisions, maintenance of law and order, different Standing Committees and Project Committees on the UP, service delivery in areas of education, health, agriculture, shalish,² citizenship certification, social and child development, and immunization and nutrition projects (Gani and Sattar, 2004; Begum, 2005; BARC Research Report, 2007; Khan and Mohsin, 2008). Empirical research findings have testified that the male's disrespectful approach and intense disregard for women members' governance roles have undermined the objectives of reservation and effectively neutralized the political

²Salish refers to the informal local arbitration council for resolution of petty disputes conducted by the UP representatives.

empowerment envisaged by the legislation (Panday, 2008; Begum, 2007). The women members alleged that they were not taken into confidence in the working of the UP (Akhter, 2001). Begum (2007, pp. 263-64) revealed that in performing UP functions women members were not considered credible or capable political actors and reserved seats “were not seen as having same value as general ones.”

Reviewing the recent election results in the UP, it is quite evident that there has been a general trend of steadily increasing the number of women candidates, voters, and campaigners, and more women are getting elected in the UP. As a matter of fact, in Bangladesh, in line with the global context, the role women has been integrated in the decentralized governance system but since 1997, they have been striving hard to strengthen their role in the UP. It is assumed that their entry into the Union Parishad has already challenged the age old domination of the male counterpart. It is evident that women’s participation in the UP has been relatively low and those women members have been more or less excluded from important areas of participation (Aminuzzaman, 2011). Women members are still fighting to establish their due rights in the UP and since their entry into the public sphere they have been able to cope with many difficulties imposed by the male hegemony. In doing so it is deemed that they have helped improve the governance of the UP as well.

From the available literature it is evident that few studies have been conducted regarding the nature, experience, dynamics and challenges of participation of women leaders in the UP. There is additionally a lack of information about their coping strategies and contribution to the governance in the UP. Women's political participation in the UP is at the nascent stage and their active and vibrant role is yet to evolve. It is deemed that the sharing of knowledge, experiences and realities judged from case studies and phenomenological approaches could be a significant contribution to the field of women's participation and empowerment in the UP that in turn would help bring about some policy directives for developing women's participation and empowerment in the UP. Against this backdrop, it is imperative to undertake a study to uncover the dynamics, experiences, and challenges of women's participation and their coping strategies in the UP in Bangladesh. More specifically, this research will delve into the following research questions and research objectives:

1.1.2 Research Questions of the Study

- 1) Do women leaders help promote governance in the UP of Bangladesh? If so, how?
- 2) How have women leaders perceived and defined their roles and coped with the realities in the UP?

1.1.3 Objectives of the Study

The general objective of the study is to analyze the perceptions, experiences, dynamics, and challenges of the participation of women leaders in local government in Bangladesh. The specific objectives of the study are as follows:

- 3) To unravel the leadership process of the women leaders in the UP;
- 4) To uncover the perceptions, dynamics, realities, and challenges of the participation of women leaders in the UP of Bangladesh;
- 5) To explore the coping strategies of women leaders in the UP.

1.1.4 Justification and Benefits of the Study

The study will be of paramount importance to policy makers. Women leaders can help create awareness, consceientization, the developing process of socialization, political participation, and social learning, which in turn can contribute to eradicating the various ills of the rural society; women are the worst victims of these ills as they are highly vulnerable. In Bangladesh, women constitute approximately half of the total population, but despite their proportion their political role is very minimal in Bangladesh. Therefore, this study may help women leaders strengthen their role in local government.

Bangladesh governments have made formal commitments to women's political participation in international treaties and conventions, which have had implications for creating an enabling environment and ensuring women's participation in the public decision-making process (Hossain, 1999, p. 178). The Constitution of Bangladesh explicitly guarantees the fundamental human rights and equality of its citizen. Despite the constitutional guarantee, the century-old traditional values have denied women's status and voice in the society. There persist disparities between men and women in every sphere of social, economic, and political life.

Again, complex and interrelated social, cultural, and economic factors condition the lives of women (Solaiman, 1998). As a matter of fact, women's political participation in the public domain has been found to be very low. In such a situation, women's unfettered and robust political participation is exigently crucial for bringing about social change, and development and transformation that will pave the way for overall democratization of the society and ensure good governance in the realm of state crafts. Recent studies have shown that the political participation of women has positive effects on the country's prospects for development: for example, countries with more women in parliament typically have lower levels of corruption even after national income and other factors are controlled for, and such participation has been shown to affect corruption (World Bank, 2001). Moreover, it is empirically evident that "where the influence of women in public life is greater, the level of corruption is lower" (Dollar, Fisman, Gatti, 1999). Reiss & Mitra (1998) and Glover, Minnette, Bumpus and Ciesla (1997) also have observed that women may have higher standards of ethical behavior and may be more concerned with the common good. Therefore, it is assumed that more empowered women in the public space can help ensure better governance of the Bangladesh society.

From a political standpoint, women's participation and representation in local government bodies is very much essential at the local level. Women can contribute to the socio-economic development by fulfilling local needs, and the demands and aspirations of the people. Local government bodies also have immense potential for creating awareness and enhancing political participation, as it plays an educative role in building the democratic process at the grass roots level (Quadir, 1994, p. 5). Therefore, this study can help democratic governance flourish at the grassroots level.

In Bangladesh the issue of women's representation in the Union Parihshad began in 1956 with an official enactment through the Local Government Representation (Union Parishad) Act of 1997. Through the nomination system up to the direct election system, the involvement of women members in the UP has now become an established reality. However, their active and vibrant role in overcoming the vulnerable situation of women in rural society is yet to evolve and their firm footing is still non-existent in dispensation of their assigned roles, duties, and responsibilities. Several rules and regulation have been promulgated from the

government to ensure their efficacious role in the UP, but still their participation is at stake due to the unfavourable environment in the UP. Therefore, using non-traditional research approaches, this study will try to unravel the dynamics and challenges of women's participation, their coping strategies, and contribute to governance of overall UP affairs.

Based on the lived experiences of women leaders in the UP in Bangladesh, this study can bring forth some interesting findings which can initiate policy debates and parley at the national level. Given the reason for promoting the cause of women's increased participation and better empowerment in the sphere of local government, women can help consolidate grassroots democracy, governance, and grow the local economy of the country.

1.1.5 The Scope of the Study

The scope of the study is limited to some particular issues. There are three tiers of local government in Bangladesh. In this study, the author's focus is on the lowest tier of the local governments of Bangladesh, which means that the study is limited to the women leaders of the Union Parishad (UP) of Bangladesh. In order to analyze the leadership process of the women leaders of the UP, their demographic profiles - comprising age, family size, marital status, and years of experience; their social profiles comprising family background, level of education, family members' education, husband's education, father's education, involvement of women members in different committees in the UP, linkage with Chairpersons of UP, linkages with NGOs and socio-cultural organizations, linkage with MPs, linkage with local elites; economic factors comprising income level, land ownership, sources of income and political factors that include the political linkages/network, directly involved political parties, duration of holding current position(in years), members of the ruling party and members of the opposition parties - will be looked into. To uncover the dynamics, intricacies, experiences, and reality of the participation of women leaders in the UP, women's involvement in resource management, project formulation, project implementation, involvement in different committees, meetings, monitoring of the projects, conducting of safety net programs, village court (the local arbitrary/dispute resolution process) and so forth, will be considered. To explore the coping strategies

of women leaders in the UP, some issues such as what mechanism, strategies and processes they have adopted, and how they have coexisted and adjusted to the challenges posed by the male members and Chairmen and what their painful and pleasurable experiences have been in the UP will be recorded. To address the research question as to whether they help promote better governance in the UP, issues such as whether women members help promote accountability, transparency, and reduce corruption in UP governance and how they do so will be the major focus of the analysis in this study.

1.1.6 Limitations of the Study

The major challenge behind this study is time, resources, and data. As a doctoral dissertation is a time-bound endeavour, it was essential to complete the study within the speculated time. To uncover the dynamics and intricacies of the participation of the women leaders in the affairs of the local development activities, few selected areas were chosen and also for analyzing the leadership process of the women leaders few variables were selected for the study in order to manage the study within the time schedule. Due to the turbulent political situation, the researcher needed to curtail some of his predesigned visits. However, given all of the limitations, the findings of the study will definitely help policy makers to draw conclusions and some policy options, which could be enormously useful for Bangladesh.

1.1.7 Structural Arrangement of the Study

The entire research study was structured in a way so that it can help answer the research questions and objectives of the research. The first chapter provides an overview of the statement of the research context and problem, justification and benefits of the study, scope and limitation of the study.

The second chapter provides an overview of the available literature and the third chapter discusses the structures, systems and processes that have allowed women leaders to play the role of leader in public life. Chapter four was designed with a view to providing the basic assumptions, approaches, and the interpretive frame work; the selection of participants and settings; the research methods, tools, data-gathering techniques and process to answer the queries; the process of triangulation, validity,

authenticity, and relevance of the research and ethical issues regarding the research. Chapter five provides a detailed picture of the case studies of five women Chairmen and five women members in the UP, and through these cases some salient features and contributing factors for leadership process are addressed. At the end a detailed description of their similarities, dissimilarities, and uniquenesses is also presented. Chapter six comprises the perceptions of women leaders about participation and a few issues fostered by them in the UP; challenges encountered and coping strategies adopted by the women leaders in the UP. Chapter seven uncovers how some women leaders are contributing to the promotion and change in the governance in the UP. In chapter eight, summaries of the major findings of all chapters are presented sequentially. Then, based on those summaries, an abridged conclusive summary has been added to this chapter. Thereafter, in order to answer the research questions and objectives, a final conclusion is presented after the suggestions and recommendations. In fine, some future research agenda is given.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW OF THE STUDY

2.1 Introduction

This chapter describes some of the common terms and concepts used in this research. In its wake, the concept of local government, the Union Parishad, concepts and definitions of participation and governance, and women in the local government have been described in brief. In last section where women in the local government have been discussed, a brief overview of women's socio-economic condition, the rationale for the political participation of women in local government, and the available literature on local government are added.

2.1.1 Concept of Local Government

Local government is an integral part of the body politic of a country, recognized or created under law for the management of local affairs of a human settlement with geographic boundaries (Muttalib and Khan, 1983, p. 1). According to the United Nations (1962, as cited in Siddiqui 1995, p. 4), the term "local self-government refers to a political sub-division of a nation or state which is constituted by law and has substantial control of local affairs, including the power to impose taxes or exact labour for prescribed purposes. The governing body of such an entity is elected or otherwise locally selected". Local government means "self-government," which connotes an idea of liberty and autonomy indicating entire decision-making authority to the governing unit. It can provide goods and services to the community at the cost of the taxpayer's money and up to their own choice and in the most efficient and cost-effective way (Muttalib and Khan, 1983, p. 258).

Local government is considered a viable mechanism through which democratic processes and practices can be established and participatory development ensured (Khan, 2000). Decentralised local government institution can create political leadership, ensure popular participation, and develop accountable administration that

helps to plan and implement the people-oriented development process at the grassroots level. The strengthening of local government institutions can, therefore, be seen as a positive trend towards good governance (UNDP and GOB, 1998, p. 16). As the representative organization of the people local government, institutions can enforce the accountability of central/national government authorities. The more aware, vigilant, and active the community is through their participation in local government bodies, the greater is the pressure on both local government institutions and government authorities to become transparent and responsive. In such a way local government can ensure accountability, transparency, participation, empowerment, equity and all of the other attributions of good governance. Local government institutions, being nearer to the people, can involve themselves in various ways: (a) planning and implementation of projects; (b) supervision of educational institutions, hospitals, and other government-financed units; (c) mobilization of support for new initiatives such as campaign against dowry, child labour, etc.; (d) enforcement of laws regarding gender discrimination, violence against women, environmental protection; (e) mobilization of resources in the form of taxes, fees, tolls, etc. Popular participation also assumes importance because of its potential for holding the local government institution accountable to the community.

2.1.1.1 Union Parishad

The foundation of the Union Parishad was laid down by the British colonial rule through the Chokidary Panchayat Act of 1870. From the colonial period until now, the structure and composition of the Union Parishad have evolved through a long process.

The Union Parishad (short from Union) is the lowest administrative unit of Bangladesh which covers an area of 10-12 sq. km. Every five years, the UP representatives are elected on a non-party basis. A UP shall consist of an elected body comprising a Chairman and twelve members and each of these 13 directly elected representatives represents villagers ranging from 10,000 to 30,000. Among these twelve positions of the UP members, only three positions are reserved for women members. A Union is divided into 9 Wards. In these Wards, three are reserved for woman members. Every three Wards make a single unit which is kept reserved for a

woman member. Nine male members are elected from nine Wards and three women members are elected from their respective reserved Wards. According to a UP ordinance (GOB, 2010) it was found that the activities performed by the Union Parishad cover a wide range of community services such as maintenance of law and order, promotion of cottage industries and family planning, protection and maintenance of public property (roads, bridges, canals and culverts), maintenance of birth and death registers; lighting of public ways, public streets and public places; planting and preservation of trees; maintenance and regulation of cattle pounds; maintenance of UP records; maintenance of huts and bazaars; issue of various kinds of certificates and licenses; settlement of petty disputes; excavation of derelict ponds for pisciculture; building and development of physical infrastructure; regulating community behaviour; improving environment, forestry and disaster mitigations, etc.

The Constitution of Bangladesh has given magnificent importance to the local government. According to the Bangladesh Constitution, the UP as a body of local government “shall be entrusted to bodies, composed of persons elected in accordance with law”. The article of the Constitution purports that every local body should perform within the appropriate administrative unit such functions as shall be prescribed by the Act of parliament which may include functions relating to: i) administration and the work of public officers; ii) the maintenance of public order; and iii) the preparation and implementation of plans relating to public services and economic development. According to the Constitution, the UP has been empowered to impose taxes. The role and functions of Union Parishad can broadly be categorized in six types, namely: 1) civic responsibilities; 2) police and defense functions; 3) revenue and administration functions; 4) transferred functions; 5) judicial responsibilities; 6) development functions. In addition to its compulsory and optional functions, the government may time to time direct that any institution or service maintained by a Union Parishad shall be transferred to the management and control of the government and any institution or service maintained by government shall be transferred to the management and control of a Union Parishad.

2.1.2 Concepts and Definitions of Participation: A Brief Overview

Over time a huge body of literature has evolved in the firmament of the conceptual, definitional, and theoretical labyrinth of participation. In simple words, participation is a process through which stakeholders' influence and share control the priority setting, policy-making, resource allocations, and access to public goods and services. As a concept, it is not entirely new; in fact, it is as old as human civilization (Haque, 2003). Various agencies, practitioners and academics have defined it from different perspectives. At first, the concept referred to people's participation. Accordingly, the issue of people's participation has gained momentum in the realm of public administration and international development discourse in the last three decades. The scholars and practitioners of public administration and political science have considered people's participation in local development as an important part of democracy and development for both developed and developing countries (Roberts, 2004; Blair, 1981; Cooper, 1983; Fagence, 1977; White, 1994; Grote and Gbikpi, 2002; Peters, 2001; Schumpeter, 1976; Meldon et al., 2004; Rahman, 2000).

Pearse and Stiefel (1979) defined popular participation as "organized efforts to increase control over resources and regulative institution in given social situation, on the part of groups and movements of those hitherto excluded from such control" (Chowdhury, 1980). Cohen and Uphoff (1977) viewed participation with regard to rural development as "people's involvement in decision making processes, in implementing program, their sharing in the benefits of development programs and their involvement in efforts to evaluate such program." Uphoff (1987, as cited in Chowdhury, 1987) defines four types of participation: a) participation in decision making, in identifying, formulating alternatives, planning activities, allocating resources, etc.; b) participating in implementation, in carrying out activities, managing and operating programs, partaking of services; c) participating in evaluation of the activity and outcomes; and d) participation in economic, social, cultural or other benefits, individually or collectively. Blair (2000, p. 23) has identified a consequential formula of participation; that is, "participation leads representation, representation ensures empowerment, and empowerment gives benefits for all and thus it helps reduce poverty and enhance equity among all groups, which leads the country in the direction of good governance". From this standpoint, participation could be defined both as an end and

a means (Oakley, 1991; Ahmad et al., 1998). As an end, “participation lifts the marginalized people from being excluded to being in partnership with public institutions. As a means, it enables them to contribute to the development in a meaningful manner for their own, as well as for society’s benefit” (Ahmad et al., 1998). Thus, participation can be seen from two parameters: efficiency and empowerment. In the efficiency parameter, participation is considered a tool for achieving better project outcomes. In the empowerment parameter, it is a process that enhances the capacity of individuals to improve their own lives, and it facilitates social change to the advantage of disadvantaged or marginalized groups (Cleaver, 1999). Therefore, reversing power is the key to participation. Participation is an active process by which beneficiaries influence the direction and execution of a development project with a view to enhancing their well-being in terms of income, personal growth, self-reliance or other values they cherish (Paul, 1986, p. 2).

International aid agencies have defined people’s participation in a more comprehensive manner. Participation refers to the close involvement of the people from all walks of life irrespective of sex, race, group, caste, colour and religion in the economic, social, cultural, and political decision-making process of an area (UNDP, 1993). Again the UNDP (1993, p. 21) notes that participation means that the people are closely involved in the economic, social, cultural and political processes that affect their life. According to the World Bank (2002), participation is the process through which stakeholders’ influence and share control over priority setting, policy making, resource allocation, and access to public goods and services. On the other hand, the OECD views people’s participation as a partnership, which is built on the basis of a dialogue among the various actors, where the agenda is jointly set and local people’s views and indigenous knowledge are deliberately sought and respected. Thus, according to the OECD, people become active actors in the development process instead of only being beneficiaries (OECD, 1997). According to the Human Development Report (UNDP, as cited in Mayo and Craig, 1995, p. 2) “participation refers to access to decision-making and power and economic participation.”

Since the early seventies different international organizations, scholars of public administration, sociology, political science and so on, have tried to define it and have placed emphasis on participation from various perspectives; however, the

meaning of participation is still blurred and ambiguous (Ahmed, 1987; Quddus, 1994). Because of the amorphous nature of the term, Adnan et al. (1992, p. 51) suggest to “distinguish between the different ways in which the term might be understood or misunderstood.” Participation is, however, not always effective. It can be passive, co-optive, and as well as ditched if it is not properly understood or nurtured. One may thus come across many types of participation. In summarized form we can say that over a long time the concept and meaning of participation have undergone changes in their essence and paradigms.

Although the term people’s participation has become a buzzword in the firmament of current development jargon, it has not been without criticism. The majority of the criticism is derived from two different perspectives: procedural or technical, and contextual. Cooke and others criticize participatory techniques as they “produce homogeneous local viewpoints where none previously existed; they privilege certain voices whilst suppressing others; and they are insufficiently sensitive to the form of knowledge they produce” (Cooke and Kothari, 2001). Some argue that local knowledge produced through participatory techniques is problematically authentic, but necessarily reflects and is mediated by project-community and intra-community power relations (Mohan and Stoke, 2000; Mosse, 2001). The other criticisms are contextual, suggesting that developing nations are poor candidates for citizen participation initiatives for various reasons such as being costly, lack of representation and authority, difficulty of diffusing citizen goodwill, the power of wrong decisions and persistent selfishness (Irvin and Stansbury, 2004, pp. 58-60).

Opponents have also claimed that participation can be a destabilizing force in that it can unbalance existing socio-political relationships and threaten the continuity of development work. The elitist theorists argue that the rulers are rational and more informed, whereas the masses are apathetic in political and government matters and incapable of taking an active and responsible role in society. They emphasize that the masses have the right to vote for representatives that can make decisions for them (Schumpeter, 1976). Some criticize that the proponents of people’s participation have failed to properly address the issues of power and power sharing (Biggs, 1995 in Cleaver, 1999). This applies especially to the post-colonial countries of Asia and Africa, where bureaucracy still plays a strong role and the democratic political system

is uncertain.

However, the term has received growing recognition among the scholars and practitioners of public administration, international aid agencies, and OECD member countries - that decision-making without people's participation is ineffective and no development project can do without it (White, 1994; King, Felty and Susel, 1998). Moreover, it is now widely accepted that reform packages, such as the decentralization program of developing countries, will not be successful and able to bring positive changes in the fate of the local people unless they participate as actors rather than beholders. The participation process is not a simple task, but a rather difficult one, due to its complex nature and the varying contextual realities of the developing nations. In a society like Bangladesh where women are lagging behind in almost all socio-economic spheres, women's effective participation can help bring change and transformation at the grassroots level.

2.1.3 Concept and Definition of Governance

Globally and nationally governance is a multidimensional concept and huge issues are involved with the concept of governance. In the realm of academic discourse, perhaps governance, which is still expanding, evolving and also elusive to some extent, occupies the most predominant place. Ara and Khan (2006, p. 91) have opined that governance has become the hottest issue in the discourse of contemporary political and global development. There are differences in the views regarding the meaning and importance of governance among the scholars, academicians, professionals, practitioners, international donor communities, etc. The concepts and definitions of governance are full of overlapping-no two definitions appear to be the same (Islam and Asaduzzaman, 2008, p. 2). Despite numerous attempts in recent years it is yet to be defined and the definition of governance remains controversial (Olowu, 2002). Keefer (2009, p. 439) also notes that "there is no agreed definition of 'governance.'" According to Pierre and Pithers (2005, p. 28), the concept of governance is "notoriously slippery" and Schneider (2004, p. 25) comments that the conceptual vagueness of the term is the "secret of its success." Kohler-Koch and Rittberger (2006, p. 28) put it bluntly: despite decades of work "there is still confusion about the conceptualization of the term" (quoted in Chhotray and Stoker, 2010). In fact, there is

a great deal of definitional ambiguity in the concepts of governance (Weiss, 2000; Doornbos, 2001; Andrews, 2008; Keefer, 2009; Williams, 2009; Grindle, 2010).

The term good governance has become a strongly-desired value (Zafarullah and Huque, 2001) and an obsession of current debates on development in developing countries (Williams and Young 1994 as cited in Jamil, 1998). In fact, during the last three decades, it has become a common phenomenon in the literature of international aid agencies, which generally advocate establishing governance as a precondition for aid receiving countries (Rhodes, 1997). In general, good governance is associated with efficient and effective administration in a democratic framework. It is equivalent to purposive and development-oriented administration, which is committed to improving the quality of life of the people and enlarging the scope of people's participation in the decision-making process of development (Jefries, 1993). Governance refers to "all processes of governing, whether undertaken by a government, market or network, whether over a family, tribe, formal or informal organization or territory and whether through laws, norms, power or language" (Bevir, 2013). According to former United Nations Secretary-General Kofi Annan, "good governance is perhaps the single most important factor in eradicating poverty and promoting development" (UN, 1998).

The international aid or donor agencies are the major proponents and advocates of the concepts of governance, and those agencies have tried to view and define governance according to their own agendas and perspectives. The World Bank (1994, 1997), UNDP (1997, 2002) and the OECD (1995) have become the major proponents and frequent users of this concept, especially for the aid receiving countries, to promote democracy, decentralization, accountability, transparency, rule of law, and people's participation in their development. The World Bank (1994) defined governance as "the manner in which power is exercised in the management of a country's economic and social resources for development". They highlighted the administrative aspects of governance, addressing civil service reform, public sector downsizing, service delivery and contracting out, capacity building, and institutional strengthening (World Bank, 1997 quoted in Brinkerhoff and Brinkerhoff, 2002). The World Bank (1997), from its lending experience in many developing countries, has realized that good governance is central in creating and

sustaining an environment which fosters strong and equitable development and its essential complements to sound economic policies. The World Bank has also identified a number of aspects of good governance, such as political accountability, freedom of association and participation, rule of law and independence of the judiciary, bureaucratic accountability, freedom of information, a sound administrative system, partnership between the government and the civil society organizations, etc. (Blunt, 1995).

According to the UNDP (1997), “governance is the exercise of economic, political and administrative authority in managing a country’s affairs on all levels”. This perspective of governance comprises the mechanisms, processes, and institutions through which citizens and groups articulate their interests, exercise their legal rights, meet their obligations, and mediate their conflicts (Hyden, 2001). The UNDP (1997) notes that good governance means equal participation of all citizens in decision-making. It is transparent, accountable, and equitable and it promotes the rule of law. It allows the local people and the most affected to be heard when decisions are being made and when resources are handed out. The UNDP (2002) further argues that good governance advances sustainable development for three reasons: 1) enjoying political freedom and participating in the decisions that shape one’s life are fundamental human rights; 2) it helps to protect people from economic and political catastrophes; and 3) it can promote sustainable development by empowering citizens to influence policies that promote growth and prosperity and reflect their priorities (as cited in Hope, 2005). The ESCAP views governance as a process of decision-making and the process by which decisions are implemented (or not implemented) According to the ADB there are four basic components of governance: accountability, participation, predictability, and transparency. For the IMF, it is “the process by which public institutions conduct public affairs and manage public resources’ (UNDP, 2007, p. 128). For the OECD, it is “the use of political authority and exercise of control in a society in relation to the management of its resources for social and economic development,” which “encompasses the role of public authorities in establishing the environment in which economic operators function and in determining the distribution of benefits as well as the nature of the relationship between the ruler and the ruled” (OECD, 1995, p. 14).

Again the UNDP (2000) notes that governance, including its social, political and economic dimensions, operates at every level of human enterprise, be it the household, village, municipality, nation, region or globe” (UNDP, 2000, as cited in OECD, 2009, p. 24). Thus, the term is widely used in relation to a variety of specific contexts and approaches: e.g., corporate governance, participatory governance, global governance, information technology (IT) governance, environmental governance, local governance, NGO governance, and sustainable governance. Governance as addressed in the policy literature reviewed here refers primarily to governance in domestic politics and is distinct from these other uses. In general, this means a focus on governance at the national level, although governance at various sub-national or local levels is also central to some work.

Reviewing the concepts and definitions of governance propagated by the donor agencies, some scholars have identified seven core components that were highlighted in the working definitions of good governance. These components are: democracy and representation, human rights, the rule of law, efficient and effective public management, transparency and accountability, developmentalist objectives, and a varying range of specific economic and political policies, programs, and institutions (Santiso, 2001, pp. 4-6; Nanda, 2006; Hout, 2007).

The governance concept encompasses fast changing political, social and economic environment, along with exogenous factors including international environment and conditions of operational governance. Most reviews on the development of governance theories begin with the observation that governance has been used in a variety of ways in the political science and public administration literature (Kjaer, 2007; Pierre and Piders, 2005; Jordan et al., 2005). According to Landell and Serageldin (1991), governance denotes “how people are ruled, how the affairs of the states are administered and regulated, as well as a nation’s system of politics, and how this functions in relation to public administration and law.” Governance is the interaction among structures, processes and traditions that determine how power and responsibilities are exercised, how decisions are taken, and how citizens and other stakeholders have their say (Graham, Amos and Plumptre, 2003).

The most influential and three major dimensions of governance are accountability, transparency, and participation (Mills and Serageldin, 1992 as cited in Rahman, 2009, p. 7). These three aspects of governance are seen as basic to good governance because it means: a) the governance structure has built-in mechanism which ensure that politicians, civil servants and service providers are held accountable to citizens, peoples and customers for their actions; b) their action is guided by clear, codified and transparent rules of conducts; and c) citizens have sufficient scope for participation in decision making.

A maximal definition of good governance would include: checks and balances among various organs of the government, legitimacy and authority structures of the state institutions, rules and norms that determine who holds power and the exercise of this power, relationships of functionaries and citizens, the capacity of government to make policy, manage administrative and fiscal affairs of the state and delivers good and services (Rahman, 2005, p. 7). The Commission on Global Governance (as cited in Aminuzzaman, 2006) defines governance as the sum of the many ways individuals and institutions, public and private, manage their common affairs. Eight major characteristics of good governance are: being participatory in nature, consensus oriented, accountable, transparent, responsive, effective and efficient, equitable and inclusive rule of law. Nowadays the country-specific performance of governance is measured with innumerable lists of indicators. The widely-accepted indicators, developed by the researchers of the World Bank Institute, are: voice and accountability, political stability and absence of violence, government effectiveness, regulatory quality, rule of law and control of corruption (Kaufman and Pablo, 2000 as cited in Rahman, 2009; Aminuzzaman, 2006). Good governance is both “a broad reform strategy and a particular set of initiatives to strengthen the institutions of civil society with the objectives of making government more accountable, more open, transparent and more democratic” (Minogue, 1997).

In the ultimate analysis governance can be viewed as the sum of three major components: process, content or values, and output or deliverables (Aminuzzaman, 2006, p. 13; Rahman and Robinson, 2006, p. 8). The process of governance encompasses factors such as accountability, transparency, and participation. Content includes values such as ensuring social justice, welfare, equity, institutionalization of democracy and a

sustainable poverty reducing and developmental strategy. The output or deliverables can be better public administration and quick service delivery to the citizen. If all of these three components are fulfilled or obtained, then governance becomes good governance.

Based on the above discussion it can be summarized that the notion of good governance is still developing in terms of its definition, its ethical connotations, and its usefulness (Kruiter, 1996). Therefore, the meaning of good governance cannot be confined to a time frame. Succinctly we can say that governance concepts include a huge range of issues such as better service delivery, establishing democratic norms and values, plurality, separation of power, independence of judiciary, establishment of rule of law, empowerment, conscientization, people's participation, awareness rising, capacity building, transparency, accountability in the affairs of state-fostered development process, privatization, voice and inclusion of the poor, political stability, freedom of expression, free flow of information and press and media, human rights and liberty, privatization, sustainability and environment and it encompasses a pro-poor developmental strategy in the state affairs. Moreover, governance connotes a citizen-friendly, citizen-caring, responsive, decentralized local government system, an autonomous political society, an efficient and accountable bureaucracy, strong civil society, and a free media (Huque, 2001; Minocha, 1998; Stowe, 1992). The contemporary literature suggests that good governance cannot be attained in any developing countries unless and until power is transferred from the centre to the local institutions and people's participation is ensured in local development (Hye, 2000; Siddiqui, 2005; Haque, 2003a; Haque, 2003; Peters, 2001; Fung, 2006; Dibia, 2003; Schneider, 1999).

Political institutes are the most vital institutions for ensuring the democratic governance in a nation. As a grassroots-based local government, the Union Parishad is one of the important institutions through which governance in rural society can be promoted and nurtured and where women leaders can play an effective role in addressing the problem of governance in the UP.

2.1.4 Women's Leadership in Local Government

In this study women's leadership refers to the elected women representatives in the Union Parishad. A brief overview of the concept and issues and rationale for women's leadership in local government is provided in this section.

Leadership is a broad and multidimensional concept. Leadership is the ability to exercise power or exert influence in social collectiveness (Quadir, 1997). Leadership has been described as "a process of social influence in which one person can enlist the aid and support of others in the accomplishment of a common task" (Chemers, 1997). According to Tannenbaum and Massarik (1986, p. 413), leadership is defined as "interpersonal influence exercised in situations and directed through a communication process toward the attainment of a specified goal or goals". Walliullah (1974, p. 11) states that leadership refers to a process in which a relatively small number of individuals in a community behave in such a way that they affect (or effectively present) a significant change in the lives of a relatively large numbers of people.

Leadership is a complex interpersonal process of influencing human behaviour. According to Davis and Newstrom (1985), "leadership is the process of encouraging and helping others to work enthusiastically toward achieving objectives. It is the human factor that binds a group together and motivates it towards goal." Leadership is the ability to influence a group toward the achievement of goals in a given situation. Leadership is a crucial ingredient in organisational effectiveness. Social organizations are highly dynamic, versatile and adaptive to the multiplicity of changes. Leadership can be seen as an attempt to implement change. The process of leadership is the use of non-coercive influence to direct, motivate, coordinate the activities of the members of the organized group towards accomplishment of group objectives. Leadership is the set of qualities of characteristics attributed to those that are perceived to successfully employ such influence (Gray and Starke, 1984). Leadership is something a person does, not something that he has. Leadership is something that emerges, that grows and that is achieved. It is a continuous process of influencing human behaviour.

Leadership refers to the quality, capacity, and the art to conquer, exercise, and maintain the leader's function³. It aims at defining the capacity to lead people or organizations to the achievement of objectives. Referring to behaviors that may characterize the person that may play the role of "leader," leadership may hence be defined as "the capacity of an individual to influence, motivate, and make others capable of contributing to the efficiency and success of organizations they belong to." Leadership can be both ascription and achievement oriented. At the local level women are the most backward and vulnerable group and women are deprived from productive activities at the local level. In countries where socio-economic institutions are weak and malfunctioning, the local government can help establish democracy and development at the grassroots level. In these developing countries women's participation and development are interlocked with various socio-economic and cultural barriers. Women have a subordinate role in the family, society and state in these countries. Here women's participation is critical and it should be viewed from broader perspectives. Overall development includes development in social, economic, political, cultural and other dimensions of human life and also the physical, moral, intellectual and cultural growth of a person. Therefore, women's participation and development should be considered as an essential component in every dimension of development. Women's participation and empowerment through the political process is one of the best processes for women's development. Women's entry into local government will help them play a role in the country's decision-making process that in turn can ensure their socio, economic, cultural, and political rights.

As local government is the closest and most acceptable level of government to women and local governments traditionally provide services utilized by individual households such as electricity, waste disposal, public transport, water, schools, health clinics and other social services, it is very important to involve women leaders in the local government. The "decisions of local governments therefore have a direct impact on the private lives of women, because they are traditionally responsible for providing for and caring for the family and the home in most countries" (IULA, 1998). Women must be fully part of the local democratic system and have full access to decision-

³ From <http://www.wikipedia.org>

making structure. Until the interests of women have been represented at the local level, the system is not fully democratic (IULA, 1998). The attributions of local governments suggest that local government could be a good place to begin addressing gender inequalities in society. If women are involved in local government, then presumably women's interests and needs would be better represented in policy. Women lack the status and resources to have immediate impact at the national level but they could play an important part in local policy-making relatively quickly (Ahmed et al., 2003). It is deemed that through political participation and decision-making in local government women leaders can participate in the activities of people by acting individually or as community members with a public or political responsibility at the sub-national level. Local government can contribute to the training and socialization of local political leaders and this can help change and development through playing roles as leaders. Based on the local needs and priority they can advocate for suitable policy directives for the national government as well. Therefore, the political participation of women in local political institutions is of grave importance.

In the structure of local government women can initiate, usher, and implement socio-economic change and development of the rural communities by unleashing various development potentials. In this study women leadership refers to the elected women representatives of the local government institutions, namely the Union Parishad. The presence of women leadership in local government institutions is considered vital for ensuring grassroots-level governance and development. Furthermore, women leaders can emerge as an effective change agent at the grassroots level, which in turn can bring massive socio-economic development to the whole country.

2.1.5 Review of relevant literature on women and the UP

In the following section some of the literature concerning women's socio-economic condition and their importance in political participation in the sphere of local government has been added.

Bangladesh, being predominantly Muslim and with a high degree of religiosity, is one of the world's most impoverished countries with more than half of its population living below the poverty line and more than a third (35%) living in extreme poverty (Chowdhury, 2005, p. 22). Bangladeshi women, especially in rural areas, remain the poorest of the poor; faring worse than men on almost every measure (Alam and Karim, 2007; Mahtab, 2007; Naz, 2006; Hasmi, 2000). Empirical data across developing countries show that households below the poverty line are suggestively higher for female-headed families in Bangladesh (ADB, 2001a, p. x). Women wage earners in poor households consume on average of 1.3 meals a day as compared to 2.4 meals eaten by men (Mahtab, 2007). Women are less educated, having a 48% literacy rate compared with 59% for males (United Nations, 2007). Women's medical expenditure in the typical household is 45% compared with 55% of men (Stalker, 1995). Only 45% of women in Bangladesh own a second set of clothes, a pair of shoes or some warm clothing (Hamid, 1996, p. 86). Furthermore, Bangladesh is one of the few countries in the world where women on average die younger than men (Mahtab, 2007).

In rural areas women's participation in paid employment is low due to low level of education and low skills (Aminuzzaman, 2011). Women face work and wage-related discrimination in various ways. Often their payments are delayed, they are paid partially and sometimes they even face physical harassment (Chakaborty, 2004, p. 64). Although half of the population is women, on an average they do two-thirds of the total work, including households work and receive only one-tenth of the world's income (Huq, 1995; Hussain, 2002). The participation of women in higher professional and managerial positions is very limited. Islam (1998) found that education for girls is considered as an economically less useful investment. In general, girls are viewed as potential mothers and homemakers; thus priority is given to their training in domestic chores rather than their right to education (ADB, 2001a). Moreover, having same level of education, women receive a lower wage rate than men, particularly in the garment industry (UNDP, 1994). Viewing the rate of women's progress in decision-making positions as slow, the UN has estimated that, based on the current rate of change, women would have to wait until the year 2490 to

reach equal representation with men in the higher echelons of power (Seager, 1997, p. 70).

Multiple factors have contributed to women's inferior situation and one of the most important factors that have affected the non-participation of women in the decision-making and governance is the gender stereotypes associated with women and men. Gender relations and the patriarchal structures and attitudes prevailing in both the private and public domain contribute to women's subordinate status and their inability to participate in governance (Mukhopadhyay, 2007). There are three reasons for the non-participation of women in politics: 1) difference in socialization; 2) less education; and 3) low esteem resulting from traditional thought and superstition. Women do not participate in politics because they are family centered, vote as their husband/relatives desire, are drawn to authoritarian figures of politically motivated leaders and thereby their activities are limited in family matters and child welfare (Bambewala, 1983, p. 2, as cited in Chowdhury et al., 1994). Critics argue that women's non-participation in political space is a consequence of a number of factors, including women's responsibilities for family and children, the negative attitudes and discrimination of political parties, conservative religious and cultural doctrines, discriminatory socio-economic conditions, electoral systems, and the nature of the regime and financial barriers (Rule, 1994a, 1994b; Liswood, 1999; Harris, 2001). It is deemed that with recent social and cultural changes there is now greater acceptance that more opportunities are available to women than bearing and rearing children (Hall, 1992, p. 28). Nevertheless, women still take more responsibilities in caring for children and families. Haines (1992, p. 189) argues that mothering is a very under-rated occupation.

In a recent world-wide survey of female politicians, 76% of the respondents claimed that prevailing values about gender roles limit the participation of women in politics (Inter-Parliamentary Union, 2000). A female politician from Central America states that the patriarchal ideology prevailing in our society is the biggest stumbling block towards women's political participation (Inter-Parliamentary Union, 2000, p. 61). Arguments of women's inferiority to men are present across all dominant religions, and religions have long been used to exclude women from aspects of social, political or religious life across the world. Harassment of women was commonplace

in Uganda's parliament (Tamale, 1999), and in Bangladesh Islamic fundamentalists turn their backs during speeches by female political leaders (Commonwealth Secretariat, 1999, p. 35). Based on the cross-national data Moore and Shackman (1996), Paxton (1997), Matland (1998), and Kenworthy and Malami (1999) found that while most research has pointed out that political, socio-economic, and cultural factors play an inhibiting role for gender equality in political representation, culture remains the most influential factor. Bangladesh is a South Asian nation, where a patriarchal system reinforces women's dependency on men and men have strong reservations regarding women in leadership and management positions (Halder, 2004). Religion is well recognized as playing a major role in sanctioning many cultural norms and practices that underpin women's subordinate status, which includes the patrilineal organization of households, patrilineal inheritance systems, dowry and early marriage (Kabeer, 2002; Hamid, 1996; Mahtab, 2007).

The reason behind women's low representation in public office is that there are obstacles to women's full, equal participation in politics. Many of these "barriers are deeply rooted in patriarchal structures and attitudes and manifested in the structures and agenda of political parties, unfair electoral voting systems, high costs of elections, and lack of access to training and education" (Reyes, 2001). Ensuring women's equal political and economic rights has seemed to cause controversy, disinterested, and denial everywhere (Giele and Smock, 1977). Moreover, existing laws seem unable to protect women effectively from violence and economic deprivation. There is also very limited women's participation in the party hierarchical structure.

Women's participation in politics has been widely discouraged and denied by the major political parties in Bangladesh. None of the major political parties of Bangladesh has emphasized women issues or promoted women's participation in public life. It is noteworthy that one fundamentalist party, namely the Jamat-e-Islami, did not nominate a single woman in any elections, as it has been always strongly opposed to gender equality and particularly women's participation in politics. Some mullahs⁴ openly condemn those women pursuing public life. Shehabuddin (2003)

⁴Mullah refers to local religious fundamentalists that are important opinion leaders in a traditional society like Bangladesh.

found that women are still prevented from going to the pooling centers because of local fatwas⁵ declaring that it is inappropriate for women to vote.

Against such a backdrop, women's representation in local government institutions (LGIs) is essential from a political point of view as from the considerations of both equity and production (Quadir, 1993, p. 25; Quader and Islam, 1987, p. 4). Women's involvement in LGIs could help develop themselves as political resource persons and contributors or beneficiaries of the services generating from the institution. In fact, the involvement of women in LGIs creates a scope for familiarizing them with the democratic system, which acts as a training ground for political education. To develop political awareness and consciousness women should be involved in social, economic, and political activities and the participation of women in higher decision making bodies will help them deal with women's issue more successfully (Siddiqui, 1995, pp. 271-272). In fact, the LGI is the closest and most acceptable level of government to women because it traditionally provides services utilized by individual households such as electricity, waste disposal, public transport, water, schools, health clinics and other social services. The decisions of the LGIs therefore have a "direct impact on the private lives of women, because they are traditionally responsible for providing for and caring for the family and the home in most countries" (IULA, 1998). Therefore, "women must be fully part of the local democratic system and have full access to the decision making structure. Until the interests of women have been represented at the local level, the system is not fully democratic" (IULA, 1998).

However women's participation is ever more marginalized at LGIs, reflecting the social realities of women's subordinate and dependent status and the consequent invisibility of women in public space (Chowdhury, 1994, p. 49). The participation in the political decision-making process at the local level is merely marginal. In fact, the problems of women's participation are more of structural than organizational. Such structural problems are embedded in wide-spread illiteracy, confinement in household work, old tradition of subordinate roles, religious and cultural factors, and lack of training and motivational facilities (Ahmed and Quader, 1993).

⁵Fatwahs are the verdicts or opinions given by the local mullahs which have a considerable influence in the rural society of Bangladesh.

Women are given opportunity to participate in the LGI but their role is not clearly stated by the government (Khan, 2006). On the other hand Shvedova (1998, p. 34) discussed the psychological barrier of women viz. lack of confidence among women. If local government is to meet the needs of both women and men, “it must build on the experiences of both women and men through equal representation at all levels and in all fields of decision making, covering the wide range of responsibilities of local government” (Khan and Ferdous, 2006). Hussain et al. (1996) found that development projects in the UP were mostly selected on the basis of the personal desire of the UP Chairman, male members, influential local leaders or the MPs, which means there are little scope of participation of women members. Ahmed and Jahan (2002) found that in regulatory functions women’s participation is almost nil. The majority of the women members felt that there did not exist any equity in sharing rights or in performing responsibilities between male and female members in the UP. The study also found that some of the male Chairmen and members expressed reservations regarding the capabilities and practicabilities of women to participate in the UP.

Women’s political participation should be promoted for diverse reasons. Kaushik (1993, p. 6) views that women would worry about women's problems and therefore, women are more preferable to men as leaders. The increased participation of women has not meant a qualitative and progressive change in the policies or even attitude towards women's abilities and role (Kaushik, 1993, p. 10). Hence women need to get into the political process and they should be empowered to gain an entry into the functioning of the state and share the control over the apparatus of the state. To preserve and promote equality and justice and to bring about positive changes for removing the bottlenecks in women's political participation, necessary policy changes along with social restructuring comprising culture, practice, believe, attitude, values are essential.

Women have a greater sense of social issues, well-being, and welfare concerning their communities. It is evident that women members have contributed enormously to areas such as housing, safety, clean water, sanitation, environment, education, social implications of policies, health services, childcare, poverty alleviation and community development. In West Bengal, women members have

achieved remarkable success in dealing with family issues, dowry problems, and violence against women and children (Drage, 2001).

Ogletree and Alwis (2002) observed that “nothing is as important today in the political economy of development as an adequate recognition of political, economic and social participation and leadership of women.” Any legislative initiative to advance women must, therefore, focus not only on the so-called objective of making men and women equal, but also on the inner aspects of the particular culture with which they are closely associated and in which discrimination is a deeply embedded social phenomenon (York, 1996). Democratic governments have reckoned that adequate and effective women’s participation in political processes and in public life is a tangible step towards realizing women’s status and equality. Women’s equal participation in political life plays a pivotal role in the general process of advancement of women (Karam, 1999). It is not only a demand for simple justice or democracy but can also be seen as a necessary condition for women’s interests to be taken into account. Without the active participation of women and the incorporation of women’s perspective at all levels of decision making, the goals of equality, development and peace cannot be achieved (FWCW, 1995, p. 1).

Women’s development and empowerment grow through collective movement everywhere. Involvement in civil society also gives women the opportunity to influence government and gain visibility, credibility and respect, and to help mitigate barriers to women's political participation. In many regions, civic organizations are led by women, and are often viewed as vehicles for women's leadership; they have emerged as incubators for women to cultivate their political and personal power. Creating strong partnerships among women in civic organizations and women in political parties and elected office can help advance a common women's agenda in a coordinated way. Furthermore, partnerships between civic organizations that are critical in reaching and educating citizens-political parties and elected officials help build networks, develop relationships, and sustain trust and communication at the grassroots level. They need support to build solidarity amongst women, through strengthening the links between women's organizations and elected bodies. The entry of women into local government has given them a platform to integrate themselves into the women’s network so that they can strengthen their role.

Wollack (2010) states that “women’s political participation results in tangible gains for democracy, including greater responsiveness to citizen needs, increased cooperation across party and ethnic lines, and more sustainable peace.” Women’s political participation has profound positive and democratic impacts on communities, legislatures, political parties, and citizen’s lives. As women can bring positive changes in democratic practices, therefore it is exigently essential to delve into the participatory politics of women in order to consolidate grassroots democracy.

Hashme et al. (1997) pointed out that “the participation of women in credit programs of rural development organizations have increased their mobility, their ability to make purchases and participate in major household decisions, their ownership of productive assets, and their legal and political awareness and participation in public campaigns and protests.” This means that women’s empowerment could be achieved through their involvement in different income-generating activities and productive employment. Therefore if women can effectively participate in the local government process, women leaders would help other village women become involved in more income-earning opportunities.

To strengthen women’s role in political arena education plays a very important role because education enhances women’s autonomy, social and economic self-reliance, child survival, health condition, and it also leads to lower fertility, later age of marriage, smaller family size, and reduced likelihood of unwanted fertility (Jejeebhoy, 1996). Begum and Biswas (1998) found that education and women’s income and employment had a positive impact on the decision-making power of women. Quadir (1997) found that education and occupation helped women leaders to play a leadership role in organizations. It was observed that attitude formation towards political activities among females should be developed from childhood. Therefore, political parties and women’s organizations can play important roles towards this end (Siddiqui, 1995, p. 271).

CHAPTER 3

STRUCTURES AND SYSTEMS THAT HAVE ALLOWED WOMEN AS LEADERS

3.1 Introduction

This section is comprised of women's representation in the local government in Bangladesh and the structures and systems that have allowed women to be leaders. In Bangladesh the women's role in the UP is a very recent phenomenon, which started in 1997. In order to bring women leadership to the UP, myriad social, economic, political and legal factors have contributed to the development of women leadership and are systematically described and analyzed in this chapter.

3.1.1 Women's Representation in the Union Parishad in Bangladesh

Local government (LG) in Bangladesh has deep roots in the past. The foundation of today's Union Parishad was laid down by the British colonial rule in the undivided Indian subcontinent with the promulgation of the Village Chowkidary Act of 1870. After the end of the British rule in India in 1947, India and Pakistan emerged as two different states. Afterwards, Bangladesh achieved its independence in 1971 from the "internal colonialism"⁶ of Pakistan and inherited the LG system (LGS) from Pakistan with some modifications in its structure and composition. Since 1870 the functionaries of local government⁷ have always been in the hands of males (Chowhdury, Begum, Islam, & Mahtab, 1994, p. 6) and the right to vote in the local

⁶The term internal colonialism was used by Rawnak Jahan (1972) in her book *Pakistan. Failure in national integration*, USA: Columbia University.

⁷In this research local government connotes the rural local government, more specifically the Union Parishad, the oldest rural local government body in Bangladesh. Until 1983, the only local government in Bangladesh was the Union Parishad. In the last 144 years, from 1870 until 2014, the UP has never lost representative character and elections have continued every 5 years in the UP unlike many ups and downs in Bangladesh society.

bodies was dependent on educational qualifications, possession of property and tax payments, etc. (Smock, 1977, p. 117; Women for Women, 1992). Although women's representation in the political community was allowed through the Government of India Act in 1935 (Forbes, 2002), women for the first time took part in elections to the rural local bodies in 1956 on the basis of the universal adult franchise (Rashiduzzaman, 1968; Inter-Parliamentary Union, 1987). Following this provision only one female candidate was elected to the local government (UP) in the election of 1956 and 1969.

After independence, in the first UP election of 1973 in the Bangladesh period out of 4,352 UPs, only one woman from Rangpur district was elected as Union Parishad Chairman (Alam, & Begum, 1974, pp. 38-51). Afterwards, women's representation to local government was enshrined by two presidential ordinances; namely, through the Local Government Ordinance of 1976 and the Municipal Ordinance of 1977, which for the first time in Bangladesh provided a provision for the nomination of 2 women members in the Union Parishad. Regarding women's representation in local government, an important development took place during the Ershad regime⁸ through the passage of the Local Government (Upazila Parishad and Upazila Administration Reorganization) Ordinance of 1982 and the Local Government (Union Parishad) Ordinance of 1983. According to the Local Government (Union Parishad) Act of 1983, the provision of the nomination of three women members was introduced apart from the provision of nine male members and the Chairman (Haque, 2003; Khan, 2011; Khan, & Ara, 2006). In 1993, the system of nomination of women members in the Union Parishad was changed to indirect election and accordingly three women members were elected by the 9 elected male members and the elected Chairman. A major breakthrough regarding the process of representation of women members in the Union Parishad was made in 1997, which provided reservation for one-third of the total memberships for women members.

⁸Hussain Muhammad Ershad was one of the military rulers in Bangladesh. While he was the Chief of the Army Staff of the Bangladesh Army, he declared Martial Law following a bloodless coup and became Chief Martial Law Administrator in 1982. Afterwards he became the President of Bangladesh from 1983 to 1990. During the Ershad regime, following the suggestions of the National Executive Committee for Administrative Reform and Reorganization (NICARR), he undertook substantive reform measures in the sphere of civil administration and the local government system in Bangladesh.

According to the legal provision of 1997, in each Union three seats are reserved for women dividing nine wards into three units. One woman is elected from three wards through the direct adult franchise in the Union Parishad. Later on, by an office order from the Ministry of Local Government, Rural Development and Cooperatives (LGRD&C), women's representation in the Union Parishad was made in different standing committees and project committees.

Apart from this, the Upazila Parishad (UZP) Act 1998 (amended until 30 June, 2008) and the Municipality Ordinance also provided a wider scope for women leadership by making provision of one woman vice-chairman for both LGIs (Siddiqui, 2009; Taleb, 2004). Since 1977 women leaders have been coming in the UP but after having their representation through direct elections, the number of women candidates both in reserved and general seats has also increased (see following Table-3.1)

Table 3.1 Leadership Position Held by Women Leaders in the Union Parishad (1977-2012)

Year	No. of Union Parishads	Total Women Seats	Number of Women Candidates		Women Leaders Elected	
			Chairman	Members	Chairman	Members
1977	4352	13056	19	19	2	7
1984	4300	12900	-	-	6	-
1988	4401	13203	79	863	1	-
1992	4450	13350	115	1135	12	20
1997	4479	13437	102	43969	20	12828
				456*		110*
2003	4488	13464	232	43764	22	12684
				617*		79*
2011	4498	13,506	-	-	24	-

Sources: Ahmed, T., Chowdhury, M. M. R., & Shefali, M. K. (2003); Ahmed, T. (2012)

Note: * Women members elected to the general seats

3.1.2 Structures and System That Have Allowed Women as Leaders

This section will provide an overview of how the social, economic and political structures and systems have contributed to the development of women and have helped them take leadership roles. Instead of an automatic process, all over the world, irrespective of country specifications-developed and developing-women leadership has grown everywhere with the positive impetus and dynamic process of the socio-cultural development of the country. A lot of factors, structures and systems affect the process, nature, extent and dynamics of women's participation in public life in Bangladesh. There are psychological, attitudinal, social, political, cultural, economic, religious, organizational and institutional factors that influence the process of political participation of women. The development of women leadership is intricately interrelated and conditioned with and by the prevailing social, cultural, economic and political context of a country. Papanek (1975, pp. 220-222) disclosed that there are two different avenues for women's development. The first method of development is to give priority to changing the situation of women by accepting existing social, economic and political structures. To change the situation of women the second alternative necessitates a general transformation regarding the existing socio-economic structures. According to Papanek (1975, pp. 220-222) the second case is relevant to third world countries.

In fact the structures, systems, and contexts responsible for this increased political participation of women at the local level are myriad. According to Kaushik (1996, pp. 40-41), in understanding the aspects of political participation of women factors such as the ideology of the state, the interrelationship among the components of its structure, i.e. class, caste, gender social, political, and economic context, are crucial. Rai (1995, p. 115) views that women's access to public life can be ensured through different routes, i.e. family background, and other factors such as social and political movements, and political leaders and their policy initiatives may provide equally important access points for the political life for women. Some women have received inspiration from their predecessors to join politics. The first move for women coming into the public domain outside the home is very important as once women can do that, they can automatically overcome other problems involved in this.

In order to achieve a systematic analysis of the structures, systems, and contexts of women's leadership, these contexts have been divided into socio-cultural, economic, political and legal contexts, which have been discussed below.

3.1.2.1 Socio-Cultural Context

The socio-cultural contexts are quite important for understanding the political participation of women. In countries where culture and society are heavily textured by patriarchal and traditional values, it is necessary to look into the issues or causes that in turn help to promote and create an enabling environment for women to enter the structure of power and decision-making process (Rahman, & Sultana, 2005). In general, women lack access to the resources in the family and state, i.e. education, ownership and employment that limit their opportunities to enter avenues leading to the political arena (Chowdhury, 1994a). Leary and Ahmed (2001, p. 8) also view that women are unequal due to their dependent socio-economic status, lower education, less mobility and above all due to the social, cultural, and religious customs. In the cultural realm women are subjugated by men, which is well entrenched or entrapped in the habits, beliefs, customs, feelings, thinking, art, morals, laws, etc. of Bangladesh society (Khanam, Rashida, & Khan 1996, p. 22). Women were able gain access to public office owing to overall improvement in the socio-economic and political contexts and structures of the society, which have been described beneath briefly.

1) Cultural Liberalism

One of the greatest constraints to the participation of women in politics in Bangladesh is the misinterpretation of religious principles and "fatwas" by the so-called religious leaders; most of the women leaders are ignorant about the principles of Islam (Bhuiyan, 2001, p.10). The traditional attitude of the male-dominated society and the patriarchal social norms hinders women's access to leadership positions on the grounds that Islam does not recognize leadership by women (Bhuiyan, 2001, p. 11). Cultural beliefs create psychological and emotional barriers for women to run for political office, regardless of their careers or level of education (Inter-Parliamentary Union, 2000, p. 25). However, in reality, Bangladeshi women are not fundamentalist but liberal in thinking, and such liberalism has helped women's leadership to grow in Bangladesh.

Women in developing countries may rise to political leadership positions through the changes that undermine traditions (Chaney, 1973). Cultural liberalization refers to the liberal norms, attitudes, beliefs and culture that help with the emergence of women's leadership. Bengali-speaking Muslims are basically liberal minded. The fundamental cause of developing women's leadership lies with the fact that women in Bangladesh are moderate and quickly adaptive. The women are not as conservative or traditional as the so-called progressive people have tried to establish about these Muslim women. Bangladesh society is not as patriarchal as it is deemed (Muniruzzaman, 2003)⁹. Though Khanam et al. (1996, p. 24) view that for religious reasons, women in Muslim states are strictly excluded from politics, but in Bangladesh religion always helps people to continue their life, and religion never create problems. In the author's opinion Bangladeshi Muslims have their religious spirit in mind or in their heart but their behavior is modest and moderate.

2) Development of Education Facilities

Education and employment can help have a positive impact on women's empowerment. In recent days due to the enormous growth of education, employment, massive development of communication networks, availability of civic amenities, and the media and information revolution many of the socio-cultural problems of women have substantively been reduced and this may have a positive impact on women's mobility and empowerment. It is also equally well recognized that any attempt that seeks to promote women's empowered role has to combine multiple strategies that go beyond politics to social and psychological, cultural, familial, economic and careerist, policy making and implementing levels. Above all, women need to be empowered by ending their indignity caused by domestication, breaking their isolation imposed by socio-cultural barricades, by unifying them through common interests and organizing them on the basis of mutual trust, common goals, and collectivity. Hence women need to get into these processes and institutions, gain

⁹Adopting the expert consultation method in a research project by Rahman, Md. Mizanur and Sultana, Fouzia Nasreen (2005). *Women in Local Government in Bangladesh and West Bengal: A Comparative Perspective*, Dhaka: FOWSIA, Bangladesh Freedom Foundation, I personally interviewed Dr. Talukder Muniruzzaman, Professor, Department of Political Science, University of Dhaka in 2003.

an entry into the functioning of the state, and share the control over the apparatus of state. To preserve and promote equality and justice and bring about positive changes, and to remove the bottlenecks regarding women's political participation, necessary policy changes along with social restructuring of the culture, practices, beliefs, attitudes, and values are essential.

Attaining political power by women leaders largely occurs outside politics (Randall, 1987; Chafetz, 1991). One important area is education. Education makes women knowledgeable, skilled, and self-confident in their participation in the ongoing development process of the country (Villaluz, 2000). Many women lack access to education, which is necessary for an equal political position with men, and this may influence their political outlook. An empirical study in South Korea conducted by Wade and Seo (1996, p. 44) suggested that with education women become more politically aware, and more assertive and active in political discussions and participation.

Education is certainly one of the formidable factors that contribute to the transformation of politics and government, especially at their higher levels, from the male preserve into institutions where men and women can make themselves heard equally well. Both the modification of traditional restrictive attitudes and the preparedness of women to take on new roles depend on it to a large extent (Newland, 1975, p. 33). In case of the developing world, education means basic skills such as literacy or language. International development organizations share the consensus that education is crucial for improving the quality of women's citizenship and leadership (Knight, 2004). It is therefore encouraging that significant progress in the education of women has been made in recent years. In countries where women have access to educational opportunities, one expects that they will be more likely to participate in politics. Basic education may be an especially important resource because it bestows political knowledge that may be essential for participation in the political realm (Verba, Burns, & Schlozman, 1997).

The feminist groups view that the first and foremost constraint on women's participation in the political process is the patriarchal social system (Khanam et al., 1996, p. 21). Cantor and Bernay (1992, cited in Genovese, 1993, p. 217) also point out that escaping the bondage of the patrimonial problem is an

essential ingredient to creating a just and equal society that helps liberate both men and women. However, Islam (2003)¹⁰ thinks that “it will be reduced with the gradual development of the socio-economic status of women. The more women will come to politics the more easily this problem will be removed.” Therefore, Chowdhury (1994b, p. 54) finds it important that women that are active in politics and public life need to be aware of those problems for removing the barriers to their equality and accelerating the process of women's advancement. Only through raising the awareness or consciousness of the general mass through enlarging educational facilities the patriarchal problem can be reduced. There is however no denying the fact that through education many of the socio-cultural problems could be solved where women would also be able to solve their own problems through education.

Concerning women's access to the political process at the local level, Chowdhury points out that bringing women leadership to the LG is not a problem for the patriarchy because at the local level there are few resources, few issues, little jurisdiction, few sources so that women's leadership can obtain the opportunity for growth. However, at the national level, women are yet to be involved in party politics and women's leadership still does not have any continuity in Bangladesh. Chowdhury opines that as Bangladesh is basically a patriarchal society where the politicians think that politics is for males only and the men's perspective reign the politics. Pointing to two national-level women leaders, she opines that both the Prime Minister and the leader of the opposition are the product of patriarchy and they became leaders using family legacy and do not have any feminist orientation. Accordingly, their cultural make up is laden with those traditional values and therefore they do not have any intension to bring women into leadership because patriarchy asserts that a win for women in a direct election is a defeat for the man. Based on the rationale that women could be patronized but they cannot be equal, women are allowed to participate in the local government. In a real sense being convinced by the demands of NGOs, donors, and development partners, the

¹⁰Expert consultation with Dr. Sarder Aminul Islam, Professor, Department Sociology University of Dhaka, in 2003; see Rahman and Sultana (2005), *ibid*.

government has undertaken various programs for the development of women as there is no question of power sharing, Chowdhury adds.

The advancement of science and technology has resulted in new production processes, occupations, and skills, which have led to an increased demand for women's labour. Consequently, changes in social roles, customs, attitudes and laws have begun to emerge for both men and women. Changes in the attitudes of people have occurred through the progressive trends of the society and the mobilization of poor women by the government has also helped women to raise their social position, which has brought about a positive change in the spheres of women's empowerment in Bangladesh. The development of communications, modernization and organized economic development has changed the socio-economic context in rural Bangladesh. All of these factors in turn have facilitated the social transformation of women through breaking the traditional structures of power and value systems (Kaushik, 1993, p. 12; 1996, pp. 38-45, and Rajeswari, 1996, p. 131).

Subrahmanyam (2002, p. 32) points out that "the spread of education, the influence of the electronic media, and the improvement in the levels of income, exposure, knowledge, and awareness among the ruralities have created an impact in the value system, attitudes, perceptions, expectations and aspirations of the rural disadvantaged sections in recent years." As a matter of fact, in the ultimate analysis, women have begun to realize that political empowerment holds the key for their social and economic betterment.

The effect of information revolution, expansion of education, employment opportunity has helped to bring about a positive change in the age-old cultural and mental make-up of women in the family, society and community, and has facilitated the growth of liberal cultural norms, attitude, beliefs and value system of the women and has paved the way for the emergence of women from the four walls of kitchen room to the outside world.

3) Development of Technology and ICT Innovations

The cataclysmic development of science, technology and IT revolution has helped to change the mindset of women and has played a positive role in the development of women. In the late 70s and early 80s, there emerged a massive change in the global communication system. TV, VCR, radio, two-in-one/cassette

recorders, and daily newspapers were more or less available to the rural women. The information revolution helped women to obtain modern and up-to-date knowledge and this has had a positive impact on the thinking process of women. During the Khan (1947-70) regime, transistors played an important role in developing rural women in terms of changing their attitude by listening to family planning programs broadcasted from the East Pakistan broadcasting center. During the Bangladesh period another popular BTV and educative program on agricultural economics called “Mati O Manush (Soil and Man)¹¹,” possibly helped to make an ever-lasting impression on the mindset of rural women. Shaikh Siraj, the presenter of that program, was one of the masterminds of women’s development in rural Bangladesh. Watching this program, women got involved in various income-generating activities, which helped some of them to achieve economic emancipation, which actually facilitated the growth of women’s leadership in Bangladesh.

Another hidden fact in developing women’s leadership was the family planning and health workers of the Health and Family Planning Department. From time immemorial women’s role in public life was almost prohibited in Bangladesh. Research shows that the low rate of contraceptive users was the result of the lack of access to information, suppliers, limitations of the local workers, and services for those that were interested (Smock, 1977, p. 116). Some analysts have suggested that the practice of purdah, rather than Islamic doctrine itself, encourages the high level of fertility prevalent among Muslim Bengali women (Smock, 1977, p. 116). Judged from economic standpoints, two groups of Bengali women, mainly with upper-class and lower-class backgrounds that observe purdahless rigidly, are

¹¹Mr. Shykh Seraj anchored a popular and influential TV series, *Mati O Manush* (Men and Soil), during the eighties. The program featured investigative and in-depth documentaries pointing out solutions to various problems that farmers face. In his work, Seraj visited remote areas, talked with farmers, conducted filming, searches for stories, and encouraged young educated generations to engage in farming. In 1999, he became the director of the news on a popular TV channel in Bangladesh (Channel I). In 2004, Seraj started a new program at his channel called *Hridoye Mati O Manush* (Soil & Men in Heart) based on the format of the earlier program. As recognition of his innovative journalism, he received the US Ashoka Fellowship in honor of his poverty elimination program on TV in 1992. In 1995, Seraj was a recipient of the *Ekushey Padak* award, which is Bangladesh’s highest civilian award for contributions to his field. In 2009, the UN Food and Agriculture Organization awarded him the A. H. Boerma award for his outstanding developmental journalism in the field of agriculture.

usually more aware of the availability of contraceptive devices, but the upper-class women were more inclined to use them than the majority of Bengali women (Aitken, & Stoeckel, 1971, pp. 75-87).

In a bid to control the population growth, the Pakistan government embarked on a massive program, as population control was one of the major concerns for the Pakistan government. However, due to traditional belief and purdah system it was very tough to achieve success with it. Therefore, based on field research and action research by the Pakistan Academy for Rural Development (currently Bangladesh academy for Rural Development), several innovative model programs were developed and introduced in the early sixties that have made a significant impact on the adoption of family planning practices (Khan, & Khan, 1975, pp. 31-32). After initiating the family planning program in the sixties, prewar surveys indicated that despite the high incidence of illiteracy and prevailing conservatism, the national family planning program of the Pakistani government had been able to bring about an awareness of the existence of modern contraception to some 85 percent of the target population (Khan, 1972, pp. 48-49). The Bangladesh government also continued the efforts with the highest priority attached to it to curb the population boom. Therefore, the post war population rate was reduced considerably (Curlin, Chen, & Hussain, 1975).

Moniruzzaman (2003) opines that at the grassroots level family planning workers were the first and foremost change agents in the rural society. Due to widespread use of the radio, cinema and television, books and newspapers, the national health awareness and family planning program consciousness levels of women have increased. As a result of improved methods of family planning, women cannot only relieve their worries and preoccupations with matters such as too-frequent childbirth and health problems of large families, but they can also now afford to invest part of their energies in activities outside their homes. The health and family planning program helped women secure a social role that relieved them from the familial, reproductive, and childbearing role. Through distributing various contraceptives to the rural women by the health workers, rural women have become free from the anxiety of being pregnant every year since they are aware of various methods of birth control. The motivation for birth control has helped remove inertia

and has brought about a radical change in the cultural and behavioral pattern of women, which has given impetus to the development of women's leadership in rural society.

3.1.2.2 Political Context

In the political domain women leadership was developed in Bangladesh undergoing the following processes and systems:

1) Democratic Governance

The unfettered and unstinted development of women's leadership calls for a fundamental requirement for democratic governance as democratic sustenance helps develop women leadership all over the world. There is a positive effect of democracy on the gradual development of women leadership, as evidence shows that women leaders are always elected through "regular" channels (Paxton, & Goemans, 2006), which means that they do not take power through irregular means, such as military coups. This is certainly reasonable because women are rarely the military leaders that would be placed into power through a coup. However it also suggests that female leaders are more successful in a democratic system.

Women's political participation results in tangible gains for democracy, including greater responsiveness to citizen needs, increased cooperation across party and ethnic lines, and more sustainable peace (Wollack, 2010). Women's political participation has profound positive and democratic impacts on communities, legislatures, political parties and citizen's lives. Women can also bring positive changes in democratic practices and therefore it is essential to foster participatory politics of women in order to consolidate democracy and the development of women as well.

In fact, democratic governance helps women's organizations and networks to uphold their demands and interests for the women's community for the concerned policy makers and they can also advocate and lobby for bringing salutary policy changes through undergoing myriad forms of democratic movements for them. Thus democratic governance provides the necessary conditions for strengthening women's political development and participation.

2) Collective Actions and NGO Movements in Bangladesh

Leadership develops through establishing and demanding rights, rights for education, jobs, employment, economic emancipation, dowry-free marriage, the right to production and other demanding issues on which women can raise their voices. The greater the scope of demands created for women, the more prospects there will be for women's leadership in Bangladesh. However, the big question that lies with the grass roots women is how these demands are legitimated in the context of the Union Parishad. The development of women will depend on questions about their leadership-how many women are educated in the UP and what their levels of education are and whether they are capable of meeting these rights in the UP. These are some of the major challenges in the days to come. The government remains silent when fundamentalists oppose women's issues and beat women and NGO people. Political parties prefer rhetoric and seemed divided or play foul regarding such crucial issues and therefore it would be difficult for women's leadership to emerge in Bangladesh. In Bangladesh women's leadership exists at the national level, where both the Prime Minister and the Leader of the Opposition are women, but when women's leadership at the grassroots-level is demanded there arise confrontations. In the course of time, however, they both extended their flexible attitude towards bringing women into the political structure in the UP.

Women leaders evolve through becoming members of collective associations. Through collectiveness women gain self-confidence and political consciousness. Immediately after the liberation war, Bangladesh had a chance to organize itself into a process of collectiveness amidst various development interventions and micro credit programs of NGOs, mahila samities, etc. In fact, the NGO revolution has contributed a lot to the growth of women's leadership in Bangladesh, which also received further motivation by the donor agencies, which helped build links with women's organizations and NGOs through networking, information building, consultation, conferences, and workshops in order to promote gender issues within the political agenda (Sikoska, & Kardam, 2001).

Being a part of a collective force and drawing strength from others and giving support to the group activities are very important for developing women's leadership. Through group activities women can develop mutual and

symbiotic relationships among the members of the group and women can do their work with collective intelligence and strength from this process. The participation of women in the UP is a mechanism for the collectivization process so that they can ventilate their views and opinions. Though until now this system has not become fully effective, there is no doubt that it is a good system for developing the participation of women in the governing process at the grassroots level. Sharma (1998, p. 42) views that “worldwide women's collective action and mobilization has made a significant contribution in enlarging the definition of politics, however, they remain largely excluded from formal politics.” In other words Sharma (1992) elaborates that “despite difference in perspectives, approaches and methodology there seems to be a general agreement both within the women's movement and the government that grassroots organizations are vital instrument in providing women with collective strength, bargaining capacity and collective articulation of their interests.”

3) Mass Mobilization

Mobilization is an important element for increasing women's leadership but Jahangir (2003)¹² raised the question concerning whether there is any process of women's mobilization in Bangladesh. In order to articulate and ventilate some of the demands and choices of women, mobilization has taken place in women's groups. In Bangladesh, however, violence prevails in such mobilization processes though in some cases women's mobilization has become stronger through violence as well. Women's leadership can also flourish in the participatory process. If women get more opportunity to make decisions and can get more chance to participate in the development activities of the country, it can also help with women's leadership. In developing the participation of women in the policy-making process, bureaucracy acts as the main barrier. Jahangir (2003), as one of the members of the Local Government Reform Commission, informed that when the members of the Commission wanted to introduce women members in the UP, the local-level bureaucrats expressed their conservativeness concerning this. The local bureaucrats pointed out that Bangladesh society was conservative and that there were traditional “Mullahs” and certain provisions in the Quraan and Hadith against women leadership, and therefore it would

¹²Expert consultation with Dr. Borhan Uddin Khan Jahangir, Professor (Rtd.), Department of Political Science, University of Dhaka in 2003, see Rahman and Sultana (2005). *ibid*.

not be wise to bring women to the forefront of local government and government should not advance fast. On the other hand, in India along with a solid structure of local government there emerged an organized farmers movement, which was further strengthened by NGOs and political parties that helped immensely to influence women's leadership there.

4) Political Movements since the Colonial Era

The seed of women's leadership was germinated through the farmers' movement, which was popularly known as the "tebhaga movement." This movement started simultaneously in both parts that now constitute Bangladesh and West Bengal before the partition of undivided India. A huge number of women took part in this movement and this was the basic instinct for developing women's leadership in both the areas. In the wake of the "tebhaga movement"¹³ various farmers' movements emerged which in turn were transformed into political movements where women's participation was quite visible.

The British era had stages of movements for independence and the revitalization of society. Women's movements during the Pakistan period and post-independence age had a socialist philosophical influence and the effects of nationalist ideologies (Guhathakurata, Begum, & Ahmed, 1997, pp. 186-187). Later, these movements transformed into democratic movements that demanded gender equality, elimination of violence, torture, and fundamentalist's activities against women in society, which have been effective in crystallizing women's issues and solidarity (Guhathakurata, Begum, & Ahmed, 1997).

The issue of the emergence of women's leadership in Bangladesh begins with the British colonial era and the Pakistan period. During the British period some women such as Priti Lata Sen and Ashalata Devi, who were active member of the patriotic movement, showed women the way to become

¹³The Tebhaga movement was a militant campaign initiated in West Bengal by the Kisan Sabha (Peasants front of Communist Party of India) in 1946. At that time share-cropping peasants (essentially, tenants) had to give half of their harvest to the owners of the land. The demand of the Tebhaga (sharing by thirds) movement was to reduce the share given to landlords to one third. In many areas the agitations turned violent, and landlords fled the villages leaving parts of the countryside in the hands of the Kisan Sabha. This movement equally came into being in Bangladesh as part of that movement started in West Bengal as at that time Bangladesh was part of undivided India.

involved in the political movement. However few Muslim women participated in the independence movement, and the handful Muslim women that did address women's meetings or collect money included virtually no Bengali woman (Minault, 1974). Then during the Pakistan period some women from elite families organized in the "Mahila Samity or Parishad (Women's Forum)," which helped women to participate in some social work. During the time of the language movement in 1952 and mass movement in 1969 and the liberation movements of Bangladesh in 1971, some female students of Dhaka University took part in those movements. According to Suraiya (2003)¹⁴ these were the beginning of the women leadership in Bangladesh.

5) Civil Society Movement

Women's development and empowerment thrives through collective movement everywhere. All over the world women's collectivization takes place through civil society movements. The development of women's leadership to an extent was an outcome of systematic, well-ordered, incremental efforts and movements by the civil society group, most of which came from outside the government. In the wake of all such movements against social ills and problems causing the underdevelopment of women, women's organizations demanded reservation for women in the administration and political power structure. These movements influenced the government to take steps to include women in local governments and the national parliament as the Constitution of Bangladesh also recognized the right for such civil society movements, such as NGOs, women's organizations, the Mahila Parishad¹⁵ and the women activists in Bangladesh.

6) Women's Organizations

The role of women's organizations is very important for developing women's leadership. According to Caplan and Bujra (1979), there is evidence that women's organizations are the most effective agents for bringing change in women's behaviour. Women and women's organizations have played a major role in changing the laws or the interpretation of laws that have defined women's legal status (Newland, 1975, p. 34). In Bangladesh, the mahila samity or

¹⁴Expert consultation with Suraiya Begum, Professor, Department of Sociology, University of Dhaka in 2003; see Rahman and Sultana (2005), *ibid*.

¹⁵Bengali word that stands for Association of Women.

women's organization helped to bring women into the political sphere. Students' movements in universities also helped women to obtain exposure for becoming leaders.

In Bangladesh women have gained strength through developing their consciousness level by participating in various development activities, micro credit programs, and in training and activating their political consciousness in various organizations of self-help groups. A lot of development programs undertaken by these women's organizations have helped to develop the condition of women thus affecting their thinking, culture, beliefs, and ideology. There are numerous women's organizations in Bangladesh that are playing a crucial role in building awareness among the women in Bangladesh. These organizations are taking various programs to increase women's social mobilization, raising their social status and increasing their political consciousness (Khan, Rahman, Islam, & Islam 1981, p. 7). Besides the national NGOs such as BRAC, Grameen Bank, Proshikha, Gono Sahajjya Sangstha (GSS), ASA, etc., there are women's organizations such as Women for Women, Bangladesh Kendra, Naripokkho, Bangladesh Nari Progati Sangha, etc. that are notable examples of organizations working for women's political development (Rahman, & Rahim, 2001, p. 128).

According to Jahan, (1995; 1991) "women's organizations have begun to establish links with NGOs in order to focus on programs intended to raise the consciousness of women at the grassroots level, helping these organizations to raise gender issues in other forms." Organizations such as Bangladesh Mahila Parishad, Ain O Salish Kendra, Women for Women, Nari Pakkha, Ubining, Nijera Kori, Saptogram, and so on are working on developing a women's agenda. Apart from mobilizing women around specific issues, these organizations are expanding the scope of the women's agenda to include many other developmental issues, such as the debt crisis, the environmental crisis, population control policies and programs, women's health issues, legal reforms, and enhancing the participation of women in the political process (Jahan, 1995; 1991). Training programs have been organized to educate women for positions of leadership by those organizations also.

7) Organizational and Institutional Factors

Leadership develops through structures as well. In the UP there is no regular structure. Jahnagir (2003) views that, women leadership has developed in Bangladesh outside the trajectory of the local government structure. Therefore, the perspectives of developing women leadership in Bangladesh are quite different. Panchayats in West Bengal evolved through political process. However, in Bangladesh local government elections are not held on a political party basis. The quality of women's leadership in Bangladesh and West Bengal is also different. All of the issues and demands are addressed through proper channels in West Bengal but in Bangladesh this process is absent. According to Jahangir (2003), the condition required for developing women leadership does not exist in the country. He deems that "continuity is the most important issue for growing leadership." In Bangladesh there is no continuity in local government structure, let alone developing women's leadership. In Bangladesh, it is very common that successive governments are changing, sometimes canceling the policies and programs of the past governments. In Bangladesh the tiers and structure of the local government are yet to be fixed. On the one hand, all political parties have unanimously accepted the Panchayats system in India, though it has been introduced by the Congress. However in Bangladesh it is yet to take strong footing. For flourishing leadership, organized political movement and enhancing of the consciousness level of the people are necessary, but such a process is absent in Bangladesh. In Bangladesh developing a structure of local government through a unanimous political consensus has not yet been possible. Jahangir (2003) moreover opines that the analysis of women's political experiences in different countries indicates that the structure and nature of political parties, their work modes, and nomination and elite recruitment processes discourage and hinder women's entry in legislative polities. The general trend that is noted suggests that in many of these cases family and male political linkages, political crises and violence provide the background and serve as an enabling environment for the entry and rise of these women in politics. However, in recent times, some positive efforts from the government have helped regarding women's leadership at the UP, Upazila, and Municipality level.

In short it can be concluded that women's leadership is promoted through women's movements for establishing various socio-economic and political rights and demands. Through these socio-political movements, the mobilization and participation of women takes place, and through them women can gain strength and get a chance to organize themselves. These movements are no doubt good processes for facilitating women leadership. Women's leadership can also be promoted with the structures and continuity of local government. The nature and structure of political parties, and the recruitment and nomination of the political process can be instrumental in building women's leadership. However, unfortunately, all of these processes for developing women's leadership are feeble, emaciated and underdeveloped in Bangladesh.

3.1.2.3 Economic Context

During recent times through gaining economic strength, women have got a good footing that has helped the process of women's leadership in Bangladesh. The basic issues which have helped the emergence of women's leadership in Bangladesh have been economic. To overcome the boundless poverty, women from poor families have come out from their home. Involvement with different works and jobs helps with the emergence of leadership among the women.

Development of NGOs and Economic Emancipation of Women

Women's leadership developed through Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) and business organizations. The thriving of women leadership can be accelerated if women can effectively participate in the decision-making process in these organizations. At present a lot of NGOs, namely BRAC, Proshika, RDRS, GSS, World Vision, KARITAS, Concern, CARE, DANIDA, USAID, Grameen Bank, Bureau Bangladesh, ASA etc., have been working in diversified poverty reduction programs through which millions of poor rural women have been imparted various training programs in various income-generating activities in different areas, i.e. fisheries, livestock, poultry, handicraft, healthcare and sanitation, nutrition, agro forestry, formal and informal education and credit programs, which have helped these women to obtain self-employment and income-earning opportunities that have contributed to social consciousness and economic emancipation (Meher, 2000).

In developing women's leadership in Bangladesh, NGOs have played the cardinal role. In Bangladesh governments have failed to reach some of the remotest areas of rural Bangladesh, but NGOs through working at the field level, they have become able to bring about a change in the consciousness level of the women in the rural society. In every country economic development occurs in a certain process. As NGOs have involved women in that process, therefore, the topmost role played in the development of women leadership at the grass root should be given to NGOs.

Through various IGAs and micro-credit programs, NGOs are actively involved in poverty alleviation programs. Among their programs and activities women were the prime targets and this has helped immensely to organize poor women in the rural areas. The micro credit programs of NGOs have helped unleash women's potentials and have brought about a radical change in their outlook, consciousness, and cultural level. At the same time the issue of women's development has been strengthened and accelerated by the national government, which was reflected in the state policy for women's development.

In general it is believed that women suffer from economic segregation due to the non-accessibility to a resource base and this keeps them away from income-earning opportunities and outside power structure (Khanam et al., 1996, p. 25). While women have not always been able to benefit from the macro-policies and major programs and projects, a number of initiatives sponsored by the government and NGOs have demonstrated that developmental goals can be effectively achieved by enhancing the capacity of women. Both economic and social returns from such investment are high. Many of these initiatives provided poor women with increased income and assets, literacy, education on health, nutrition and environment, and awareness about social, political, and legal rights.

One of the major reasons for flourishing women's leadership in Bangladesh is the economic emancipation of women through the intervention of non-governmental development organizations. In these NGOs a lot of poor women have received a chance to become involved in various income generating activities through micro-credit, development programs, skill training, capacity building programs, etc., which have helped them increase their income, knowledge and education, remove their vulnerability, instill a sense of confidence and courage to fight with social ills, and thus develop the mobility of poor women of remotest rural areas-which in fact contributed immensely to the evolving women's leadership in Bangladesh.

3.1.2.4 Legal Context

Women's leadership in Bangladesh has emerged in the context of global change. The impact of the global movement for women's empowerment has had a subsequent impact for women's development, which has facilitated women's leadership in Bangladesh. The international donor and aid agencies have tried to improve the condition of women through advocating some policies, legal measures, strategies and conditions favoring the cause of women's development. With the prescription and persuasions from the donor agencies, the national governments are to take measures to increase the participation of women in development activities through undertaking various development projects by government organizations and institutions. The global developmental strategies for women have created a platform for political empowerment of women in the developing countries.

1) Global Context

The issue of women's political participation in Bangladesh has been developed within the ambit of the broader global perspective. The process began with the Universal Declaration of Human Rights of 1948. This was followed by the adoption of the UN Convention on the Political Rights of Women in 1952, which emphasized women's participation in all spheres of life. After that the first UN Conference on Women, held in Mexico City in 1975, declared that the decade spanned from 1975-1985, the "International Women Decade," and also 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), a declaration in 1979 that laid down the importance of the 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 of the 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 the Women Conference held in New York in 2000-have emphasized women's civil and socio-political and legal rights and empowerment. The documents and strategies of all the international conferences on women stressed creating a strong platform for action and advocacy for women (The Hunger Project, 2000 and Hossain, 1999, p. 178).

International Women's Movement/Organizations Help Women's Leadership

International women's organizations and movements have also helped the development of women's leadership in most of the countries of the world and Bangladesh is no exception to this. International bodies have worked directly for increasing the supply of women, and women's international movements/activities have helped to increase the demand for female politicians. Most directly, international organizations have pressured states to adopt gender quotas in the developing countries (Childs, & Krook, 2005; Krook, 2004; Towns, 2004).

In some countries international bodies have helped with the capacity development of women, which indirectly has helped to develop women's leadership. The UN, the International Labour Organization (ILO), The World Bank, the UN Food and Agricultural Organization (FAO), and a wide range of international nongovernmental organizations all have provided money, personnel, training, employment and skills development, etc., which have helped bring rural women together from across the world to promote their empowerment throughout the world (UNDP, 2000, p. 97). Empowering women by helping them get employment, training, education, or access to valuable resources that helped create develop women with knowledge, skills, and interest to run for political office.

Through quantitative analysis, Paxton and Hein (2006) using data from more than 100 countries from 1893 to 2003, found that the combination of women's organizing in the form of Women's International NGOs (WINGOs) and UN activities has had a powerful impact on women's parliamentary representations over time.

2) National Context

The governments of third world countries have to devise suitable strategies to achieve the goals sets by international conferences, which in the long run help emergence of WID policy in their respective countries. The Bangladesh government has made formal commitments to women's political participation in congruence with all of those important international documents.

As part of the national legal context it is worth noting that the Bangladesh Constitution has mandated equal rights to women in all spheres of private and public life, including the right to hold elected and appointed office [i.e. Article 28 (1), Article 28 (2) Article 27, Article 28(4)]. In the Constitution of Bangladesh women's political participation was ensured through the reservation of 15 seats in the national parliament in 1972, which was valid for 10 years. In 1978 the number of reserved seats was increased to 30 and the time frame was extended to 15 years. This provision ended in 1987 and following that no seat was reserved in 1988. In 1990, however, the number of reserved seats for was increased to 30 seats and practiced for the fifth, sixth and seventh parliamentary elections. The eighth parliamentary election, held in 2001, again enacted the provision of 30 reserved seats for women (Chowdhury, 1994b, pp. 40-42; Chowdhury et al., 1994, p. 25; Khanam et al., 1996, p. 92). In 2004, the number of seats in parliament was raised from 300 to 345, with the addition of 45 reserved seats for women. These reserved seats are filled by the political parties in proportion to their seats secured in the national election.

Today, most national governments have some form of women's policy machinery, or government body devoted to promoting the status of women (Staudt, 1998; Stetson, 1995; Weldon, 2002b). Government-level women's policy machinery can help in the formation of a national women's agency, a women's commission, or a women ministry. Having a designated space for women within a government, those machineries help to promote women's interests in a number of ways. Women's policy machinery, in turn, helps to coordinate and consolidate the development and implementation of policy (Stetson, 1995; Stetson, & Mazur, 1995; Weldon, 2002a).

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 the Municipal Ordinance of 1977-which made provision for the nomination of two women members to the Union Parishad. Afterwards, President Zia in his Swanirvar Gram Sarker Program in 1980 kept provision for the nomination of two women in its composition. Following that, some changes took place in the number as well as in the procedures of the 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, the nomination system was changed in 1997. A system of three reserved seats for women to be filled through the direct adult franchise in both the Union Parishad and municipalities was enacted in the same year, 1997.

At the national level, favorable legislations and policy directives of governments have also buttressed the cause of women's development. Government policy especially policy measures for education, has also influenced the emergence of women's leadership in Bangladesh. Non-formal education, adult education, the Total Literacy Movement (TLM), food for education, free primary education, and scholarships for girl students are some of the strategies through which women's development issues were rightly addressed by the governments.

To enhance women's status and participation at national and sub-national levels, another positive attempt was the establishment of the Ministry of Women's and Children's Affairs. Furthermore, the creation of focal points for women in all Ministries, Divisions, and Agencies and making the WID 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 multifarious projects related to the development of women. All of these legal provisions have contributed positively to the development of women's leadership in the Bangladesh context. In the following figure, the context of the increasing leadership of women is explained.

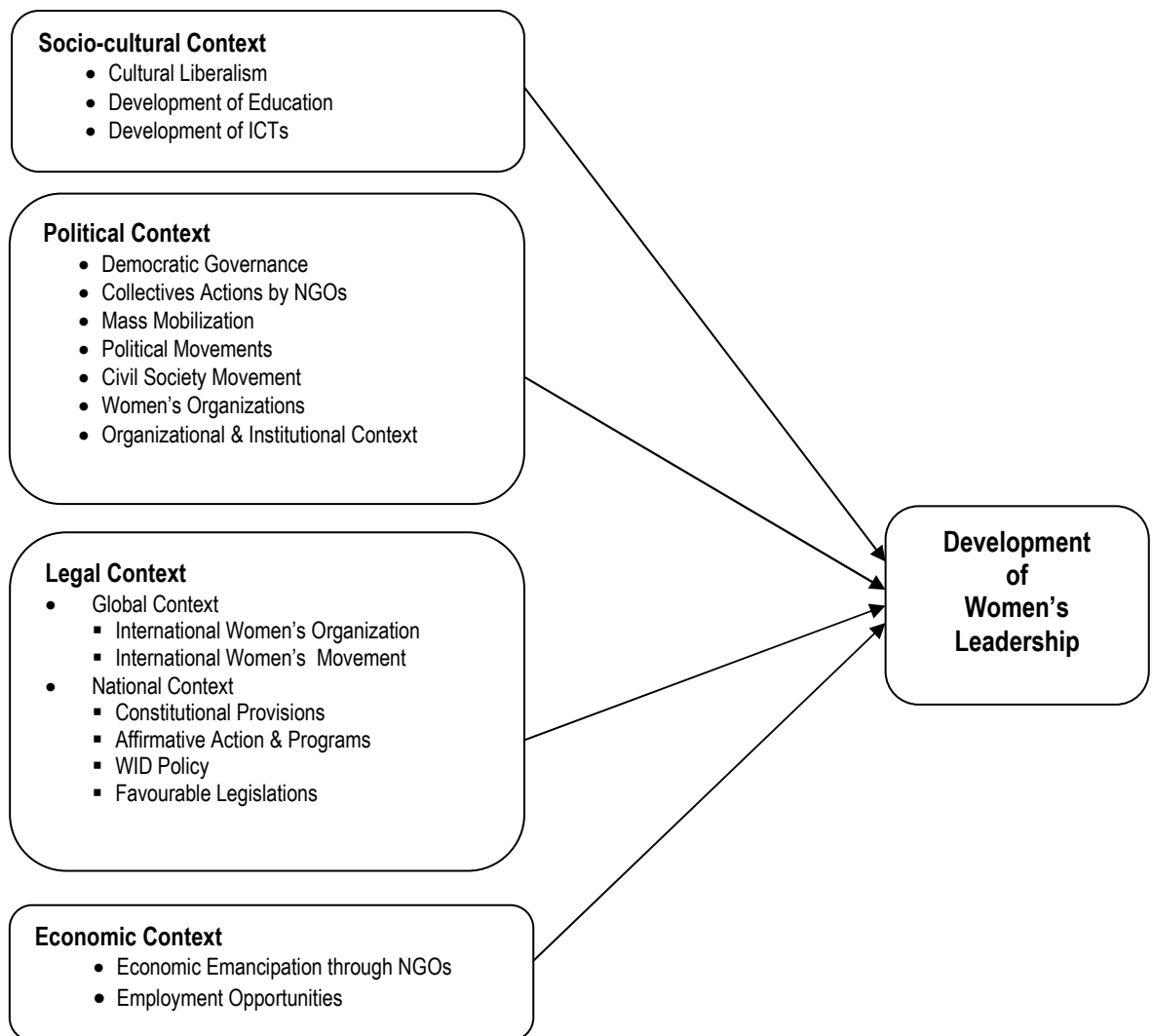


Figure 3.1 Structures and Contexts That Have Facilitated Women Leadership

3.1.2.5 Summary

In a situation where in a greater labour force working in the industrial sector such as ready-made garment factories, and more NGOs and credit groups are forming, more women are coming into politics, more women are getting involved in the development process of the country and the consciousness level of women is increasing, it would be very difficult to reverse the whole process overnight. Along with the government, other social cultural and political institutions or organizations or groups are trying to bring women into the development process, and therefore women's role and status in leadership positions are becoming firmer and stronger day by day. Regarding the socio-cultural context of Bangladesh, it can be concluded that

liberal values and the socio-cultural system have helped to increase women's leadership role in society. In Bangladesh some changes have been initiated by the health and family planning workers at the grassroots level. The advancement of science and technology, electrical and electronic media, education, employment among other developments have also helped with the process of the development of women. A few women leaders at the grassroots level have emerged from the political mobilization and participation in NGO movements. Among the entire contextual dimensions, the economic context has been the strongest regarding the emergence of women leadership in Bangladesh. Due to NGO intervention in the remotest rural areas, women have had a chance to develop their economic, social, educational, and mental strength through becoming involved in various income generating activities (IGAs) and skill training opportunities that have accelerated the process of grassroots-level women's leadership. In ultimate analysis in addition to the socio-cultural, economic, and political contexts, legal measures, and government affirmative action and WID policy have helped immensely regarding the emergence of leadership on the part of women in Bangladesh.

CHAPTER 4

METHODOLOGY OF THE STUDY: THE WHOLE RESEARCH PROCESS

4.1 Introduction

This chapter is the embodiment of the whole research process. Here the research design, philosophical underpinnings, research methods, the selection of the settings, the selection of the research participants, preparation of textual description, triangulation and ethics in qualitative research are portrayed. In line with the research questions and objectives, suitable qualitative methods are delineated with the rationale. A detailed description for choosing the research settings and appropriate selection of the research participants are described. The process of triangulation and a summary of the chapter are also added.

4.1.1 Research Design

In simple words, the research design is the total plan for carrying out an investigation. However, research methods, methodology, research type, and philosophical perspectives are deemed synonymous with the research design. A full-fledged research design shows the step-by-step sequence or arrangements of actions and strategies in carrying out an investigation essential to obtaining objectives, and reliable and valid information. The “research design refers to the entire process of research from conceptualizing a problem to writing research questions, and on to data collection, analysis, interpretation and report writing” (Bogdan and Taylor, 1975). Yin (2009, p. 29) states that “The design is the logical sequence that connects the empirical data to a study’s initial research questions and, ultimately, to its conclusions.” The completed design also indicates how the resultant objective information is to be used to determine conclusions about the accuracy of a hypothesis, a theory, or the correct answer to a question (Dillman, 2000; Eisner and Peshkin, 1990; Leedy and Ormrod, 2001; Miller and Salkind, 2002). A good design is one in which the components work harmoniously together, and promotes efficient and

successful functioning; a flawed design leads to poor operation or failure (Maxwell, 2013, p. 2). Yin (1994, p. 19) stated that “every type of empirical research has an implicit, if not explicit, research design because a design always exist, it is important to make it explicit, to get it out in the open where its strengths, limitations, and consequences can be clearly understood.” Likewise, this study has an explicit research design. This study is primarily based on the qualitative research approach. The basic reason for choosing such a method will be explained in detail in the following sections.

4.1.2 Selection of a Doable Qualitative Research Method

At the proposal writing stage, the mixed method approach was considered for this study but later having little grasp of qualitative methods and approaches, the design was changed to adopt the qualitative research methods, as “qualitative enquiry represents a legitimate mode of social and human science exploration, without apology or comparisons to quantitative research” (Creswell, 2013, p. 6). Creswell (2013, p. 44) defines qualitative research as that:

“That begins with assumptions and the use of interpretive/theoretical frameworks that inform the study of research problems addressing the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social and human problem. To study social and human problem, qualitative researchers use an emerging qualitative approach to inquiry, the collection of data in a natural setting sensitive to the people and places under study, and data analysis that is both inductive and deductive and establishes patterns or themes. The final written report or presentation includes the voices of participants, the reflexivity of the researcher, a complex description and interpretation of the problem, and its contribution to the literature or call for a change.”

According to Boeije (2010, p. 11), “The main purpose of qualitative research is to describe and understand social phenomena in terms of the meaning people bring to them. The research questions are studied through flexible methods enabling contact with the people involved to an extent that is necessary to grasp what is going on in the field. The methods produce rich, descriptive data that need to be interpreted through

the identification and coding of themes and categories leading to findings that can contribute to theoretical knowledge and practical life.” It was deemed that by adopting qualitative research methods, lived and rich experiences, multiple realities, diverse dimensions and dynamics, and challenges towards participation of women leaders could be explored, which have not been studied to any great extent before. The adoption of qualitative methods facilitated the exploration and analysis of women’s own experiences, understandings and commonalities of their lives (Clisby, Holdsworth, Fairbank & Miles, 2007, p. 8). The principal rationale of choosing a qualitative method is that the basic feature of qualitative data lies with their “richness and holism,” with strong potential for revealing complexity; such data provide “thick descriptions” (Geertz, 1973) that “are vivid, are nested in a real context, and have a ring of truth that has a strong impact on the readers”. For better understanding, an interpretive approach was adopted, which aimed to study social reality in natural settings and attempted to make sense of phenomena from the perspectives of research participants (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000, p. 3). The researcher took the role of a “complete participant” (Bulmer, 1982, p. 251) while data were collected from the UP in Bangladesh.

4.1.3 Philosophical Assumptions and Interpretative Framework of the Study

The research process is based on two philosophical streams, either inductive or deductive. A key technique used in inductive reasoning includes grounded theory and thematic analysis. In this research, by categorizing the field data into different thematic arrangements the corpus of data was analyzed. In this study the inductive method of enquiry was opted.

In qualitative research it is necessary to clarify one’s position regarding the philosophical assumption behind the study. In the social sciences, the issues under investigation involve unpredictable human nature, and interpretation of information plays a vital role in drawing conclusions about reality and truth (Corley & Gioia, 2011; Mingers, 2008). In the realm of qualitative research there are three major paradigms, positivism (or functionalism), constructivism (or interpretivism), and critical realism, which dominate the social sciences. The categorization of one’s work

in one of these paradigms requires answering four questions about fundamental philosophical issues. These questions are related to the epistemological, ontological, methodological and axiological positions of the researcher (Kuhn, 1970; Guba, 1990; Pfeffer, 1993; Cresswell, 2013). According to Lindgren & Packendorff (2009, p. 40), constructivism can be seen “as a source of challenges to traditional perspectives, theories and empirical work.” However, the interaction, which takes place between the researchers and their objects under investigation in a constructivist study, has been an issue of debate among scholars (Guba, 1990). Adopting a positivist or critical point of view enables researchers to justify their work through validity tests while being a constructivist researcher is often criticized for the lack of rigorous practices in data analysis (Corley & Gioia, 2011; Shah & Corley, 2006). Nevertheless, given the aim and objectives of this study, the constructivist or interpretative approach seemed to be the most suitable. Not only is pure objectivity not easily applicable when human nature is under investigation, but also the influence of the social researcher on his/her own work is inevitable (Lindgren & Packendorff, 2009). Further, the social sciences require a more flexible way of conducting research than the “hard” disciplines (e.g. math or biology) (Meckler & Baillie, 2003). Here lies the basic argument for using an interpretative analytical framework. In this research an interpretative or (social) constructivism framework is employed to analyze the field data.

4.1.4 Research Methods Adopted in the Study

To address the research questions and objectives properly, several qualitative research methods were adopted in this study. To uncover the perceptions, dynamics, challenges of participation of the women leaders (WLs), to explore coping strategies adopted by the WLs, and to address how WLs are promoting governance in the UP, a phenomenological method was used as it describes “the common meaning of several individuals or their lived experiences viewing data thematically to extract the essence and essentials of the participants’ meaning” (Miles, Huberman & Saldana, 2014, p. 8). Following prolonged interviews, data were analyzed to illustrate how the participants understood and reflected upon their experience regarding their participation in the UP.

In order to achieve in-depth knowledge about the leadership process of the WLs in the UP, 10 in-depth case studies, covering 5 women chairpersons and 5

women members, were done in the major socio-cultural zones¹⁶ in Bangladesh (Appendix-1). For doing the case studies, data were collected using a short checklist (Appendix-2) comprising demographic, socio-economic background, socio-political network, and challenges encountered by the WLs towards participation. To verify the data obtained from the interview with the WLs, 3 FGDs and 2 PRAs were conducted in 3 and 2 UPs respectively comprising different sections of villagers (Appendix-3). The researcher's observation and content analysis method were also incorporated in order to analyze the data.

4.1.5 Selection of the Settings

In qualitative research, the most significant factor lies with the vivid and candid picture of the real life situation of the participants. The total number of women members in the Union Parishad is 13,506 and they are geographically located all over Bangladesh. To get a real picture of the lived experience from the field, women leaders were selected from 27 UPs from 5 divisions in Bangladesh. In fact, considering time and resource constraints, efforts were taken to cover the UPs from all major socio-cultural zones of Bangladesh. Amidst hostile political unrest, the number of UPs was covered which was deemed sufficient for achieving the “whole picture” regarding women's participation in the UP.

4.1.6 Selection of Research Participants

In qualitative research, the selection of the sample does not matter much; rather collecting data from the real world is much more important. In qualitative methods, even the term sampling is not used. In qualitative research, the typical way of selecting settings and individuals is neither with probability sampling nor convenience sampling. It falls into a third category, which Light, Singer & Willet (1990, p. 53) calls “purposeful selection” or “purposive sampling”(Plays, 2008). Patton (1990, pp. 169-186), Miles and Huberman (1994, pp. 27-29) described a large number of types of sampling that can be employed in qualitative research, almost all

¹⁶There are 7 divisions and 64 districts in Bangladesh. The sampled UPs were selected from 5 divisions and 7 districts of Bangladesh, i.e. Chittagong, Comilla, Faridpur, Sylhet, Barisal, Bogra and Gaibandha districts.

of which are forms of purposeful selection. The size of the sample is of secondary importance to the quality of data, as “qualitative research is concerned with smaller numbers of cases with more intensive analysis” (Davidson & Layder, 1994, p. 173).

Keeping all of these points in mind to tap the multiple realities from the field, the research participants were chosen based on purposeful selection and easy access from different socio-cultural zones of Bangladesh. As this research was mainly concerned with women members, therefore mainly data were collected from them. However at a certain stage of the data collection, it was learnt that there were 24 women Chairpersons¹⁷ in the UP. Then it was further decided to collect data from them also because the central focus of the study was women’s participation in the UP.

In summary, for the case study and phenomenological analysis data were collected from 19 UPs from 5 major socio-cultural zones of Bangladesh (Appendix-4). As soon as the same themes began repeating, the data collection was stopped. To collect data about the socio-economic characteristics, the political network, and the linkage of WLs and their participation in different areas in the UP, 2 data collectors¹⁸ were employed that collected data from 73 women members and 6 women Chairperson¹⁹ from 27 UPs (Appendix-5), which were used in the analysis of socio-economic and political profiles of the WLs in the UP. For both women Chairpersons and members more or less 100 hours time was spent in interviewing them.

To involve women members in a healthy, free, fair, and uninterrupted discussion, the WLs were interviewed separately based on the observed rationale in the presence of male members; the WLs preferred either keeping silent or the male members created noise that led to total indiscipline and disarray in the entire discussion. Therefore, in the case of the Amratoli, Wahedpur and South Durgapur UPs, joint discussion comprising male and female members was carried out. Based on a bizarre experience, women members of those 3 Ups were contacted separately through cell phones. Apart from that, personal visits to 5 projects implemented by

¹⁷Initially this was not in the author’s plan. I prepared the entire data collection plan with only women members but as soon as I come to know it, I included women Chairpersons in my study.

¹⁸I employed 2 data collectors from the research division of the Bangladesh Academy for Rural Development (BARD) where I have been working since 1996.

¹⁹Popularly the top leadership position in the UP is called the Chairman from historical time because of the fact that this position is meant for men.

women members in 2 villages were added. In order to tap multiple perspectives and a better understanding of the research issues, and to have a grasp of the women members' performance, experience, and social acceptance in the rural areas regarding the themes already developed during data collection, it was deemed worthy to interview male Chairmen, male members, and the secretary of the UP. Apart from that, interviews with other participants, namely Upazila Nirbahi Officer (UNO), Upazila Tag Officer²⁰, Upazila Social Welfare Officer, Upazila Engineer, Upazila Woman Vice Chairman, general villagers and personnel from Cooperative Organizations, Union Health Complex and Educational Institutes were performed.

4.1.7 Preparation of the Textual Description and Managing Reflexivity

According to (Cresswell, 2013, p. 215) “the writing of a research is a reflection of the interpretation based on the cultural, social, gender, class and personal politics that the author brings to it.” Therefore, in qualitative research the writing or narrative or textual presentation of a qualitative text cannot be separated from the author because it significantly matters how it is received by the readers, and how it impacts the participants and sites under study. In fact, Gilgum (2005) opines that “writings are co-constructions, representations of interactive processes between researchers and the researched.” Hammersley & Atkinson (1995) also views that “qualitative researchers need to “position” themselves in their writings. One characteristic of good qualitative research is that the researcher or the inquirer makes his or her “position” explicit.” In qualitative research textual narratives can be expressed both in first person and third person. In this study textual narratives will be expressed in the third person.

4.1.8 Unit of Analysis

According to Teddlie and Tashakkori (2009, p. 347), “unit of analysis” refers to the individual case (or group of cases) that the researcher wants to express something about when the study is completed and is, therefore, the focus of all data

²⁰Tag Officer is an officer that is assigned by the UNO to look into the project performance of the UP when the project is undertaken from the budget approved by the Upazila administration.

collection efforts. Babbie (2010) refers to “unit of analysis as what or whom being studied. In social science research, the most typical units of analysis are individual people. The unit of analysis in a study is usually also the unit of observation. In fact, the units of analysis vary from research to research. It can be individuals, society, group, organization, political parties, institutions, social interactions, social artifacts, etc.” In this study, the unit of analysis is women members or leaders of the grassroots-based rural local government *i.e.* the Union Parishad of Bangladesh.

4.1.9 Data Analysis Methods

The basic aim in analyzing data is to bring meanings and insights to the words and acts of research participants. The data analysis is the embodiment of several consequential but interrelated procedures such as organizing data, generating categories, coding, collating codes into potential themes, defining and refining themes, and finally presenting the overall story the different themes reveal (Marshall and Rossman, 1999, p. 152). In this study the data analysis was basically based on the research questions and research objectives. The qualitative analytic method identifies and analyses themes and puts them together to form a comprehensive picture of the collective experiences of research participants (Braun and Clarke, 2006, p. 79). In fact qualitative research aims to describe and explain phenomena in various thematic arrangements, so attempts were taken to organize the data into different themes and also to look for general patterns in analyzing the dynamics and challenges of the participation experienced by the WLs and uncovering the coping mechanism to adjust with the prevailing situation in the UP. Here the researcher tried to find the “themes” that cut across the cases.

During the data collection stage, important notes were kept in a diary. In order to retrieve the full texts as opined by the participants, a voice recorder was used to record the participants’ reply to the research questions. After completing the data collection, a detailed transcription was prepared from the voice recording, which constituted the whole corpus of the data in the study. As all of the discussions were in Bengali, the data were transformed into English transcription. From the English transcription “thick” descriptions were prepared and those were then reorganized into thematic arrangements or pattern clarification. In addition some unorganized

discussions also took place during the data collection period, which was transcribed into detailed notes to identify the regular recurring experiences and feelings of the research participants. The thematic analysis focuses on identifiable themes (Aronson, 1994, p. 5), so various patterns of experiences were first identified and all similar patterns were grouped together and thus the textual description was prepared for this study. In framing themes importance was placed on the prevalence of the patterns of experience, but in some cases the importance was given to the overall research question.

4.1.10 Achieving Triangulation and Credibility in the Research

The term triangulation is used to ensure validity of the research findings in social research and equally applicable for both qualitative and quantitative research. In the social sciences, “it refers to the combination of two or more theories, data sources, methods or investigators in one study of a single phenomenon to converge on a single construct, and can be employed in both quantitative (validation) and qualitative (inquiry) studies.” (Yeasmin and Rahman, 2012, p. 156). According to Miles & Huberman (1994) “triangulation in social science research refers to a process by which a researcher wants to verify a finding by showing that independent measures of it agree with or, at least, do not contradict it.” However, in practice, “qualitative studies in social sciences often involve picking triangulation sources that have different strengths, foci, and so forth, so that they can complement each other” (Beijaard, 1990; Buitink, 1998).

In quantitative research methods, there are some established tools for ensuring the validity of the findings; however, in qualitative research methods, in answering the questions of validity of the findings, different authors used many different terms. For, example to establish trustworthiness of a study, especially if it is qualitative, Lincoln and Guba (1985, p. 300) used terms such as credibility, authenticity, transferability, dependability and conformability.

However, unlike the deductive approach, in the inductive approach or qualitative research methods, the validity of the research findings lies with the researcher himself or herself, as in conducting qualitative study the researchers need to stay with the research participants for a prolonged time so the validity lies with it

because “qualitative researchers strive for understanding that deep structure of knowledge that comes from visiting personally with participants, spending extensive time in the field, and probing to obtain detailed meanings” (Cresswell, 2013, p. 243). Social realities are inherently complex to be grasped in their entirety with one method of investigation. They are so complex that it is impossible to capture them with a single method of data collection or technique. All of the existing tools of social research method have advantages and disadvantages. In other words, each method contains strength and weakness; no single one can provide all perspectives. Therefore, it is useful to triangulate in order to overcome the weaknesses of other methods so as to have a holistic view of social realities.

In triangulation researchers make use of multiple and different methods, investigators, and theories to provide corroborating evidence (Ely, Anzul, Friedman, Garner, & Steinmetz, 1991; Erlandson, Harris, Skipper, & Allen, 1993; Glesne & Peshkin, 1992; Lincoln and Guba, 1985; Merriam, 1988; Miles, & Huberman, 1994; Patton, 1980, 1990). Repeat distinguished “five kinds of triangulation in qualitative research: 1) triangulation by data source (data collected from different persons, or at different times, or from different places); 2) triangulation by method (observation, interviews, documents, etc.); 3) triangulation by researcher (comparable to inter-rater reliability in quantitative methods); 4) triangulation by theory (using different theories, for example, to explain results); and 5) triangulation by data type (e.g., combining quantitative and qualitative data).”

The type of triangulation chosen depends on the purpose of the study. Of course, more than one type of triangulation can be used in the same study. In this study, triangulation was maintained by triangulation of method and triangulation by data sources, as the data were collected using six different methods and from different sources. Triangulation by method is more commonly known as methodological or multi-method triangulation, however methodological triangulation is also used to refer to the combination of qualitative and quantitative data (Erzberger, & Prein, 1997). In this study limited scale data triangulation was employed in the case of the socio-economic profile of women leaders in the study.

4.1.11 Ethical Considerations in Social Research

Ethical issues are crucial in social research. According to Biber (2005) “social science investigates complex issues which involve cultural, legal, economic, and political phenomena. This complexity means that social science research must concern itself with “moral integrity” to ensure that research process and findings are “trustworthy” and valid.” For social science research, “the ethical norms of voluntary participation and no harm to participants have become formalized in the concept of informed consent” (Babbie, 2010, p. 66). According to Kidder (1981, p. 404), in order to maintain proper ethical manners in the domain of social science research, a researcher should be guided by the rules such as: 1) conveying to the participants the investigator’s sense of the potential value of research; 2) giving the participants an appreciation of the contributions they have made to the research; 3) providing the participants with an educational experience that includes an understanding of behavioral sciences research as used in the study in which they have taken part; 4) developing in the participants an understanding of the necessity of employing questionable practices to obtain meaningful answers to the research questions asked in the study; 5) immunizing the participants against the tendency for negative impression of self that are developed in the experiment to preserve even after attempts have been made to correct them; 6) convincing the participants of the investigator’s regrets over the need to employ questionable practices and concern over the participants feelings about having subjected to these practices; and 7) giving participants a perspective on their experiences that minimizes any feelings that they might have been manipulated, made fools of, shown to be gullible. All researchers need to take ethical issues on board and minimally, according to Kirsch (1999, cited in Plummer, 2001, pp. 226-227) must usually: 1) obtain informed consent from participants on an ongoing basis; 2) make sure that participation is entirely voluntary; 3) inform participants of any risks involved in the research; 4) protect the privacy and confidentiality of all participants; and 5) ensure that participation does not cause any harm to the participants.

During the data collection stage every effort was made to maintain proper ethical consideration as stated above. Before going to the field the participants were informed about the research purpose, asked about their availability and informed of

the possible time to be spent with them. As the principal participants of this study were women, due sanctity and proper demeanor were maintained with them in order to secure their confidence and trustworthiness, aimed at gaining spontaneity and freeness or openness to discuss the research issues. When the women were found to be unwilling to discuss certain issues, they were not insisted to do so; rather the issue was avoided. Thus efforts were employed to maintain the informed consent of the participants, their availability and time, and the confidentiality of the responses giving highest priority in this research. Proper research ethics were also maintained in using quotations, notes, cases, and references. Finally, ethical standards were emphasized in the collection of the data, and their interpretations and analysis. However, despite the author's best endeavor and striving, in a few cases the respondents' voluntary participation could not be maintained and therefore it was quite difficult to stay with the ethical issues at all stages of the research process for practical reasons. Christians (2000, p. 140) rightfully argues that the accuracy of data is also a question of ethics in social research. As a researcher, a careful attempt and proper attention were taken to ensure the accuracy of the data, since fabrications, omissions, subtractions, and contrivances are unethical.

4.1.12 Summary

In line with the research questions and objectives, the entire research design was organized in a systematic way so that it was well suited to qualitative research methodology. In order to obtain different perspectives and realities regarding the perceptions, experiences, dynamics, and challenges of the participation of the WLs in the UP, the researcher needed to spend pronged hours (about 100 hours) with the participants. To fructify the research questions and objectives, suitable methods and techniques were employed, which are summarized below in the following matrix:

Table 4.1: The Matrix of the Research Methods Followed in the Study

Research Questions	Data collection methods	Research methods
i) Do women leaders help promote governance in the UP of Bangladesh? If so, how?	• Interview	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Phenomenology • Observation • FGDs • PRA
ii) How have women leaders perceived and defined their roles and coped with the realities in the UP?	• Interview	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Phenomenology • Observation
Research Objectives	Data collection methods	Research methods
i. To unravel the leadership process of the women leaders in the UP;	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Short checklist • Interview 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Case Study
ii. To uncover the perceptions, dynamics, realities, and challenges of the participation of women leaders in the UP of Bangladesh;	• Interview	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Phenomenology • Observation
iii. To explore the coping strategies of women leaders in the UP.	• Interview	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Phenomenology • Case Study

CHAPTER 5

WOMEN LEADERS IN THE UNION PARISHAD IN BANGLADESH: A STUDY OF THEIR CHALLENGES, COPING STRATEGIES, AND GOVERNANCE

5.1 Introduction

In this chapter, through a few cases of women UP Chairpersons and UP reserved members, their socio-cultural background and leadership process have been described, interpreted, and analyzed. Based on deep attentiveness to and empathetic understanding of their life experiences, these cases were prepared. In order to achieve an in-depth analysis of the process of women's leadership these case studies were prepared covering a wide range of the elements comprising their background: personal, demographic, family, economic, social, political backgrounds, family network, their experiences, coping strategies and challenges of the women leaders in the Union Parishad, etc. These cases revealed many crucial factors relating to women's leadership in the UP in Bangladesh.

5.1.1 The Case of Mst. Razia Begum (Mina)*, Chairperson, Bethkapa UP

5.1.1.1 Socio-economic and Family Profile

Mosammat Razia Begum (Mina), 48, after contesting Chairman position 3 times is now heading Bethkapa Union of Palashbari Upazila in the Gaibandha district in Bangladesh as an elected Chairperson. In fact, being requested and motivated by her husband, Dr. A. K. M. Mahbubur Rahman, Scientific Officer, Bangladesh Agricultural Research Institute (BARI), she was elected UP Chairpersons through the direct adult franchise of the Union. As a widow she is now running her

*The first time the interview was done on 7 November, 2013 at around 11:30 am by the researcher himself and for further clarification a second interview was done on 21 March at 11:10 am and 8:45 pm.

small but single family²¹ with a monthly income of about 40,000 taka²² (515 US\$). Her family is composed of 2 sons and the eldest one has recently passed the MBBS (Bachelor of Medicine, Bachelor of Surgery) at Dhaka Medical College and is now doing an internship, and the youngest one is a BBA (Bachelor of Business Administration) student at Dhaka University. Mina hails from Khamar Norail village and obtained a BA (Bachelor of Arts) degree, and owns some property from her husband and parents. Most of her monthly income comes from agricultural land of about 2.5 acres. She also receives a pension of her husband on a regular (monthly) basis. Razia comes of a good family. Her father, an SSC (Secondary School Certificate) passed served in a public office has already passed away. Her mother, who also obtained an education up to the SSC level, is a widow and used to work in a private organization; she is now passing her retired life. Razia has 6 brothers and 5 sisters. She has 3 uncles; among them one has his own business whereas others are engaged in agriculture. Rezia has two maternal uncles; both of them were service holders.

5.1.1.2 Political Profile

Analyzing the socio-cultural profile of Rezia Begum, it was learnt that nobody in her family acted as leaders in the Union Parishad, Upazila or Zilla Parishad, or the National Parliament, but a few of her ancestors played roles in the Sardary/Matbori²³ system in village. To a question regarding her involvement in any socio-cultural organization before coming to this elected position, she replied that she was involved with the Grameen Bank²⁴. She has also been personally involved with

²¹Single family refers to a single unit family of husband, wife and their children. In general husband acts as the family head in the single family concept. With the gradual development of the society the tradition of extended or joint family is changing whereas single unit family is getting preference in the rural society like the urban society.

²²1 US\$=77.78 taka as of 22 March 2014. The figure is calculated more or less in full digit deducting the fraction amount.

²³Sardar and Matbor refer to the local leader that performs a leadership role in local dispute resolutions in the community through an informal and unstructured mechanism. The act of providing service from the sardar or matbor may be regarded as sardari or matbori. Both terms are interchangeably used in Bangla and English.

²⁴Grameen Bank is a specialized financial institution in Bangladesh. The Grameen Bank is a Nobel Peace Prize-winning microfinance organization and community development bank founded in Bangladesh. It has developed a group-based micro credit approach which is applied to use peer-pressure within a group to ensure the borrowers follow through and conduct their financial affairs with discipline, ensuring repayment and allowing the borrowers to develop good credit standing. More than 99% of its borrowers are women and through micro-credit program Grameen Bank helps empowering the poor women in rural Bangladesh.

the Chatra League, the students' wing of one of the major political parties in Bangladesh named Bangladesh Awami League (BAL)²⁵ since her student life. She has now changed her political support from the BAL to Jatiyo Party (JP)²⁶. However, it was found that nobody in her family was or is now directly involved with any political party in Bangladesh; and before coming to the UP, she was never involved with the UP, meaning that she has been elected to this office for the first time in her life. Interviewing her, it was learned that she maintains good communication with the MP (Member of Parliament) of her concerned constituency, a person that was a teacher of her late husband.

She and her husband hailed from the same Union. She used to study in a high school and government college in Palashbari Upazila. During her college life she was involved in student politics in the Bangladesh Chatra League and her husband was involved in the same students' political organization that ultimately led them to get married. Her husband had a cherished desire to become an MP as a candidate from the BAL. Her husband thought that before that, if his wife was elected on the UP, it could help him win in the MP election. Being motivated by the thinking and inspiration from her husband, Rezia Begum quit her permanent position at the Grameen Bank where she had worked for the previous 13 years. While she decided to contest in the UP election she was promoted to Manager in the Grameen Bank. She stated the following:

“I was involved in student politics when I was reading in school. After that I get admitted in Gaibandha Government College from where I passed my BA (Bachelor of Arts). Here during my college life I get involved with students politics with the Bangladesh Student League. My coming to UP was fully backed and supported by my husband.”

²⁵BAL means the Bangladesh Awami League, which is one of the major political parties in Bangladesh. This party played a crucial role in the liberation of Bangladesh. BAL is a right-oriented, progressive and liberal democratic political party in Bangladesh. Currently based on the seats in the parliament, it is the number one political party in Bangladesh now.

²⁶JP stands for Jatio Party. Jatio is a Bangla word meaning national. JP is the third biggest political party in Bangladesh. President Lt. General Hussain Muhammad Ershad was the founder of this political party.

She also added that:

“One day my husband told me that as you were involved in politics from your childhood so I (husband) wished that you contested the UP election next year. And my husband told me that after I was elected Chairman in the UP, he (my husband) would like to contest in the MP election. And this was how I entered in to the public political sphere. In fact, we planned this way for seeking nomination of MP election of my husband next year but unfortunately after I was elected Chairman my husband suddenly passed away from the world in December 2012.”

At the age of 21, she was married to her husband, an agricultural scientist in BARI. She was in fact the second wife of her husband. Mina has a good relationship with her husband's previous wife and family. Her husband's first wife had one son and one daughter, whom Mina loved equally as her own children. The daughter of her husband's first wife was married to an agricultural scientist and the son of her husband's first wife is currently pursuing higher study in Sweden. Being her husband's second wife, her husband loved her very much. As a government official Mina's husband was a very honest officer and he maintained a good linkage and network with the socio-political elites at the district and sub-district (Upazila) level as well with a view to becoming future MP from that constituency. Due to her wide network of political elites, she understood rightly the activities of the then UP Chairman, who was out and out a bad and corrupt man.

5.1.1.3 Contesting the UP Election

Mina's husband was a popular personality in his village as he used to help many poor people as and when they asked or approached him for help. In a bid to oust that corrupt UP Chairman, he requested her wife to contest the UP election and accordingly Mina contested as Chairperson in the UP election in 1997 for the first time but unfortunately she could not win. Having been defeated in the election Mina and her husband were really upset but they and their supporters as well did not lose hope to fight against that corrupt Chairman. Garnering more support from her

husband along with the constituents, Mina was mentally reinforced to contest the UP election again in 2003 but all was in vain. Judging from the ground reality it was thought that Mina had enormous political support, but being defeated for two consecutive terms in the UP election their supporters started thinking over the matter seriously. After a detailed, thorough, and realistic investigation and sagacious analysis, ultimately they altogether were able to detect and unearth the pivotal factor of their defeat in the last two elections in the UP. The main reason behind their defeat or losing in the UP election was vote rigging. Discussing with many elites and political actors of the locality, they were able to uncover the fact behind Mina's defeat. They discovered that both the time of the counting of the votes were done at night, that helped them to think that the corrupt Chairman, behind the scene, might bag huge votes manipulating all the intermediaries in favour of him and was able to defeat Mina through such heinous but common political practices. Based on their pragmatic judgments, during the third time Mina and her party supporter demanded counting the votes in broad daylight so that they could stop the vote rigging that occurred in the last previous two terms. Accordingly, in line with their demand, as soon as the voting time finished all of the election officials started counting the votes and finished counting by 6:30 pm which, in turn, ultimately led Mina to achieve a landslide victory, which was much desired, not only by most of her supporters but also by her husband and above all Mina.

After winning the election she gradually came to know that most of the files and registers during the tenure of the former Chairman were removed or kept clandestine so that Mina could not take any action against those wrongdoers and culprits. Citing that corrupt Chairman's maladministration and misappropriation case recently, one day in a meeting at the Gaibandha District, the present deputy commissioner alluded that if Mina had not been elected in the 2011 UP election, most of the former Chairman and his miscreant associates could be arrested due to the massive misdeeds they committed during their tenure.

5.1.1.4 Challenges Faced

During my first interview she informed me that she did not face many challenges in the UP but during my second interview Mina disclosed that she had to face some challenges from the male members while she assigned projects to the

female members. Sometimes the male members expressed their dissatisfaction, wrath and anger to her as instead of assigning projects to the male members she distributed them to the female members based on fair judgment. Some members even threatened her quite often, saying that they would file a fake case against her. However, Mina, being an honest, skilled and articulate woman, was able to handle the trouble because of her past experience. In the UP there is a provision of a quorum system in the process of decision-making and according to that provision 7 votes from UP members out of 13 votes are needed to pass any resolution or decision. While Mina decided a date for the meeting, she came to the meeting with due preparation so that she could manage the decisions following the democratic principles of governance. While sharing her experience in the UP she explained that sometimes the male members used to protest in groups when some projects were given to the female members. She nevertheless tried to distribute the projects as per the legal provision. Being the chief executive she still faced serious male domination in the Parishad.

In reply to a request to share her experience as a woman Chairperson and what the challenges were that she faced in the UP, she replied that “we are living in a highly patriarchal society and everywhere male domination was there and certainly there was no way to avoid that. To my experience I observed that our main problem was the Upazila²⁷ administration and again our number one obstacle was Upazila”.

She opined the following:

“We were in a family composed of 12 members and after that we have had the general public with us. If we are to share anything we had to share it with Upazila. When any allocation came to Union Parishad, it first came at Upazila and when Upazila took the share from our allocation, and then our

²⁷President Lt. General Hussain Muhammad Ershad introduced the Upazila system, abolishing the Sub-Division system during 1982-4. Before that, it was known as Thana (Police Station). Afterwards, different governments used both terms (Upazila/Thana) interchangeably according to their preferences. At least 22 nation building departments (NBDs) are working at the Upazila level. Upazila is an administrative unit at the sub-district level in Bangladesh. The immediately-passed ruling party (2009-2014) formed an elected local government body at the Upazila level in 2009.

share automatically reduced. She further alluded that in the last year (2013) government allocated 12 tons rice in favour of food for works but UNO advised us that you would have to take only 10 tons and the rest 2 tons you have to give it to the Upazila. Again UNO²⁸ conditioned that UP could not do any project with just one ton but UP need to make project with at least 2 tons, which means I could give work to only 5 members.”

Mina further elaborates that:

“In the case of the VGF²⁹, the Upazila administration sanctioned only 2,200 cards for this Union but my area is a famine prone area and the number of hard hit poor was 14,000, so you understand that how we could manage distribution of our VGF cards to the villagers. For distributing these VGF, we faced a huge problem. And another story was about 40 days’ work; the government allocated fund for 160 villagers but Upazila gave me only 115 and the rest was forcibly taken by the Upazila. This was how the Upazila created a problem for the UP.”

The present author told her that she was quite aware that in Bangladesh 50% of the total population belonged to women and considering their backwardness the government brought the women members here for helping with the development of the women and the present author asked her if she would please tell him how the women were doing in the sphere of the Union Parishad; if the women could perform their duties in the UP properly or what the major problems were that they needed to face in Union Parishad. She replied as follows:

²⁸UNO refers to Upazila Nirbahi Officer, meaning the Executive Head of the Upazila, who is in charge of helping integration and coordination, all of the activities at this important administrative unit of Bangladesh.

²⁹VGF is an acronym for Vulnerable Group Feeding. The VGF program is one of the food-based social safety net programs in Bangladesh. It was created in the 1970s by the World Food Program (WFP) for emergency aid caused by disaster. Now the government provides food subsidy for the poorest under this program. The targets of the program are: i) daily labourers whose income is low or irregular; ii) the landless or those that have less than 0.15 acres of land; iii) persons with disabilities or their wives; iv) poor women/men affected by natural disaster.

“There were off course problems in Union Parishad and there were also solution of those problems. Not only for the reserved women members of the UP but everywhere such as government, semi-government, NGOs and other places where women were working, nationally or officially, government put emphasis for giving special importance for the women folk everywhere in Bangladesh but in my opinion everywhere I could see that they were more or less neglected and specifically in my Union I could not give facilities to the women 100% but I am trying to give them their due rights but you know I am facing serious challenges for that. I would like to provide equal share for the male and female members, I know that all the male members would start movement against me, would starting writing against me in media and this is fact you know that I faced all these things many many times. Now I try to convince the male members and tell them that women members should be given their due rights and I was at last become successful to convince the male members. You know when I gave big projects to the female members, male members jointly made a complaint against me to UNO, ADC³⁰, DC³¹. Now I consulted with the male members when I provide any project to the female members.”

5.1.1.5 Training and Knowledge in the UP

Talking to her personally it was known that she has a good grasp of the legal aspects, rules, regulation, acts, and implementation procedures of Union Parishad. In the meantime after coming to take the helm of this UP, she got an opportunity to visit the Gram Panchayats system in Bangalore and the Kerala States of India in 2012. Usurping the office of Chairperson she received some training relating to the functions of the Union Parishad. She informed that she attended one

³⁰ADC is an abbreviation for Additional Deputy Commissioner at the District level, who assists the Deputy Commissioner in the work at the district level.

³¹ DC refers to the Deputy Commissioner and DC is the administrative head at the district level. The activities of the nation building departments are coordinated by the DC. It is the third tire of the local government unit in Bangladesh although there is no representative local government body at this stage.

training course on UP affairs in the Sirajgong district in 2012 and also attended a training course on the functioning of the Local Government Support Program (LGSP)³² recently in 2013. She thought that women members should be given more training so that they can implement projects smoothly. She hopes that if people want, she would love to contest again for the UP next time.

5.1.1.6 Role and Performance in the UP

As the chief executive of the Union Parishad, she is engaged in budgeting, resource management, project formulation, project implementation, UP meetings, Upazila development and coordination meetings (UDCM), monitoring of projects, consultation with local people, negotiations with UNO, negotiations with NGOs, protocol functions, signing resolutions of meetings and signing MOUs and making all sorts of decisions relating to the UP. According to Razia Begum, “It seems to me that everybody is helpful but as a unit of local government UP needs more budgets to carry out local development activities.” As the Chairperson of the UP she is the Chairperson of the Maintenance of Law and Order Committee. She is also involved in the Education, Health and Family Planning Committee; and the Settlement of Family Dispute, Women’s Development and Children Welfare Committee; and the Culture and Sports Committee as a member.

5.1.1.7 Achievement and Crowning Success

The present author asked her if she would please tell us that how people benefitted by the involvement of women members in the UP? The Chairman replied that:

“The women members were working in 3 wards and that their jurisdiction of working was 3 times higher than that of the male

³² LGSP is an acronym for Local Governance Support Project (LGSP). It is a World Bank-supported project to strengthen the Union Parishads (UP) of Bangladesh. Under this project performance-based financial support (grants) is directly given to the UP. Like government system, in the LGSP, there is a provision that thirty percent of the total projects will have to be given to women members. Moreover, according to LGSP rule, women members of the respective ward will have to play the role of the Chairperson of the Project Implementation Committee (PIC) in the LGSP-supported projects.

members. When I could not attend any salish³³ program, then I telephoned one female member to remain present over there and they are doing well there. In some villages women conduct salish themselves and doing good to the society. When they faced problem, then I went there with my secretary to look into the matter and we arranged further salish in a wider scope”.

Talking to some villagers and also with the UP secretary it was learnt that she achieved some crowning success in some areas, especially setting up a tube well for ensuring safe drinking water for the poor villagers. Before Mina's coming to the UP, many villagers used open toilets and also practiced open defecation, but after she staged a special movement for destroying/breaking those unhygienic bamboo-made open toilets in her territory Mina achieved remarkable success in sanitation coverage because she provided support from her UP to set up low cost water-sealed toilets. Due to her dynamic leadership she obtained more than 95% sanitation coverage in her UP. In her Union the inundation of feeder roads was another major problem. It was learnt that due to the submerging of rural roads under water the villagers could not move from their home to other places during the rainy season. To solve this long-standing water-logging problem she constructed a drainage system in her Union and also upgraded most of the important roads in her Union. She disclosed that some UP Chairmen in some UPs did not like that the NGO should work in their UP but she requested and invited many NGOs to her UP. According to her opinion, due to scanty resource allocations from the government, she could not undertake many development projects in her UP but due to the NGOs' cooperation she was able to bring more development facilities to her UP. She opined that some of her present successes to an extent came from NGO cooperation and assistance. She was also very successful in increasing/extending the number of poor beneficiaries of various safety net programs in her UP, bargaining with the local administration.

³³Salish refers to the informal local arbitration council for the resolution of petty disputes conducted by the UP representatives.

Salient Features and Significant Factors of Mina's Case

(1) Socio-political involvement helps developing leadership: Through delving into the description of Mina's case study, it was learnt that she had been involved in student politics since her school life. This involvement in student politics might have helped her take her present political leadership position in the UP. She had been working in Grameen Bank for a long time where she had obtained the qualities of a managerial role, and she tried to overcome the interpersonal communication problems in a male-dominated society and she obtained socio-political consciousness and social mobility using her positions and in the ultimate analysis all such qualities prompted her to hold leadership positions in the UP.

(2) Family support is helpful for leadership: Although Mina did not have any political network in her family that could help her become a leader in the public domain, she received tremendous support from her husband, who gave her mental courage and enthusiasms to become the UP Chairperson.

(3) Suitable environment and training needed for better leadership: It was evidently proved that if provided a suitable and favourable atmosphere, women can do exactly what men can do. It was seen that she faced some challenges in performing her leadership role in the UP but she was able to overcome those challenges by learning all the necessary rules, regulations, and provisions of the UP ordinances using her normal learning process. Her training on UP management also helped her to combat the male domination in the UP. She might have used her knowledge and insights received from the orientation and exposure visit program in Kerala and the Bangalore local government in India.

(4) The UP structure is responsible for male domination: Being the head and chief executive of the UP, Mina faced serious problems from the male members, who challenged her leadership position and role. In fact, the structure of the UP is one of the major challenges for women leaders.

(5) Autonomy and corruption problems in the UP: Mina's case shows that without sufficient autonomy local government cannot perform better. The findings of the case study also corroborate the massive corruption in Bangladesh administration.

(6) A strong socio-economic background helps with the leadership role: Globally politics is the domain of the elites. In a mature democracy most of the world political leaders come to a leadership position following an elite formation process based on education, and the socio-economic and political process. In the case of a developing country, rather than education, politician hold position using their socio-economic and political prerogatives, which have become the usual practice in Bangladesh. The same might be the case in the grassroots-based local government in the UP. Mina's husband was an agricultural scientist in the public sector. She has a good economic base having a better income and some landed property. She possesses good social status with a good family background and structures where all her sons and daughters have obtained a higher education. For this reason, the strong socio-economic background of Mina's might have helped her to withstand the male domination in the UP.

(7) Coping strategies of women leaders (WLs): The case also revealed that through possessing some leadership qualities she had overcome the challenges of male domination in the UP. The coping strategies she followed to manage the challenges she faced by the male members were: her strong commitment to follow the legal provision, providing judgment for maintaining gender equality in the UP, being tactful to convince the male members to give sufficient arguments for women's rights in the UP, being personally honest in the governance of UP affairs, using her uncompromising attitude towards her judicious discretion, taking enough preparation before the meeting so that she could manage the quorum in the meeting. It was learnt from her case that when she started ensuring equal rights for women members in the UP, the male members were very annoyed with such a practice and they warned her that they would file fake cases against her; but as Mina was out and out honest and she knew how to tackle such problems, she overcame the male domination. Above all her previous managerial position/qualities which she obtained in her work at the Grameen Bank job also helped her to manage the problems in the UP. Her linkage with the concerned MP and previous political involvement also helped her to manage the challenges from the male members.

(8) Crowning success of the women leaders: Because of her good leadership quality she achieved success in sanitation coverage, made available safe

drinking water, increased the number of safety net benefits bargaining with the local administration, constructed a drainage system which was a much-demanded issue for the villagers, successfully managed serious male domination in her favour, and reduced the corrupt practices in the UP. In inviting the NGOs, she was also able to enhance the social facilities and services provided by them in her UP jurisdiction.

(9) Women for women: Mina's case shows that women have empathy and feelings for women. She always tried to assign project responsibilities to the female members equally and unlike other male Chairmen, she provided big projects to the women members in her UP, which in fact spurred/evoked serious dissatisfaction and anger by the male members, but she did not compromise with their undue demands. She successfully overcame the threats and challenges posed by the male members. Her education and life experience also helped her to understand the problem of male domination or patriarchal values, so she successfully withstood the challenges of the male domination imposed on her by the male members. She had sufficient confidence in the female members and that is why she involved those women members in big projects and allowed them to perform Salish and when the female members faced challenges she personally handled those cases with boldness and courage.

(10) Tenacity and perseverance of WLs: Mina's landslide victory in the third time election demands special mention here. She has had a resilient mentality, firm confidence and patience, which was reflected in the manner she accepted her two consecutive defeats in the UP election and her strategy to uncover the mystery of her defeat. We can easily understand how strongly and courageously she withstands the unhappy result of the election. After detecting the fact of vote rigging she adopted the right strategy that led her to "bag" a landslide victory in the election. From her utterance it appeared to the present author that she would contest in the election the next time also, which revealed that she has enjoyed her position and had become a successful leader in overcoming all hurdles beset by the socio-cultural structures.

5.1.2 The Case of Samsunnahar Begum*, Chairperson, Chandpur UP

5.1.2.1 Socio-economic and Family Profiles

Samsunnahar, aged 45, hailed from Dhopadanga village, and was elected Chairperson of Chnadpur UP, Boalmari Upazila, Faridpur District in 2011. Samsunnahar came from a rich family and was married to a businessman. She maintained her monthly income with an income of 1 lack³⁴ Tk. (1,286 US\$). Most of her income came from business and land. She owned landed property of 10 acres. She lives in a beautiful flat endowed with all the modern amenities and furniture. Her husband has a Honda and 2 cars in their family. She and her husband obtained an education up to the HSC (Higher Secondary Certificate Examination) and BA (Bachelor of Arts) respectively.

Her father read up to the SSC and was a businessman. Her husband is a rich businessman. Her family is composed of 9 members. She has 2 sons. She lives in a joint family³⁵ with some close relatives. Her husband is the family head. She has obtained this leadership position through his wide political network. In the course of the in-depth interview with her, it was learnt that many of her predecessors used to serve in the UP. Interestingly her husband served as Chairman in the UP for 5 consecutive terms and her father-in-law acted as Chairman in the UP for 2 terms. Moreover, one of her uncles acted as Chairman in the UP in the past. Most of the senior members/fore-fathers of her family members also acted as sarder/matbar in the informal judicial structure of the village-based community. Before coming to the UP she was also involved with an NGO related to human rights, Manabodhiker³⁶.

* This interview was carried out on 31 October, 2013.

³⁴ This is locally practiced in Bangladesh. One lack= 1,00,000 Tk.

³⁵ Joint family refers to an extended family that is composed of the members of a single family plus other relatives of husband or wife living in that family. A joint family is headed by an elderly person that may be the father, mother, brother, sister, father in law, mother in law, grandfather, grandmother of either husband or wife or any other close relatives of the husband or wife. During earlier days in the typical rural society, most of the family belongs to such extended family but nowadays the concept of joint family is undergoing change in the rural society.

³⁶ Manabodhiker is a Bangla word which means human rights.

5.1.2.2) Political profile

Samsunnahar was involved in a student political party (Chatra League) during her school life. Now her husband is also involved with the Bangladesh Awami League (BAL). She has a good linkage with the local MP.

5.1.2.3) Training

This is for the first time that she was elected Chairperson of the UP. In her 2-year tenure as a Chairperson she attended some training on human rights, child marriage, and divorce and child abuse in 2013. Other training courses she attended were training on role, responsibilities and the functions of the UP at the Upazila and District level; she was additionally trained in the areas of project planning, construction, maintenance and repair or renovation of road under the auspices of the LGSP and LGED³⁷.

5.1.2.4 Performance

As the chief executive of the Union Parishad, Samsunnahar was engaged in a wide range of activities relating to the UP. She is actively involved in preparing and coordinating the budget of the UP; preparation, formulation, implementation, and monitoring of various project undertaken under various budget schemes such as the ADP³⁸, LGSP, TR³⁹, funds received from 1% land transfer tax⁴⁰ of the Upazila, negotiation with NGOs, monitoring the performance of the

³⁷LGED= Local Government Engineering Department. The main responsibility of the LGED, the biggest civil engineering department in Bangladesh, is to construct, maintain, and develop the rural road infrastructure of the country.

³⁸ADP stands for the Annual Development Program of the Bangladesh government, which is an organized list of projects with budgetary allocation in various sectors. The ADP is prepared on the basis of the year's development budget approved by the Parliament. Financial assistance from the central government to the local government i.e. the UP, is provided through ADP allocation.

³⁹TR stands for test relief program. The Rural Infrastructural Maintenance Program, Test Relief (TR), is a food assisted development program aimed at addressing seasonal employment and thereby reducing rural poverty. Through the TR program each poor villager that has been selected by the UP is given 5 kg. rice under the food subsidy program of Bangladesh.

⁴⁰According to government rules, 1% of total land revenue taxes earned by the Upazila Administration is distributed to all Union Parishads under that Upazila. This is tied fund to the UPs through which UP representatives are required to undertake development projects in the UP as per set rules by the Upazila.

distribution of the VGD⁴¹ and VGF card, old age pension cards, ensuring birth and death registration, organizing village courts and playing a role in local dispute resolution, chairing of monthly and special meetings, various meetings organized at the Upazila and District level and has been involved in various types of decision making. Apart from that she is also involved in promoting some activities related to sports and cultural programs in educational institutes, clubs, and cultural organizations.

She is also involved in some of the Standing Committees as the Chairperson such as the Social Welfare and Disaster Management Committee and she is also involved in the Education, Health and Family Planning Committee as a member. Despite that, Samsunnaher has also acted as Chairperson of some Primary and High Schools in her UP constituency. She is also involved with two NGOs, named the human rights organization and women's welfare samittee (cooperative organization) as their chief executive.

She was extremely happy to become Chairperson but she was very unhappy that she could not construct a new UP complex due to the constant opposition from the opposition party. Now her husband is paralyzed and that has led her to take the helm of the UP; otherwise her husband could have become UP Chairman again. She thinks that to enhance the performance of the women members in the UP they need more training from different organizations.

5.1.2.5 Background for coming to the UP

Being asked what led her to become Chairperson of the UP, she explained that 6 months before the UP election her husband became paralyzed all of a

⁴¹Vulnerable Group Development (VGD) is a multi-dimensional food based Social Safety Net Program in Bangladesh, sponsored by the World Food Program. The target group of the program is mainly destitute women covering landless and asset-less women that are widowed, divorced, abandoned, having under-nourished children, lactating mothers and women with handicapped husband etc. In recent times, the program has moved from its role of relief provider to larger development role like providing training on life skills and income generating skills to women beneficiaries. The aim of the program is to enhance food and nutrition security of women and children through improved food consumption, education, skills development, livelihood diversification and risk mitigation. To achieve the objective of the VGD program, currently about 3.75 million beneficiaries from ultra-poor households are provided with the provision of monthly food ration of 30 kg of wheat or 25 kg of fortified wheat flour (atta, in Bangla) for a period of 24 months, and a package of development services for human capital development.

sudden. After that her father, who was a freedom fighter and the BAL leader, requested her to run for the Chairman position and he said that “it is our family tradition to rule through the UP.” For example her father stated the following:

“Your parental grandfather, father in law and your own husband and many others in this dynasty served the Chairman position for many many years, so now it is your responsibility to take the helm of it as you do not have anyone to serve in such a position. Immediately after that, the local BAL leader, local MP, Upazila Chairman, local political leaders and inhabitants of my neighboring areas came to me and convinced me to contest for the position of Chairman of that UP and thereafter I have been able to become UP Chairperson with a landslide victory.”

5.1.2.6 Role and functions of the UP

Having been requested to share her experience in the UP, she responded as follows:

“The major public allocations for the UP are sanctioned through the Upazila Development and Coordination Meeting. After that in Union meeting we discuss about our priorities and then I try to distribute those projects among the male and female members equally. Then it is my responsibility to monitor the progress of those assigned projects but if I see that anyone is creating problem for implementing any project then I immediately intervene in it and solve all those problems convening a meeting and discussing with the local people. Recently, on behalf of the local MP, a special allocation for erecting a new pucca/metalled road in the UP areas has been brought.”

Apart from the above, Mrs. Begum, as the Chairperson of the UP usually takes some initiatives for the local people of the Union. These includes taking attempts against child marriage, dowry; proving special grant for education; helping curbing violence against women by providing employment to that woman; helping poor people to get loan from the NGOs and Bank; providing assistance to the poor

people in getting treatment; giving financial assistance to the poor women during their marriage; motivating people for using sanitary toilets, attending lots of functions such as marriage ceremony, annual sports of the school or clubs and attending religious programs, festivals and occasions.

5.1.2.7 Performance of WLs

In response to a query about the performance of the women members in project implementation, the Chairperson of the UP opined that “at the initial stage they lack experience in project implantation but gradually these women members could learn the techniques of project implementation quickly.” After the implementation of one infrastructural projects and after getting a little training on some aspects of the UP, the women members started formulating a Project Implementation Committee (PIC) and a project proposal and if they were given responsibility for implementation of any project these women members purchased and procured required inputs, employed the necessary labour force, and then proceeded to implementation, which was followed by preparation of a master role for reimbursing the remaining cost from the UP. These views were also confirmed by the different sections of the people in the village.

While sharing the performances of the women members, she elaborated that “women members are quite concerned about their accountability towards the villagers/constituents but on the other hand male members never think that they should be accountable to the voters for their actions and inactions.” She complained as follows:

“Even the government officials do not pay heed to women members when the Chairman and male members did not give us due rights in the Parishad and when we seek favour from then the UNO, DC, MP, they never help women member get their due rights in the Parishad rather they advised that you have to adjust with the Chairman and male members of the UP. All of the officials have a readymade response when we informed our problem to them, and they said that it is your problem so you have to solve it nicely and smoothly in consultation with the Parishad.”

She also added the following:

“The women members have their grievances for not getting their due rights in the Parishad and therefore they cannot provide any services and benefits to the common people and it is the basic reason that very few of such women come to elect second time in the UP election.”

5.1.2.8 Problems of the WLs

While the present author asked about the problems of the women members in the UP to the Chairperson, she responded that “women members were just simply denied of their due right in the UP.” She categorically pointed out some of the problems that women were encountering now: i) they were devoid of many important responsibilities in the UP; ii) the male members did not inform the women members about important meetings; iii) when the women members wanted to implement a project in their jurisdictional area, the male members tried to create problems; iv) the UP male Chairman and the other male members thought that this was their Parishad, and that the women were there for nothing; v) when protest were made for any illegal exercise and injustice towards women members, they simply avoided it and never paid heed to what was said. She also shared the idea that “the male Chairman and male members never helped women members and they never gave us a UP manual when we asked them for it.”

The Chairperson stated the following:

“As women members have wider area or jurisdiction, which is 3 times higher than the male and this is why women members needed to work in the whole area but they are getting the same allowance like male counterpart which are quite irrational because they need to visit 3 times higher areas than the male members. Women are naturally shy and they have less access and experience than males, so they need more training and exposure so that they can ensure their rights in the UP.”

Salient Features and Significant Factors of Samsunnahar's Case

(1) Socio-political involvement helps leadership: Since her childhood Samsunnahar Begum has been involved in students' politics and she was personally involved with a human rights NGO, Manabodiker, for a considerable time, before she was elected Chairperson in the UP. Both involvements in student politics and in the NGO might have helped her to become a public leader.

(2) Family legacy: Her father-in-law, uncle and husband were involved in the UP for a long period and this gave her a foundation to become a public leader. Using her family political network, she became a public leader. Another factor is no less formidable: in contemporary politics, most of the women leaders in South Asia⁴² have occupied their leadership role in public life using their family network. Through using the family and political legacy of their ancestors, some women leaders come to the political sphere as is the case here for Samsunnahar.

(3) Training helps better performance: Samsunnahar's case reveals that as a woman Chairperson she achieved sufficient command over UP affairs within a short tenure there. Attending many training courses might have helped her to be capable of handling those activities. Her linkages and political network helped her to get projects from the concerned MP of her jurisdiction.

(4) Challenges of women leaders: She categorically pointed out many of the practical problems or challenges⁴³ encountered by the women leaders in the UP. According to her, some problems that women were encountering now in the UP were: i) they were devoid of many important responsibilities in the UP; ii) the male members did not inform the women members about important meetings; iii) when the women members wanted to implement a project in their jurisdictional area, the male members tried to create problems; iv) the UP male Chairman and the other male members thought that this was their Parishad, and that the women were there for nothing; v) when the women protested any illegal exercise or injustice towards them, the male Chairmen and male members simply avoided it and never paid heed to what

⁴² In the summary part of this section relevant evidence will be provided in this regard.

⁴³ More details discussion has been made in the Chapter 6: Major Challenges.

was said. She also shared the idea that the male Chairman and male members never helped the women members and they never gave women members in the UP a manual when they asked for it.

(5) How male domination is patronized through politics (MP, UP Chairman) and administration (UNO, DC): Her experience in the UP was unique, which helped her identify the major problems in today's UP governance in Bangladesh. From her case it was found that local administration (UNO, DC) and even the MP did not come forward to resolve the challenges and deprivation faced by the women leaders in the UP. Rather, they suggested to solve problems compromising with the Chairman, which reflected the true intension of the patriarchal values as all of the above position holders (UNO, DC, MP) represented patriarchy and that is why they also justified their stand and favoured preserving the continuation of the male Chairmen's and male members' interest without providing justice to the women members concerning their pain, deprivation and denial of due rights enshrined by the legal frame. This is exactly how male domination and patriarchal values are sustained, nurtured, and protected by men year after year, generation after generation so that patriarchy can rule or govern the society for an indefinite period. This case also represents how the local administration (UNO, DC) and MP protect the interests of the UP, that upholds a notion that they maintain a relationship to continue their respective interests through sharing mutual benefits⁴⁴.

(6) Training helps better performance: From the case of Samsunnahar it was learnt that through providing sufficient training women's capacity to work efficiently and effectively in the overall activities of the UP can be ensured.

(7) No difference between women and men when there is equal opportunity and an enabling environment: Her case also testified to the fact that given equal rights and opportunity and an enabling environment there would be no difference in the performance of males and females; rather, in some cases women could produce better performance.

⁴⁴ For details see the male domination section in chapter 6.

5.1.3 The Case of Nargis Akhter Khandaker*, Chairperson, Machchar UP

5.1.3.1 Socio-economic and family profile

Nargis Akhter Khandaker was elected Chairperson of the Machchar UP of Faridpur Sadar Upazila of Faridpur District in the UP election of 2011. She hails from Gaandia village of that Union. She is 45 years old and is married to a businessman and has obtained an education up to class five only. On the other hand, her husband only passed the ninth class. Nargis runs her family with a monthly income of 60,000 Taka (772 US\$). Most of her income comes from her husband's rice mill. Her husband is also owner of an earthen industry and a few fisheries. Her husband has some landed property, which is about 5 acres. Her father passed eight class. After marriage they have been living in a single family and until now they do not have any children. Her husband is the head⁴⁵ of this single unit family.

She comes of a middle class family. She has 5 brothers and 1 sister. Among her brothers one, who was a freedom fighter, has already died, and 2 are doing business and 1 is engaged in the agriculture profession and another is a service holder in a government hospital. Her only sister is married and she is a housewife and read up to eight class only. Nargis had 3 uncles that were all businessmen, and all had under-matriculate level of education. Among her 3 maternal uncles, 2 have already died; one was a freedom fighter and now is doing business in Faridpur Sadar and he obtained SSC level of education. Her paternal and maternal grandfather and father-in-law were government servants and no one has been directly involved in political parties. Regarding her previous political involvement it was learnt that she was never involved in any political organization in her student life or even afterwards. However, it was observed that some of her predecessors were involved in the local judicial process as sardar or matbar. She has a linkage with the local MP. She has 2 brothers-in-law that were BNP supporters and are doing business. She came to the UP due to her husband's wish.

*The first time that the interview took place was on 31 October, 2013 at 5 pm in the UP office by the researcher himself and for further clarification a second interview was carried out on 21 March at 6:45 pm.

⁴⁵In a traditional Bangladeshi society family head refers to the position that makes decisions in the family.

5.1.3.2 Political Network

Nargis' grandfather acted as a UP Chairman for 25 years. Her cousin also served in the UP. Her brother-in-law contested for a UP Chairmanship but failed and in later days he became a UP member for 2 terms (10 years). She said that her sister-in-law served as a member for one term in the UP. The family background of Nargis' revealed that she had a political history and association in her past family life. She got married to a businessman that is actively involved in local politics. Her husband holds a president position in the Upazila Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP)⁴⁶. As part of her family responsibilities when party supporters visited her house, she always used to entertain them. When her husband invited party supporters in their residence she cooked for them and thus she started connecting with local influential sociopolitical elites. She also attended many occasions in her vicinity territory and every time that she went people requested her to become a UP Chairman. Being the granddaughter of a grandfather that had served as a UP Chairman for 25 years she found that no one from the paternal side of her family had occupied public office until now. Based on such a basic premise, many of her paternal relatives also wished that someone would come forward to hold a public position. Her husband was involved in local politics, which helped him to achieve a wide political linkages and networks with local and national-level political leaders. Another factor might have influenced her thinking process. Having no baby in her married life she thought that if she could win in the election she would be able to serve the interests of the poor people and thus get some mental satisfaction. Getting blessings from all those aforesaid and drawing inferences from those multiple hidden factors, she was ultimately convinced to contest for the UP election as Chairperson in 2003 for the first time and she earned a massive victory in the UP election, winning 7 centers out of 9 in that UP. After coming to the UP she started doing some good projects related to road construction.

⁴⁶BNP stands for Bangladesh Nationalist Party. It is one of the major political parties in Bangladesh. The founder of this party was Major General Ziaur Rahman, the first military ruler in Bangladesh. It is a pro-Islamic political party in Bangladesh. According to the number of seats in the parliament it is the second largest political party in Bangladesh.

5.1.3.3 Social Engagement and Community Services

In the second UP election in 2011, due to her honest and benevolent leadership quality, she received an absolute majority victory in all the 9 centres in that UP. What actually helped her win in the election for the second time, the author asked her during the second-round interview with her. Nargis replied that “people still value good, honest and qualified leaders, who in fact feel innermost concern for her people.” She elaborated that God did not bless her with children but God has blessed her with innumerable children, referring to her constituents as her own children. She enunciated that as a public leader she had to attend many public functions in her jurisdictional area. These functions could be marriage ceremonies, birthday parties, parties for new born babies, circumcision of male child parties, inaugural and opening ceremonies for a business or social organization, and death anniversaries, etc. She says that:

“When I get message of any death case in my area I immediately rush there to express my sympathy and console the bereaved family members. On all those occasions I experienced very peculiar phenomena always. Sometimes when I went to attend a marriage ceremony, I came to notice that the father of the bride was crying seeing me, as she could not provide anything to his son-in-law. Hearing this I handed over 5,000 Taka (64 US\$) to that father of that wretched bride. Sometimes I observed that when someone died in any family, they could not manage even a funeral cloth⁴⁷ and it prompted me to pay some money for that. Generally when I attend any ceremony I preferred to provide gifts according to the merit and sanctity of the occasion and event. Thus I got to have love and respect from the villagers around me. Not only that but also whenever any problem occurred in my area I tried to rush there immediately to solve it. I make my mind in such a way that I can never think of myself without my people. I deem that “I was always with them, I am now with them and I will be with them always.” This is me whom and how my people get

⁴⁷According to Muslim ritual, when a Muslim dies, he or she needs to be buried with a white cloth covering the whole body from head to legs. Here funeral cloth refers to that.

always in all their weal and woes; miseries, adversities, bad days and their heydays. I also owe my beloved and revered people. Thus I can never think of my people apart from me. I did some good things in the field of education. In some schools I personally started providing some scholarships to the extremely poor students. Due to my honest and good leadership I got an award from the World Mother Teresa Foundation and also Bangladesh government crowned me with the “Best Chairman Award” in 2006. I felt lucky to get such a prestigious award as out of 4498 UP Chairman in Bangladesh I was selected as one of the 8th “Best Chairman Award” holders in Bangladesh.”

5.1.3.4 Maintaining Gender Equality

Nargis tries to follow gender equality in her UP. It can be understood from the following:

“Due to the very fact that my husband is a local political figure and my holding of Chairmanship position in the UP, I had obtained insurmountable popularity to my people. Therefore, I seldom face challenges in accomplishing my jobs best with my public office. As a woman leader I am pledge-bound to follow few basic principles in the domain of my entire UP functions and my social welfare activities-sincerity, honesty and transparency. As per legal provision women should get one-third of the total projects in UP but as a woman leader I try to distribute such project assignments equally between men and women members. My rationale is quite straightforward and crystal clear because according to my own judgment I deem that 3 women members are tantamount to 9 male members. And that’s why when I judge any woman member; she (women member) is 3 times greater than a male member as she represented 3 times higher constituency. When any confusion occurs with my male members during distribution of projects assignment I simply explain the above logic soberly and solemnly and they never dare to come to me with different argument refuting my rationale in favour of them. So I follow 50: 50 principle for both men and women members in my UP. And very frankly speaking I would like to suggest that the reservation for

women member at the lowest tier of governance should be 50%. I think real democracy takes place in UP, so we should start from here.”

5.1.3.5 Challenges and Coping Pattern

In replying to the author’s question concerning how to encounter the male domination and corrupt practices adopted by any male member, she replied that in controlling both problems she used public support. She also opines that:

“When a project is given to any member I personally inform the local dwellers about the whole budget allocation and coverage of the project and warn that member saying that if I get any complain from the project areas I won’t give any more project to you next time, and this strategy works like magic solution in my UP.”

Nargis informed the interviewer that she faced some insurmountable challenges regarding the construction of roads in the whole UP area. When villagers came to inform their real need for construction of a road, they argued that due to lacking of that road they faced a lot of difficulties. Due to a lack of a pucca/metalled road they could market their agricultural products in the market properly as no vehicle could reach their home. Especially when someone becomes sick there is no ambulance that can go there and therefore it is an exigency to construct a road for them. Therefore, she consulted with village elderly and local elites but she observed that some of the influential villagers did not want to provide land for constructing the road. Thereafter, she sought assistance from the UNO for that.

After that, the concerned UNO and Nargis jointly visited the speculated project site in the village. Then Nargis informed the UNO that their main strength was their poor villagers, so they could efficiently and intelligibly garner support from them, and the UNO also extended his unstinted support in favour of her stand and the UNO also managed supports from the law enforcement agency. Nargis opined that the road would be constructed for the villagers’ interest, so nothing could prevent them from doing such a public project. Thereafter, she received a budget from the government for construction of the road and she successfully completed that project employing many poor people from the village in constructing it. As a result, no one disturbed her anymore and finally after she successfully constructed the road

many villagers, even those that had created obstacles during the initial stage, became very happy because now an ambulance and other vehicles could enter the village.

5.1.3.6 Community-mind Mentality

She had served as UP Chairperson for the last 2 terms. Other than her normal activities in the UP she used to help poor people in her UP and she constructed a bamboo bridge in the village using her own money. She is involved in the Maintenance of Law and Order Committee as a Chairperson. Apart from the regular Standing Committees of the UP, she is also engaged with Hut-Bazar Management and the School Management Committee and the Protection of Human Rights Committee (NGO). She is happy that as a woman she has been elected to serve the people of that UP and on the other hand she is unhappy because she cannot help the poor people as much as she would or to the extent that they need, as most of the people are very poor, so it was very difficult for her to help them all. She thinks that women members are not adequately equipped with the required knowledge for working in the UP and they lack proper experience and knowledge. She thinks that if the number of male and female members were equal in the UP, that would be better for the UP to balance the male domination in it.

Salient Features and Significant Factors of Nargis Khandaker

(1) Gateway to politics: Coming into contact with the party supporters of her husband by inviting them in their family and attending many social occasions such as birthday parties, wedding ceremonies, circumcision ceremonies for male children, inaugural or opening ceremonies, etc. in her area, she made her first gateway to entry into political life.

(2) Family support helps leadership: Analyzing the case of Nargis, it can be noted that she became a public representative in the UP using her family linkage and legacy. All of her relatives wanted to see her as a public representative because they want to continue their dynastic tradition through her. Her economic background also could contribute to her becoming a woman leader in the UP.

(3) Socio-political involvement helps leadership: Her political affiliation in her paternal family life coupled with her involvement in an NGO helped her to become a UP Chairperson.

(4) Education has little role in leadership performance: It was quite evident from her case study that education has little significance in playing the role of a good leader. With only primary level education (five class) she was doing excellent in her assigned roles in the UP.

(5) Women have a strong community mind and attitude for the people and society: Nargis has a strong community service mind and attitude. She seems to perceive her political role as a supra-social worker like many women politicians elsewhere in the world. Her community mind attributions have been reflected in many ways. As she did not have a child in her family life, she devoted her love, affection, and respect to her own people. Her sympathy for the poor people has been aptly reflected through her extending assistance to the poor father, for example, that failed to provide a gift for her son-in-law and the poor man that failed to buy a funeral cloth. Her social activities also have been expressed in making provisions for scholarships in an educational institute. Above all her community feelings can be grasped when we see that she constructed a bamboo bridge out of her own money which was symbolic of her feelings for the community and which could help her be elected by the general people.

(6) Women have strong and rational value judgment: Nargis's argument and strong rationale in favour of her maintaining and practicing gender equality in the UP also are mention-worthy. As a woman member has 3 times higher representation than a male member, so under no discernible argument was she mentally convinced to provide more project assignments to the male members. Through her demonstrative convincing capacity no male member dared to refute her argument, which led her to suggest a 50:50 share for male and female members in the UP. In her experience she realized that real democracy worked at the local level, so she suggested that the government should promote a reservation quota for women members in the UP, from 33% to 50%.

(7) Coping strategies of women leaders in the UP: Nargis's case revealed her excellent capacity to cope with a male dominating environment in the UP. To withstand the male domination imposed by her male members, she followed the most pragmatic strategy through practice of sincerity, honesty, and transparency. It is interesting to note here how intelligently she tried to maintain integrity in the

development projects by sharing all of the relevant information with the inhabitants at the project site with a view to getting appropriate feedback about the real performance of the male members that were the assigned job by her. Her coping strategy to overcome the bottlenecks and to manage the challenges from the influential landlord class that had caused problems in the construction of an important village road included using massive public support by employing poor villagers as labourers in the construction of the road. An excellent example of her coping strategy was vividly apparent through her seeking assistance from the local administration and involving them efficiently to manage local problems.

(8) People value honest and competent leadership: Nargis stated that “people still value good, honest and qualified leaders, who in fact feel innermost concern for her people,” which is quite significant. By proving her demonstrative leadership quality with a strong sense of community feeling, she was able to win a landslide victory in the election for two consecutive terms.

(9) Crowning success: By dint of her gifted leadership with a strong community mind she, on the one hand, obtained an innocuous and unmixed blessing of love and respect from her constituents and on the other hand, her excellent community service was also duly recognized by the International Mother Teresa Foundation and also from the government of Bangladesh as she was awarded the “Best Chairman Award” in 2006. She was one of the award holders among 8 best Chairmen in Bangladesh.

5.1.4 The Case of Urmilla Rani Baroi*, Chairperson, Jolla UP

5.1.4.1 Socio-economic, Political, and Family Profile

After her husband’s death by unidentified gunmen/miscreants, Urmilla Rani Baroi, 47, started serving in the Jolla UP, Wazirpur Upazila, Barisal district for the last 2 consecutive terms since 2006. As a widow she needs to look after her one son and four daughters. Her family is run with the income from landed property of about 4 acres and a few fisheries. She read up to eight class. Her father passed only

* The interview was made at 6 pm on 31 October, 2013.

sixth class while her husband was an IA⁴⁸. She is heading a joint family which is composed of 9 members. Responding to the query of political linkage she informed the interviewer that her husband served as Chairman of the same Jolla UP for 2 terms. Nobody in her family is involved with any representative or political position. Before coming to serve in the UP, Urmilla used to work in an NGO named “Aloshikha.” Urmilla in fact was elected Chairperson in the by-election of the UP while her husband served as a sitting Chairman and was shot and killed by unidentified hooligans suddenly in 2008.

5.1.4.2 Challenges faced

Would you please tell us that in an extremely male dominated society what were the challenges you had to face and how you overcame all of these challenges? She replied as follows:

“When general people face any problem, then I just stand beside them, the public support was the main issue. To my own judgment whatever I deem just and right, I always try to ensure that. I know that Honesty is strength. I know that in my every walk of life, I will have to face lots of challenges and obstacles but I know I need to work and solve all those with courage and upright.”

Would you please tell us when you came to the Parishad for the first time, and what challenges you had to face at that time? She spelled out that nobody can learn anything the first time but one can learn the whole thing while one is engaged in doing work practically and then through trial and error, one gets experience and grasps everything. Then she explained the whole matter in the following way:

“When any case came to me, I just called the respective ward member and I advised him to collect those people who were expert on that particular subject/issue and had sufficient knowledge on the legal documents. Then I told the male member

⁴⁸IA= Intermediate in Arts, which is equivalent to Higher Secondary Certificate Examination in Bangladesh.

to consult with both the contending parties (convict and plaintiff) about choosing the experts whom they had complete confidence. Then I formed a committee involving those experts, some local elites, village elderly and then arbitration started and they investigated and probed everything and at last they provided final verdict. Thus we performed local disputes resolution successfully. You know in doing so I come to know from my experience all people did not understand the legal documents. Moreover, some MA passed man even did not understand the legal documents while on the other hand some eight passed man could understand every document.”

5.1.4.3 How She Was Elected

While asked about the context of election in the UP she pinpointed the following:

“I needed to contest with 12 contestants among whom 4 were Muslims and 8 were Hindus, to whom I was one of them. All candidates except me spent huge amount of money but I had no money but I had only public support. Sometime to keep my public support intact, I also implemented few development projects myself so that people could understand that I did not forget the villagers who in fact voted for me.”

Salient Features and Significant Factors of Urmi Rani Baroi

(1) Socio-cultural involvement with an NGO helps with leadership: Urmi Rani was involved in an NGO which helped her become elected to the UP.

(2) Patriarchy: Rani was elected UP Chairperson after the death of her husband, who also served as UP Chairman for a long time. This represented the fact that Urmi Rani became public leader using her patriarchal linkage. Urmi Rani was elected Chairperson while her husband was acting Chairman in the UP. The sudden death of her husband might have helped her get sympathy from the villagers to be elected to the post which was held by her husband.

(3) Public support helps with leadership: She was elected Chairperson contested with 11 more “big shots” in the UP. She used her public support as she valued peoples’ concern very much and she used to solve all of the problems by garnering massive public support.

(4) Coping strategy using the trial and error method: Rani used her own value judgment with honesty, boldness, and courage when she encountered any challenge or obstacle in her jurisdictional responsibilities and social engagements as well. Through her strategy she handled the challenges around her and it was evident that she had a strong participatory attitude toward solving problems in a consultative manner involving her Parishad representatives and the local people. Being a freshly-elected Chairperson in the UP she was able to grasp the UP affairs through a pragmatic approach or strategy which she dubbed the “trial and error” method; she was able to learn practical knowledge using her trial and error method. Working as a leader she obtained very practical knowledge about public affairs, which was quite evident from her description.

(5) Justification of formal education with practical knowledge: Rani believed that there are lots more people in the world that can have vast knowledge in solving their practical problems related to their daily life which could never be solved by holding higher degrees. Thus Rani successfully utilized those people’s knowledge in solving the land-related problems in the UP. Rani, no doubt, in doing so, was seen to be the epitome of the intelligent and smart woman leader.

(6) Leadership quality: The author believes that her competent leadership quality helped her to become a second-time Chairperson in the UP. She obviously has intelligence and commonsense in assigning responsibility and choosing the right approach and strategy to make things work.

5.1.5 The Case of Begum Parul Akhtari*, Chairperson, Manikdaha UP

5.1.5.1 Socio-economic and Family Profile

After the death of her husband, Begum Parul Akhtari was elected Chairperson of the Manikdaha UP, Vanga Upazila, Faridpur District in 2011, and in

* The interview took place at 5 pm on 31 October, 2013.

fact served in this UP for 2 terms. After the death of her husband she contested in the UP election in 2006 and was elected by the adult franchise of the population of that Union. Parul, 38, an SSC and a widow, is now mother of 2 sons and one daughter and is living in a joint family with 7 family members. She needs to spend 40,000 Taka (515 UD\$) on a monthly basis to defray family expenses. She inherited some landed property from her husband, about 20 acres. Most of her monthly income is managed by earning that comes from the landed property and she has some small businesses also. Her father was an SSC while her husband, an IA degree holder, was involved in business; he had passed away long ago. In fact, her husband was killed by opposition people.

5.1.5.2 Family legacy

Responding to a question regarding the family's political linkages, Parul disclosed that many of her close relatives were previously involved in the UP. Her family had a long tradition of serving this political position. Her father was a 2-time Chairman while her husband served 20 years in the UP. Her father-in-law was Chairman of the UP for 37 years while her parental Grandfather also served as Chairman of the UP for 2 terms. Her brother-in-law also served as Chairman in the UP for 5 years. In the course of time, her father also became Upazila Chairman. By tradition most of her elderly family members served as sardar and matbar for many years in their respective villages. It was found that Parul had no political linkage during her school age and even after coming to the elected position she had no direct involvement with any political party. Nobody in her family was found to be involved in active politics.

She informed the interviewer that recently she had received justice in the verdict of her husband's death from the court and she expressed the following:

“My husband was killed by the miscreants/ hooligans in 2003. According to the verdict, given by the Supreme Court seven month earlier, one was given capital punishment (death by hanging), and the other 2 culprits were given life time imprisonment. Immediately after the killing of my husband I was elected Chairperson in the Union Parishad.”

She said that her father-in-law had been UP Chairman for 37 years and her husband served as UP Chairman for 20 years. The fact was that their family had been very close to the general public for a long time. She added that after her husband's sudden death, the public did not allow her to stay aloof from the UP and due to their frequent request she made up her mind to contest the UP election. She added that at first there was no contestant in the UP election and she was elected Chairperson. After that she was again elected Chairperson in 2006 for the following term. Immediately after that after nine years of her serving as a Chairperson, again an election came in 2011. This time she had to contest with 12 contestants in the UP election and she won the election and again was elected Chairperson. She disclosed that to win the election some candidates spent more than crores⁴⁹ of Taka (128,568 US\$) but they could not win the election. She finally said that "in fact due to the public demand I was involved with such representative politics but I never thought of coming to the UP." While she was taking the role of about women in the UP, she said that "there was no denying the fact that in our country both the Prime Minister and the opposition leaders were women but despite that the whole family, society, state were being ruled by males."

5.1.5.3 Challenges faced

While asked what the challenges were that she had to face to work in a male-dominated society where you needed to engage yourself in such public functions, she said the following: "I understand that I had to maintain communication and liaison with UNO, officers of the nation building departments, MPs, ministers and many other socio-political elites." In such a context, she informed the interviewer of the following:

"Being a woman representative I was doing all these public functions personally without facing any challenges anywhere. I was being elected by the people through adult franchise and this was my strength through which I could do everything I need to do in UP without any problem and easily. The public support was the pivotal factor for doing the needful

⁴⁹ This is locally practiced in Bangladesh. One crore = 10 million.

everywhere. My father, my father in law and my husband all were UP Chairmen and I always saw them doing public function since my childhood.”

5.1.5.4 The Chair makes the position

She shared the fact that when she was elected Chairperson in the UP for the first time, she lacked experience, but within a short span of time she was able to learn everything. She added that to speak frankly, irrespective of gender specification, when anyone occupied a Chair or a position, that position helped him or her learn the essential knowledge required for the Chair or position. Replying to a question about her intention to serve in the UP the next time/term, she said that as a public representative she had been working in the UP with sincerity and that if the public wanted her to serve again in the UP she had no objection to contest in the election.

5.1.5.5 Roles of WLs in the UP

Sharing the role of women members in the UP, she informed that following a legal procedure these women members had come to serve in the UP. She reiterated as follows:

“After their entry into the UP, we were bound to work as per the rules and regulations that governed UP. These women members were being elected covering 3 wards but it was a matter of sorrow that government did not engage them in productive purposes as they did not have much work to do in UP.”

Salient Features and Significant Factors of Parul Akhtari

(1) Legacy and family network helps with leadership: Parul became a UP leader using her wide family political networks and linkages, as many of her close relatives were involved with public political organizations for a long period. Although Parul had no direct political linkage in her student life, it was learnt from her case that her husband, father, father-in-law, parental grandfather, and her brother-in-law were directly involved with the UP for a long time and it was a family tradition which helped her be a leader in the public domain. Parul bears a long tradition of a family

legacy serving in public office, as many of her direct blood-connected relatives had worked in the UP for quite a long time. Following family tradition she has successfully managed a leadership role in the UP. According to what she said it could be learnt that a “chair makes a man or woman,” meaning that by holding such a leadership role she has been very successfully managing her role, achieving the necessary knowledge of UP governance. She was elected Chairperson for 2 terms and she also wished to have such a position again, which testifies to her competency to enjoy her public/leadership role like her family forefathers. The paternalistic linkage is one of the formidable features in the women’s leadership in South Asian countries, which was also corroborated in her case.

(2) Linkage with politics and administration: She had a wide linkage with the local administration and the local MP, which also helped her play a good role as a UP leader. As the Chief Executive of the UP, Parul rightly imbibed her public role in the UP, which we can easily understand from her statement that as a public figure she needed to maintain communication with the UNO, DC, SP, MP and other nation-building departments at the sub-national/Upazila level.

(3) Coping Strategy: Like Urmila Rani, Parul also adopted the same strategy to combat the challenges in the UP. The basic coping strategy Parul resorted to manage tangles and challenges, was utilizing public support always.

5.1.6. The Case of Fatema Akhter Parul*, Woman Member, Khadimpara UP

5.1.6.1 Socio-economic and Family Profile

Fatema Akhter Parul was elected UP member for the second time; the first time in 2005 and second time in 2011 in the Khadimpara UP, Sylhet Sadar Upazila, Sylhet District. She is 38, read up to class 10 and hails from Jahanpur village. She is married to a village doctor⁵⁰ who is also a non-matriculate. Fatema’s

* This interview took place on 28 September 2013 at 11 am.

⁵⁰In Bangladesh the idea of a village doctor refers to those people that have some a smattering knowledge of medical practices which can be acquired or learned through serving in a small pharmacy or serving as a compounder/assistant with a registered doctor. There are also para-

family is composed of 6 members comprising 2 sons, 2 daughters, and her spouse. She lives in a single family. Her monthly expenditure is about 35,000 Taka (450 US\$), and the lion's share comes from her husband's medical practice. Fatema's family is also engaged in small business that also helps her support her family. She has not much landed property except her homestead which covers about .08 acres. Her husband heads the family with the active support of Fatema. In answering the query about the family network it was learned that Fatema's father-in-law and grandfather served in the UP as its Chairperson for one term in the past. She stated that Fatema's cousin is now acting as UP Chairperson. Her forefathers acted as Sarder and Matbar in order to solve the petty skirmishes/feuds that occurred in social life and in the village community. Fatema is the Chairperson of the Birth and Death Registration Standing Committee and also a member of 2 Standing Committees; namely the Social Welfare and Disaster Management Committee and the Controlling of Family Dispute, Woman, and Children Welfare Committee.

5.1.6.2 Socio-political engagement

Before coming to the UP she was engaged in 2 NGOs: Grameen Bank and the Friend's in Village Development Society (FIVDS). She has good social mobility and linkages with the Upazila Nirbahi Officer (UNO) and some government officials working in the various Nation Building Departments at Upazila. She informed the interviewer that after joining this political position in the UP she is now in line with the BNP thinking. Her husband is involved with another political party, i.e. the Jatiyo Party.

5.1.6.3 Playing a role in the UP

As she has been serving in the UP for the last 2 terms she has a good grasp of the UP affairs. She is actively involved with many activities in the UP, which include dispute resolution, the construction and repair of roads-ghats, hut-bazzars, birth and death registration, controlling of child marriage, distribution of VGD cards, selection and finalization of applicants for old age pension, test relief distribution, etc. As an experienced member of the UP she received some training in the construction

medical diploma courses for being a village doctor. They are basically practitioners or sometimes may be quacks.

and repair of Roads in 2011 organized by the LGED, empowerment and rights of women in 2013 and also the Rules and Regulations of the LGSP in 2013.

5.1.6.4 Experience and Views of the UP

In answering the question about her experience in the UP, she elaborated that:

“When I was just elected for the first time I never know about the scope of works of UP and what was my prerogatives in local judicial activities. When I was elected for the first time in UP with huge enthusiasm I was able to learn few things but at that time the male members could not at all tolerate the female members in UP which is still prevail in UP now-a-days also. But when I was elected for the second time my knowledge about UP has substantially enhanced”.

Serving 2 terms in the UP, she came to realize the following fact:

“If I know my job well then I could easily bring a project arguing with the male members and I deemed that the women members who were now working in the UP as a public representative they should be well groomed through regular training about the overall activities of the Parishad. If women member were imparted training they could be able to learn about their roles and responsibilities, and they could be aware about their rights, shares and privileges, and if they get oppressed by the male members they could know where to ask help and remedy for them and all these should have to be informed properly so that they could work in UP well.”

She also opined that the women members received job-based training but the scope of the training should be widened so that women members could achieve knowledge on the overall affairs of the UP. She stated that women members should get a one-third share of the total projects conducted by the UP, but still women members had to face lots of problems to ensure their rights in the UP. Then she

elaborated that if “I tell the truth you as male researcher may be annoyed with me even.” She added that in most of the cases the UP Chairmen were men, so they tried to keep the women members subservient to their male counterparts in the UP. In general it was observed that if any woman member had good understanding with the UP Chairman, then that particular woman got more projects from the Chairman in the UP. She informed that every two years the signatory power for issuing check in the UP management changed.

5.1.6.5 Women’s position in the UP

She informed that women members hardly got their equal share from the UP as seen in the following statement:

“We never get equal share in work distribution. I am telling you the fact that if all projects are equally distributed to all male and female members, we never get equal share because we represent 3 times higher than those of male members, so you can easily understand that how we are losing our shares. If 5 projects are given to male members, women also are given 5 projects but anyhow we should get 15 projects because we represent 3 wards which are three times higher than that of any male members. ...We, the women members contributed more times and energy in UP. If we maintained an attendance register like government and private office, we could show you that we came to office almost 5 working days. On the other hand, the male members usually come to UP once or at best twice in a week in UP office. We remain engaged in public service whole day and night.”

5.1.6.6 Community service through the salish

Parul stated that “when I came to the UP for the first time the male members always frowned me saying that you, the women members are elected in the reserved seats so you have nothing to do with UP activities just seating with us and supporting everything with us.” She shared her experience with the author concerning how she was able to win the love of the common villagers, as explained in the following:

“Once I attended a village salish where I come to know that a young man compelled one young woman to have sex with her by force. As this was the very sensitive issue in the context of Bangladeshi village and as the young man just spoiled the young woman with force, then I thought that without giving justice to this issue I would not go from salish. Then I brought my husband there so that he could accompany me if it took late hours to finish the judicial procedure. I also requested some village elderly to remain present there so that we could provide due judgment to this case. Almost 150 villagers were present there to help me. It took several hours to finish the whole judicial procedure. Then the juries unanimously decided that as the young man put the women in extreme shame and it would very tough for that victim woman to get marry with anyone because all villagers already came to know this, so it was decided that the young man should have to marry that girl on that particular night. Then the juries summoned an official match maker to register this marriage following proper religious fanfares and rituals. When everything finished, it was 3 am. While the judicial procedures were going on, no male member was present there in the salish.”

Salient Features and Significant Factors of Fatima Akhter Parul

(1) Family legacy helps leadership: It was evident from the above case of Parul that her father-in-law, grandfather, and cousin were involved in the UP before she entered into the public sphere as an elected woman leader. This testifies to the fact that she became UP leader using her paternalistic family legacy and network.

(2) NGO involvement: Parul, before coming to the UP, was involved in 2 NGOs: the Grameen Bank and Friends in Village Development Society, from where she obtained her courage, experience, and mobility to work in public life, which contributed to her becoming UP leader.

(3) Political involvement: She was also involved in local BNP politics and her husband was also involved in the JP. Such political linkages also helped her to grow as a woman leader in the UP.

(4) Male domination: Parul case represents the fact that women members were highly neglected by the male members in the UP during their entry period, but when the women members learned of their due rights and roles in the Parishad, they could ensure their due rights and shares in the Parishad. Analyzing Parul's statement, "when I come to the UP for the first time the male members always frowned me saying that you the women members are elected in the reserved seats so you have nothing to do with UP activities just seating with us and supporting everything with us," it could be easily understood how these women members were dealt with by their male counterparts in the Parishad. Still, such male domination, negligence, and deprivation are quite existent now.

(5) Better knowledge helps better performance: In ensuring their rights in the Parishad, proper knowledge about the affairs of the Parishad could help them enormously and such knowledge could be gained through proper experience in the UP and also through having sufficient training by the various GOs and NGOs. This training could help empower the women members in the UP. Women members are no less capable compared with male members' performance because if they are provided with equal opportunity and rights, they can do everything hand-in-hand with male members. Parul's case revealed that adequate knowledge of rules and regulations are the sinequanon to enjoy better rights and shares in the UP.

(6) Sense of patriarchy: There is no denying the fact that the Chairman in tandem with all of the male members tried to make the women members subservient to them because this is the norm in a patriarchal society, where women are never thought of as equal to men. She was also concerned about this when she pointed it out to the male researcher and said that he may not like her utterance. This comment shows how conscious women are about their role and men's role in the society and also her understanding of the grim reality of a highly patriarchal society. Here she depicted the real picture of how women representatives were being deprived of their due rights in the UP and how the legal provision in the UP made the woman member's role shaky and subservient in relation to the role of male members. This is really surprising to think that as per legal dictum women members are given only one-third of the total projects, while they represent an area that is 3 times larger. This is

how state or legal provision also subjugates women by depriving them of their due rights.

(7) Sincerity of WLs: This case also represents the idea that women are more sincere about their role, responsibilities, and performance in the UP. Male and woman members should enjoy the same privileges and obligations in terms of their legal provisions, but it was observed that the women members come to the UP almost every day whereas the male members are seldom observed to come to the Parishad regularly; rather they come to the Parishad just as and when necessary. Other than that they are hardly seen coming to the UP office on a regular basis.

(8) WLs are serving the community through culturally-suitable judgments: The conduct of the salish is a glaring example of the community service of the woman members in her jurisdictional area. Such an act of social justice shows that woman have proper capacity to deal with life-related matters with proper dignity and honour. Through this case we can understand that woman members can perform their social commitment and responsibility with a strong hand and ensure the rule of law in the society. Thus these women members are contributing to social justice and good governance at the local level. This case shows that that woman can play a proper role in the community if they are provided with a suitable and favourable environment and a legal framework or structure to deliver justice in the society. There are other ramifications of such a case which demonstrate that she has an aggressive attitude to this extremely male-dominated patriarchal society, where she also considers herself as a victim, so she thinks that the rapist should not go unpunished rather by providing punishment she has ventilated her wrath and anger on the irrational draconian patriarchal social norm. Therefore, when she got an opportunity to take revenge through such a wrongdoing or misdeeds done by male domination and masculinity, she left no stone unturned to deal with it with an iron hand. Obviously men and women both live in a specific culture-bound, value-laden society, where all norms, values, actions, thoughts and beliefs are properly governed and applicable in line with that specific more of that culture. According to the social norms of Bangladesh, the judgment provided by the salish committee might be a culturally-appropriate decision. However, viewed from the substantive rationale it can be easily understood how awful it might be for a woman to endure her whole life being the wife to a rapist.

Therefore, the pivotal question lies here is how will she suffer for the rest of her life, especially if her husband take revenge on her for a forceful marriage? Therefore, Parul's judgment concerning the rape case could not be supported at all; it axiomatically and unquestionably calls for necessary value changes in the society, where men and women can both enjoy the same rights and privileges without any discrimination.

5.1.7 The Case of Sufia Begum*, Woman Member, Kalirbazar UP

5.1.7.1 Socio-economic and Family Profile

Sufia Begum, 35, was elected a UP woman member contesting with 7 more women candidates from Raicho Village of Kalirbazar UP, Comilla Sadar Upazila, Comilla District in 2011. She read up to class eight and is married to a businessman. Her husband achieved class eight level of education. She lives in a joint family of 8 members having her husband, one son, four daughters, and one cousin. Sufia runs her family with an income of 30,000 Taka (386 US\$) per month. The family expenses are carried out by her husband's small business and her own tailoring business. Her husband heads the joint family. Sufia's family has not enough landed property. In total the family has .15 acres, including their homestead.

In reply to her family linkage it was learnt that no one from her family ever served in the UP, Upazila, or District and any other representative position. Her father-in-law used to involve himself as sardar and matbar in mitigating petty feuds emerging from the social problems in their village. Sufia has two matriculate brothers; one served in primary school and another one is employed as a day labourer in a foreign country. She has one more sister who is an HSC and is now running her family as a housewife. Sufia's uncle, an SSC, served in a government office, i.e. Union Land Office.

5.1.7.2 Playing a Role in the UP and Social Linkage

She is the Chairperson of the Education, Health and Family Planning Standing Committee. She is also involved in the Standing Committee on Birth and Death Registration Committee as one of its members. For a long time she has been

* The interview was conducted on 27 August 2013.

involved in socio-cultural organizations because she used to work in an NGO named the Vision and also Chairman of the Cooperative Society of the Experimental Project of Bangladesh Academy for Rural Development (BARD), Women's Education, Income, Nutrition Improvement Project (WEINIP). Sufia has good access to the Upazila Nirbahi Officer (UNO). She is not involved with any political party and neither do any of her relatives. She was elected as woman UP member for the first time but she managed to involve herself actively in the overall activities of the UP. She is so vocal and active in the UP that she already implemented 8 infrastructural projects with her 2-year tenure since her coming to the UP. Sufia informed the interviewer that when the Upazila Engineer Office helped them prepare the project they needed to give money to the Upazila Engineer Office. Sufia implemented her projects taking bricks and sand from the Chairman's trading shop.

5.1.7.3 Project experience

Elaborating her project experience she stated the following:

"We generally undertook project through ward meeting where local elites, opinion leaders (sarder/matbar), many people joined and through a priority list we finalize project(s). In one meeting one villager demanded that a small culvert is needed to bring agricultural products to his homestead yard and few people also supported his cause. Latter that man also informed his demand of culvert to the Chairman of the Union Parishad. As the project is related to my jurisdictional area, Chairman being convinced gave this small project to me. After that, Chairman told me to form a Scheme Implementation Committee, which was being Chaired by me and assisted by concerned male member, few elites and villagers of the ward. The Chairman advised me to prepare project estimation taking help from the Upazila engineer office and secretary of the UP. After that Chairman also told me that I have my friend who can supply brick on credit for you and he also advised me that after finishing your project the due can be cleared. Then I myself purchased 11 bags cements from the Kalirbazar market and required rods as per the estimate and I brought all those construction materials to the project sites. In doing so my husband was with me to assist me bringing all

those things. On coming back to my home I talked to the Manson for erecting this culvert and thereafter, with the help of 4 labours, she completed the structure within 7 days. Every day I went to the sites and observe the progress and at some point I also invited UP Chairman to oversee the progress.”

Sufia shared her project experience with the present author. She informed him that at first they needed to complete their project spending their own money and on successful completion of the project when they submitted the master roll with the required documents, and the bill was passed. Here it is mention-worthy that after passing the bill she needed to pay 20% as a bribe to the Upazila Administration. In general when the amount was 50,000 Taka (643 US\$) she paid 10,000 Taka (129 US\$) and when the amount was 1,00,000 Taka (1,286 US\$) she needed to pay 20,000 Taka (257 US\$) as administrative cost. She added that “when I got any project, the male members of my ward get seriously hurt.”

She stated that after implementing one lack taka project she got a 3,500 Taka (45 US\$) surplus from which she paid 500 Taka (7 US\$) to the lower level office staff of the UP and Upazila. Then she come back home with a scanty profit of 3,000 Taka (39 US\$). She expressed that while the Upazila Engineering office prepared a project proposal for the UP, according to her opinion all guesstimates were calculated at a low price whereas the market rate was in fact higher. Therefore, nothing could be gained by implementing a development project in the UP. She further added that in fact, as a member or elected representative she was supposed to involve herself in public welfare but this position has emerged as a position with a little bit of a profit. Talking to her it was learned that Sufia is now working as one of the panel Chairmen and when the existing UP Chairman could not fulfill his duty, at that time Sufia needed to play the role of Chairman and this is why she needs to go to the UP office every day.

5.1.7.4 How She was Elected

When the author asked her how she was elected member, she replied “to me I never think of being a UP member. There was a UP woman member just near my home. I always go many places, many GO-NGO offices with that woman

member. At some point the villagers opines that giving up her company I should try to be a member in the Union Parishad.” People tried to convince me saying that:

“You are more qualified than that woman member because you have quality to convince and motivate villagers about development issues and also you have capacity to do project and thus you could develop our areas, the people believed. So villagers requested me to contest in the next election saying that, we will vote for you we promised to you.”

In response to their demand she said that she did not have money to contest the UP election, and then they (people) assured that you did not need to spend money; rather they all would help her. After that she called a meeting at the nearby school with all her relatives, village elderly people, supporters, and addressing them she reiterated the following:

“You encouraged me to contest the UP election, so you should help me in all respects and you should not leave me when I just stepped in to the fray and entreated in the election canvass from now onward, you all should assist me and advise me about what I should do or not.”

Then elderly villagers advised her to go door to door to the villagers and ask them to vote for her in the forthcoming UP election. At that time she followed a strategy that when the Chairman called a meeting she just went there taking her village elderly and her supporters with her and begged votes for her in that meeting, where she spoke a few words in favour of her candidature. She requested that the attending audience kindly pray for her success and sought their blessings. Then she won the election vying with six candidates in her concerned wards.

5.1.7.5 General Villagers Like Her

While asked about the experience as a woman member in the UP, she opined that she observed that women generally did not come to her; rather, the general villagers came to her for solving their myriad problems and the general villagers requested her to bring more and more developmental projects and she said

that the people thought that to undertake a development project in the village somebody should have real capacity. Answering the general public's demand she then mentioned that for bringing more projects to the villages woman members should be clever, intelligent, and pragmatic and she believed that she was not so clever. She explained that the reality lay otherwise because when a project came, the Chairman would definitely give it to the male members first, whereas when there were 2 projects, then the Chairman would give one to a male member and the other would be given to a woman member. After that, replying to the public, she said that if there was no work then how could she bring a project to the village? She stated that in general male villagers came to her to seek different kinds of assistance from her from the UP. Most of the time the women villagers came to her to ask for old age pension benefits, 40 days' work, a VGD card, a widow's allowance, a VGF card, etc. and requested her to submit their application to the UP Chairman in order to get those aforesaid benefits.

Salient Features and Significant Factors of Sufia Begum

(1) NGO involvement: Sufia's case represents the idea that to be a leader, one may not need a family network or political network or background. Sufia became a leader using her socio-cultural involvement in NGO experience and it was learnt that she was involved with a cooperative society for a long time through which she obtained social mobility, consciousness, and empowerment, which might have contributed to her emergence as a community leader in the UP. Sufia's case provides evidence of her quality and competency as a successful community leader as she obtained considerable knowledge of project experience.

(2) Patron-client relationship: It was observed that when many male members were hardly able to implement 8 infrastructural projects during the tenure of one and half years, it was possible for Sufia. This implied that she had maintained a patron-client relationship with the UP Chairman. The patron-client syndrome⁵¹ is reflected here through Sufia's playing the role of panel Chairman, getting more projects and bringing bricks for the infrastructural project and taking assistance from the UP Chairman.

⁵¹A more detailed discussion is given in chapter 6.

(3) Corruption: This case also testifies to the fact that there is prevalence of corruption in the UP, like the civil administration in Bangladesh.

(4) People's support matters for leadership: Sufia comes from a poor family but she was able to win the love and confidence of the common villagers, who in fact played a pivotal role behind her being elected as a woman member of that Union. In reply, the community people or villagers demanded more benefits, services, and infrastructural development projects from her so that the villagers could get a good road for better transportation and marketing of their agricultural products. Sufia was elected with the inspiration of the general villagers, which implied that public support is more important than resources to be a community leader.

(5) Women members are secondary: This case also demonstrates the discriminate behavior of the UP Chairman as UP projects were distributed to the male members first and giving infrastructural projects to women members was a secondary issue. Sufia's case revealed the fact that women members' position was secondary to that of the male members. This was the case everywhere in Bangladesh except where there were women Chairpersons in the UP, although they also face challenges to ensure equal rights for women. The general trends represented evidence of the deprivation and negligence of women members in the UP.

5.1.8 The Case of Kakoli Akhter*, Woman Member, North Durgapur UP

5.1.8.1 Socio-economic and Family Profile

Kakoli Akhter, 40, was elected UP member in 2011 in the North Durgapur UP, Comilla Sadar Upazila from Comilla District. She contested the election from her constituency and she was elected a member of the Shasongacha village. After her husband's death she has been living with her only daughter in a small house in Shasongacha. As the family head, Mrs. Kakoli runs her family with a monthly income of 40,000 Taka (514 US\$). Most of her income comes from her contractory business. Kakoli, a graduate, lost her husband in 2005. Kakoli's father was also a graduate and he served in a private organization. She lost her father recently, like her husband. Kakoli had 3 sisters, but she did not have any brothers. Her

* This interview conducted on 26 August 2013 at 11:10 am at the UP office.

eldest and second sister both completed their higher secondary level education and are currently living with their husbands. Kakoli is the third among her sisters, and her youngest sister, with a Master in Arts degree, is now serving in an NGO.

5.1.8.2 Involvement in NGO and socio-political Linkage

Regarding the socio-political involvement of her family, it was learnt that Kakoli's uncle had served in the Union Parishad for 30 years. One of her brothers-in-law also served in the Upazila Parishad. Her forefathers were involved in local judicial activities which are popularly known as sardari and matbari. Kakoli from her childhood was involved in student politics and now she is also involved in a local branch of the Bangladesh Awami League (BAL), one of the major political parties in Bangladesh. One of her maternal uncles was directly associated with the same political party; i.e. BAL. Before coming to the UP, she worked at Grameen Bank for 7 years. She had a very good linkage with Upazila and District Administration in Comilla.

5.1.8.3 Involvement in the UP

Kakoli is involved in a standing committee on culture and sports. She had an excellent experience of project implementation in the UP. She implemented 8 projects during the previous 2 years, and she attended several training courses in Comilla Upazila after coming to UP.

5.1.8.4 Challenges and coping pattern

In reply to a question about in a highly male-dominated society how she adjusted herself in the UP, she stated the following:

“The whole society is lagging behind because the whole society is patriarchal. Many husbands do not give weightage his wife; if they give proper respect to their wives the society could progress more. If a son did something wrong, all blames go to the wife but that husband does not think that from where the son has come and she opined that it should be shared by husband and wife both but without sharing the responsibility of the son's fault all faults should be blamed on the wife.”

She also indicated that there were 12 members and one Chairman in the Parishad and she elaborated as follows:

“Not only in UP but also to adjust anywhere in the world, everybody should have to apply technique and by adopting proper technique one had to survive in the world. According to Kakoli, everybody should have to opt the appropriate technique and nobody would promote you. It is you who had to fix where you wanted to go.”

Sharing her ideas about the male members, she expressed the notion that the male members were elected by 1000 voters whereas the female members were elected by 4000 voters and not only that, the women members also worked much better than the male partners and they had more public support than that of the male members. She stated that they worked and gave direction in 3 wards whereas the male members worked in one ward only. As a result she thought that they were clearly superior to the male members in the UP. She opined that “in a society, all would try to suppress you and it is you whom you should overcome from all sorts of pressure and if you do not surpass all of your obstacles nobody would pick you up.” She deemed that they came there to the UP to work as per the demand and wishes of the public. She said that they came there against many odds and accepting many ills in the society. She thought that “it is their responsibility to develop the women community because if they could develop the women folk, they could ensure social progress as 50% of the populations in Bangladesh were women.”

There is a proverb that says that:

“If you give me a good and educated mother, I will give you a good and educated nation. I have the same access and privilege like the male member, so I cannot do anything in accordance to the demand of the male member. I can only comply with the legal provision. It is our pleasure that our Chairman strongly supports the cause of the women members, so we feel secured in this Union Parishad.”

5.1.8.5 Her Experiences and Realities

She stated that she was personally engaged in a contractor business so she needed to keep busy the whole day long there. She was also engaged in distribution and marketing of some agricultural products. When asked as a woman how she managed such a challenging profession like a contractor business, she answered that in Bangladesh such a type of profession was also tough for a man but as she was courageous enough to do that business being a woman. She then shared her grim reality with the present author and said that “I lost my husband and after my husband death, I never wanted to be a burden for others in my family.” She also stated that her eldest sister’s husband was an executive engineer in the Public Health Engineering Department. She said that after her father’s death she was bought up by him. She mentioned that while she was living with them she came into contact with some of the suppliers and contractors through which she came to know about the contractor business. She added that now after doing some practical work, she had obtained so much knowledge from it that she could help others do this business. She thought that if some women could come forward like her, then it would not take much time to develop Bangladesh society. She opined that the women of her country were afraid of what society and others would say. That is why emphasizing it she opined that society and others could only talk about but could not solve her problem, so she should not pay heed to what others and society were saying. She said that following such a motto of life she would march forward for her future progress.

Salient Features and Significant Factors of Kakoli’s Case

(1) Family legacy and political linkage: It was learnt from Kakoli’s case that her relatives were involved in the UP and Upazila, and Kakoli herself was involved in local BAL politics. Therefore, it can be noted that Kakoli became a woman leader using her family and political linkage as well.

(2) Constant struggle helps in obtaining access in contractory profession: From her profound struggle with the stark reality of her own life experience she obtained the art and capacity to live with dignity and boldness and courage. Having lost her father and husband, she had to struggle immensely to adjust herself with the harsh reality of life, which led her to choose an uncommon profession

like that of a contractor. In a typical Bangladeshi society, the contractor business is mainly the domain of musclemen and party cadres where it is rarely found that any woman is involved in such a profession of risk and challenge as well. She had an indomitable, self-willed and forceful mentality, and more specifically she was motivated to choose contractor business as she has gained access by her brother in law who was an executive engineer in one of the government machineries and later she obtained mastery over it by way of her massive struggle with her own life experiences.

(3) No brother to detract power: In the words of Kakoli it was apparently known that she did not face discrimination from the UP Chairman whom she represented as a relatively good man but in the present author's analysis Kakoli was able to ensure her equal rights in the UP through her stalwart personality and her uncompromising attitude toward not bowing her head to the patriarchy. Kakoli's achievement of success in establishing gender equality in the UP was possible due to her stark reality of her personal life experience. The attitude that she developed in her family life was also very important as there was no brother to detract power and authority from her in their family.

(4) Strong commitment: Her strong commitment to becoming self-reliant without being a burden to others, her NGO background at Grameen Bank, her wide network and access to the local administration and social elites, her involvement in student politics and also in political parties, etc. were some of the major factors that helped her become an empowered personality.

(5) Life experience helps overcome male domination: Kakoli strongly put forward the rationale why women members should never bow their head to irrational practices and should not compromise with the supremacy of the male members in the UP. Fighting and struggling with the ills of a patriarchal society she even vowed to challenge the male domination in the UP and she was very successful in overcoming it, arguing with the male members and the Chairman. Another factor was also important for her life experience because she did not have to face patriarchal problem in her family life, as she had no brother in her parental family. Her case evidently shows that given the proper attitude, knowledge, skills, and experience, women can overcome the problem of patriarchy and be certain of their due rights and

shares in the society. Through achieving the proper sense of empowerment she never thought what others would think about her. She never paid heed to what others would say or if they would speak ill of her. This was the main essence of her real success in life.

(6) Coping strategies: Through the case of Kakoli it was observed that in order to tackle and intimidate the male domination imposed through the primordial patriarchal armament, the coping strategy she adopted was upholding the strong logic and argument attached to, choosing the right technique for fighting for her rights without listening to other or paying attention to social stigma, her unpromising and resilient attitude, forceful personality and indomitable will force to win, etc. Thus Kakoli successfully overcame the challenges of male domination and established her equal rights in the UP.

5.1.9 The Case of Hasnara Begum*, Woman Member, Alkora UP

5.1.9.1 Socio-economic and family profile

Hasnara Begum, 53, became a UP member through the adult franchise in 2011 in the Alkora UP, Chouddagram Upazila, Comilla District. She hailed from North Kaichoti village. She, an HSC, is married to government service holder, who is now retired from service. She runs her family with a monthly income of 20,000 Taka (257 US\$), which comes from her husband's pension and her son's service. Hasnara Begum has no landed property except her homestead. Her husband has a BA and is now passing a retired life. She has a single family which is composed of 5 members. Hasnara Begum has 1 son and 5 daughters, of whom 3 are married.

5.1.9.2 Involvement with NGOs and Politics

Regarding her family network it was learnt that nobody in her family served in the UP in the past. Her forefathers were engaged in local judicial activities such as sardary and matbari. She has no brother and only one sister, who is now a housewife. Both her uncles had below SSC level of education and had already passed away. She is serving on a Standing Committee on Education, Health and Family Planning of the UP. Before coming there she used to work at an NGO named

*This interview was conducted on 9 September at 11:45 am at Chouddagram Upazila Complex, Comilla.

Bangladesh Rural Advancement Committee (BRAC) for almost 15 years. Regarding her political linkage, she is involved with Bangladesh Awami League (BAL). She had a connection with student politics during her school life. None of her family members or relatives was actively involved in politics. Including this term she has been serving in the UP for the last 3 terms.

5.1.9.3 Experiences and views of the UP

Concerning her experience in the UP, she informed the interviewer that their Chairman was good so they have work nowadays. She said that as she had some experience in the UP and therefore she tried to speak all the time in favour of the women members in the meetings so that they could get their right shares in the UP. During this term she attended 4 training courses.

When asked that about how the male members have accepted the existence/presence of female members in the UP, she noted that everything depends on the Chairman and if the Chairman has a positive attitude towards the women members, then the male members cannot create/make problems for the female members. In the UP the Chairman supported the female members, so they (the women) generally do not face problems but in other UPs, the male members have hardly accepted the presence of the female members in UP to date.

Pointing to the role of women she elaborated the following:

“We should not forget that there are some women members who were not at all competent as a women member, even by education, by her own capacity and by her quality to make her acceptable to others and by all means they are unacceptable to the male members and therefore they could not do anything in the UP. If anybody wants to have project, then they need to provide money to the Chairman. The male members give much money but on the other hand, women members did not want to give money to the Chairman, that’s why they are denied of providing projects from the Chairman. The women members have yet to empower themselves to bargain with it.”

Salient Features and Significant Factors of Hasnara Begum

(1) NGO and political involvement: Hasnara Begum was involved in student politics from her school life and she had worked at BRAC for many years before she was elected to the UP. Hence, her involvement in politics and an NGO might have helped her to become a woman leader in the UP.

(2) No brother to detract power: Hasnara had no brother in her family that might have helped her become an empowered leader in the UP, and like the previous case of Kakoli, there was no one in their family to detract from her power and authority, which might have helped her to play a strong leadership role in the UP.

(3) Accepting patriarchy helps WLs get better rights in the UP: From her case it can be learnt that when woman members have a good relationship with the male Chairman, the women can get better rights in the UP, which means that if women members accept the reality of paternalistic norms, it will result in better benefits for them. A good relationship with the Chairman shows the fact that being a male, all women members need to accept the Chairman as their leader and when the Chairman finds that these women members are subservient to him, other male members will also accept the presence of the women members in the UP. The Chairman in fact upholds the symbolic presence of the patriarchy and male domination and he epitomizes this spirit through his approval of the assignment of infrastructural projects to the women members.

(4) Women for women: Another crucial factor that also emerged from this case was that women can help women better as being the experienced woman member, she always speaks on behalf of the rights of the other 2 women members as she was previously elected 3 times in the UP, so she has the strength to raise the issue of the rights and privileges of the women members in the UP. This is why, to develop the women in the society, it was quite justified to empower more rights to the women members so that these women members can help in the overall upbringing and uplifting of the rural women.

(5) Some WLs have a lack of proper knowledge about the UP: Hasnara's case also upholds the fact that in the UP, some women are not quite equipped with the necessary knowledge and expertise and some are unwilling to engage themselves in real development actors; rather they were very much guided by

their husband and they were playing some sort of proxy role in the UP. However, there is no denying the fact after having their required knowledge and experience, they never play the same proxy role in the UP.

(6) Corruption: This case also retells the saga of corrupt practices in the UP, as Hasnara disclosed that in order to give project assignments to the male and female members, they need to bribe the Chairman. Women are inherently honest and they do not want to comply with the established corrupt practices in the domain of local governance. Women members sometimes are being deprived as they have refused to pay the shares to the Chairman.

(7) People reward good leadership: Last, the very fact behind her occupying a 3-term (15 years) membership in the UP might be that she became very popular and was well accepted by her constituents through her excellent performance, honesty and competent leadership quality.

5.1.10 The Case of Nazma Akhter*, Woman Member, Amratoli UP

5.1.10.1 Socio-economic and Family Profile

Nazma Ahkter has won the UP election of 2011 from Krisnapur village, Amratoli UP, Comilla Sadar Upazila, Comilla District. Nazma, 37, is now married to a service holder. She has one son and one daughter and she lives in a joint family with 16 members. Her husband and she both have an HSC (Higher Secondary Certificate) level education. Taking her husband as the family head, she runs her family with a monthly income of 80,000 Taka (1029 US\$) per month. The majority of the family income comes from the family business, which is supported by her husband's service. Nazma comes from a rich family. Her family is well furnished with a big TV set, a refrigerator, a Honda motor cycle, a laptop, and she has 3 shops and she also possesses 3 acres of landed property. In her family no one played a representative role in any of the existing political institutions in Bangladesh, but her family had been involved in local judicial activities in the village for a long time.

* This interview was undertaken on 25 September at 5 PM.

5.1.10.2 Involvement with NGO and politics

Before coming to the UP she used to work in an NGO named Prime Worker. Regarding her political linkage, she was involved with the student wing of the Bangladesh Awami League (BAL) since her school life and now she is also involved with the BAL. Her husband is actively involved with the local committee of the BAL politics. She maintains a linkage with the local MP in Comilla.

5.1.10.3) Playing a Role in the UP

Being asked by the researcher, she shared her work experience in the UP. She responded that at first it was a little bit of a problem to understand development work but gradually she had understood everything easily with the help of her elder brothers who were the male members, Chairman, and Secretary of the UP. She said that when she faced any problem she received help from them all. Now she could understand almost everything in the UP.

She is involved with 2 Standing Committees, namely Education, Health and Family Planning; and Development and Conservation of Environment and Tree Plantation. She has come to the UP for the first time. During her tenure there, she attended a lot of trainings programs which included Women Empowerment, the Role and Responsibilities of Women Members in the UP, Health and Environment, Construction and Repairing of Roads, Pools, Culverts, and Returning Walls, etc. These training courses were organized by a local NGO (Darpan), the Director General of the Health and Family Welfare Services Office, Comilla and LGED, Comilla Office.

Sharing her project experience she informed the interviewer that when allocations came for project undertakings, at first convening a meeting the Chairman informed them that all that some projects had come. Then in consultation with all present at the meeting, the Chairman decided where to undertake the project. After that the respective members were required to call a ward meeting in their respective wards and through such ward meetings they selected their project as per priority. Then they prepared an estimate for that project as per the budget allocation of that project. Then they submitted that project to the UP.

5.1.10.4 Community Services Through Salish

In the course of the discourse she shared a few experiences of rendering community services to the women. Sharing one incident, she described how she helped a woman victim in her village. She elaborated as follows:

“Once one woman came to me and disclosed all her painful story to me. She told that she got married 3 years ago, where she got a baby there in that family. The victim somehow came to know that her husband has got married another woman and her husband was away from her since last 3 years and he was not giving any money for running her family. Her husband kept her in her father’s home and did not take any attention and care for the last 3 years.”

The victim came to Nazma, as she is a UP woman member in her area, to get some help for overcoming her sufferings. Nazma, on hearing everything, decided to meet a local advocate in the local legal aid NGO. She went there taking the victim with her and disclosed everything to that advocate. Then the lady advocate informed them that at first they could send a “show cause notice” to the victim’s husband informing him of the whole case. Receiving that notice the victim’s husband did not respond. After that the advocate sent the victim’s husband 3 notices consequently and with the last notice it was stated that if the husband did not come to meet them within 7 working days after getting that notice, a legal case would be filed against him in the Women and Children Affairs Court. Immediately the victim’s husband responded and came to meet the advocate. Then her husband promised that he would rent a home for her and would start a family with that victim again. However, after that her husband never did anything for her. Then they again went to that advocate and decided to file a law suit against her husband. In the meantime, the woman member also tried another strategy and contacted the UP Chairman of the jurisdiction of the husband and told him everything. Then the Chairman also informed her husband to meet him, but waiting 7 days the Chairman said that as the husband did not come to meet him within that period he requested that the woman member

proceed further to file the case against the husband. Then the advocate made a case and after that her husband was forced to accept her as a wife.

Salient Features and Significant Factors of Nazma Akhtar

(1) Political linkage: It was learnt that Nazma Akhtar had no family background that included a political network through which her leadership role flourished, but she was directly involved with student politics from her school life and her husband was actively involved in local politics in the Bangladesh Awami League, which might have been helpful in her becoming a community leader. By using her political linkage she was motivated to grow as a community leader. She maintains a good liaison with the local MP, possibly using her political prerogatives.

(2) Family background helps leadership: Nazma's socio-economic profiles and family background may have helped her play a leadership role in the UP.

(3) Enabling environment helps WLs play better roles: Nazma said that the male members were very supportive of her during her learning process when she joined the UP and through her experience it was evident that she had obtained good knowledge about UP project management. The reason is that the chief executive Chairman created an enabling environment for that. Providing such a supportive mentality by the UP Chairman was possible due to his higher education, as he had obtained a Master in Social Sciences Degree from the University of Chittagong.

(4) Women for women: Women can play a role for the women, like a messiah, which is quite evident from her illustrations of the community service she shared in her case. This is exactly the most desired role that the women members can render to the community women. Previously the male members could never deal with such matters at the grassroots level, but now the women members are playing a formidable role to safeguard the interests of the life-related matters of women in the community and these women are contributing in terms of establishing the rule of law and social justice, which are the basic twin objectives of ensuring good governance in rural society. This is the best example of ensuring good governance at the community level by the women leaders in the UP.

(5) Culturally suitable judgment: Like Parul's case (see case number 5.6), the same analysis is applicable here too. From the point of substantive rationale,

the solution that Nazma provided to the family is still questionable because other alternative solutions for the victim might represent better judgment. Forcing her husband to accept his married wife with a baby can be even more harmful for the victim's life if there is no mutual understanding, love or mental/emotional attachment for the sustenance of the marital relationship.

5.1.11 Summary of the Findings on Leadership by UP Women Chairpersons

Based on the analysis of the salient features and factors of all five cases of women UP Chairpersons, the following summary has been prepared. Some of them are related to the leadership process, while others are related to their traits, performance, experiences, challenges, coping strategies, contribution to governance, and suggestions.

(1) Family Legacy: To become a leader, family legacy plays a supportive role. It was evident from the cases that except for Mina, all of the UP Chairpersons had deep roots in their family tradition. By observing their close relatives' role in the public domain, some women Chairpersons obtained the proper attitude and stature to serve in the public domain. Thus using their family political network they became UP Chairpersons. In a traditional society, where women are socially, culturally, economically, and politically entrapped and enchained with lots of bottlenecks, in such a context, breaking the bondage of all of those hurdles women may find themselves helpless to become leaders in the public domain, so family legacy may be helpful for those women leaders to participate in the political sphere.

(2) NGO Background: Most of the women Chairpersons in the UP were found to have been previously involved with NGOs. It was evident that out of 5 UP Chairpersons, 4 were directly involved in different NGOs before they were elected to the UP. Having been involved in NGOs these women leaders obtained enough experience to work at the grassroots level. During their involvement in NGOs they might have received a lot of training and opportunities to interact with many people and situations. Women's prolonged association and work experiences with NGOs helped them to achieve social mobility, conscientization, enough practical knowledge, courage and mental strength, etc., which in turn, might have helped them to form their attitude and behavior, beliefs, and thinking patterns to develop their

personality and to achieve some managerial capacity. The combining effects of all those above factors might have resulted and also contributed to their assuming a leadership role in the community.

(3) Linkage with Political Parties: Leadership does not grow automatically in human life. Some sorts of previous associations and linkages with political institutions can be the cause of the leadership process. It was found that out of five, 2 Chairpersons had political affiliation from their student life, which might have helped them achieve a leadership position. In the case of 2 other Chairpersons, it was found that their husband was currently directly involved in political parties. The last one had a strong family legacy.

(4) Family Support: Family support helped the women leaders to emerge as public leaders. In the case of Mina and Nargis, this was quite evident. The 3 others had a strong family legacy, which indicated that they also became women leaders by using their family support.

(5) Socio-economic Background: A strong socio-economic background played a significant role in terms of the efficaciousness of the women leadership. Except for Baroi, all of the women Chairpersons under study had a strong socio-economic base, which might have helped them to play an effective role at the community level, overcoming myriad socio-cultural, political, and administrative bottlenecks, which were inherently embedded and entrapped in the whole rural governance parameter, which is quite complex and complicatedly intertwined with those above factors.

(6) Training Received: It was found that almost all of the women Chairpersons attended various training programs during their tenure, which surely helped with their job performance at the UP.

(7) Linkage with MP: It was found that among the 5 UP Chairpersons, all had a linkage with the MP. Undoubtedly for playing an important role in a political institution, a linkage with an MP is extremely essential, as the MP has a direct role in local development, so it is quite natural to maintain a good relationship with him or her.

(8) Linkage with Local Administration: For playing an effective role in the UP it is quite necessary to maintain a good relationship with local

administration, as the local administration also plays a supporting role for local development. It was found that all 5 women Chairpersons had a good linkage with local administration. As all public funds are channelized to the UP through Upazila, it was quite natural for the UP Chairpersons to maintain a relationship with local administration. Among the Chairpersons under study, Nargis was directly involved in the UNO in solving her problem in local development while the others were just maintaining a working relationship. Such a working relationship is mutually beneficial for the UNO and Chairpersons both.

(9) Reelected Issue: Among the 5 Chairpersons, except for Mina, 4 Chairpersons were elected for more than one term. Mina contested the UP election 3 times, including her current leadership position. This is an important indicator for women leaders. Due to women leaders' huge popularity they could achieve this, which means that they were really performing excellently in their assigned role through their competent leadership. In the context of Bangladesh, most of the UP Chairmen can be found to be involved with corrupt practices, but these women leaders through their honesty, integrity, and quality leadership are trying hard to bring change and transformation at the local level, which might be the cause of their being elected for the second term. Coming to the UP, these women leaders were able to grasp all of the necessary rules, regulations, and practices quickly, and they were also able to adjust to the prevailing established socio-cultural and political milieu of the rural society, which in turn might have helped them achieve success in bringing change and transformation to the rural society. Therefore people recognized their performance through electing them for multiple terms.

(10) Male Domination and Patriarchy: There are innumerable challenges for women leaders. However, the women Chairpersons identified male domination and patriarchy as the major problem due to the fact that in a patriarchy everything is judged with the concept of the superiority of men over women. Other factors those are intertwined and interlinked with patriarchy⁵² are no less a formidable challenge for the flourishing of women leadership in Bangladesh.

⁵² For details please see the discussion of the major challenges faced by women leaders in chapter 6.

(11) **Structural Bottleneck:** The whole structure of the UP has been structured in such a way that women members have little voice in UP governance. Women's role has been weakened, emaciated, made feeble, and curtailed by the existing structural arrangement of the UP. Out of 13 elected representatives there were 9 male members and 3 women members in the UP. Male Chairmen in tandem with male members have extremely overpowered the entire governance, where women members found themselves helpless. Male Chairmen are omnipowerful in the UP, which helps them to maintain an excessively autocratic role in the UP. Some Chairmen were found to have a relatively favourable attitude towards the role of women. In this author's analysis, the major cause underlying such an attitude is patriarchy, as the Chairman symbolizes superlative power and authority in the UP. It is quite natural for the women members to accept the Chairman as their leader as he holds the topmost position in the 13-member Parishad (council). Finding women members loyal and subservient to the Chairman, he favours promoting the role of women. Considering the Chairman's attitude towards women members, some male members also were found to extend their support to those women members. However the reality changed as soon as some of the women pointed out their equal shares and rights in the UP; the relationship, good behavior, and favourable attitude started to elapse. Women members are good and less harmful for male Chairmen as long as they do not want to raise their voice or make their choices heard, and demand their shares and rights. The women members are deemed good if they accept whatever the Chairmen allow or grant them but when women leaders call for their due rights, they no longer remain good and lose the supportive attitude of the male Chairmen.

(12) **Local Administration and MP Do Not Help Women Members:** From the above case discussed here it was found that at the initial stages, when women members were deprived of their due rights, they sought help and assistance from the UNO, DC, and MP, but they all advised them to adjust to the Chairman rather than providing practical solutions to their grievances. In fact, the whole political milieu causing enormous problem for women to play their role in the UP because the Chairman, being the chief executive of the UP, maintains an unholy alliance with the UNO, DC, and MP as they mediate the same interests for having/achieving control and sharing of the public funds flowing to the UP through the local administration (UNO, DC) and political system (MP). The role of local administration in local governance is very crucial and

complex. As a male the Chairman can easily adjust to the complex arrangement, but women, being relatively honest, have to struggle with such a systemic problem of the social setting.

(13) Prevalence of Corruption: Most of the Chairpersons identified that corruption has emerged as one of the stumbling blocks in the entire scene of local governance.

(14) Coping Strategy Followed by Women Leaders: Most of the women Chairpersons tried to cope with the male domination created by the male members boldly and courageously. The coping strategies adopted by the women Chairpersons were to use their knowledge gained through rules and regulation; to follow the ideals of honesty, integrity, transparency, and accountability in their all actions; to garner public support; bear/foster a resilient mentality with confidence, strong arguments, commitment, patience, strong and indomitable will power, and an uncompromising attitude toward their own value judgments, etc. Having experienced those coping strategies and also recognizing the fact that Chairpersons are holding the superlative power in the UP domain, male members, despite their absolute majority, were ultimately bound to comply with the Chairperson's value judgment for ensuring gender equality in the UP.

(15) Women are Promoting Governance in the UP: From the in-depth analysis of the cases studied here it was found that some women leaders are visibly making differences in the sphere of local governance through their crowning achievements in some areas, such as education and infrastructure (Nargis); safe drinking water, sanitation and drainage (Mina); and safety net benefits for the poor (Mina, Parul, Baroi). They ensured better governance in the UP through their sincerity, honesty, and integrity, which also helped them to promote transparency and accountability, reducing corruption and increasing community participation using a participatory, consultative, and cooperative style of management.

(16) Women Leaders Are Different than Male Members: Women leaders were found to be committed, honest, sincere, and dutiful in their assigned roles and responsibilities because all of the women leaders tried their best to follow the legal provisions. Moreover, in most cases, they showed their difference in the pursuance of strong value judgments in the case of women's representation and their entitlement, which is quite irrational according to the existing legal provision.

(17) **Women Have a Strong Community Mind:** The case of Nargis revealed the real picture in this regard, who emerged as a supra-social worker fostering a strong community mind, which was clearly reflected through her extensive community services. In the case of Nargis, it was evident that she had no child, which might have led her to the furtherance of her community mind for the cause of people.

(18) **Women Support Women's Causes and Interests:** One of the important themes found in the present study is very significant. All over the world it is evident that in the case of women's issues, women leaders play a very important role, which has been elaborately described in the governance part of the present study. It was found that as a woman Chairperson, Mina, Nargis, Samsunnahar, Parul extended their whole-hearted support for ensuring women's rights and equality in the UP amidst the serious male domination imposed by their male counterparts.

(19) **Role of Education:** From the cases it was found that education has an insignificant role in women becoming a successful leader. This was quite evident from the case of Nargis, who had only primary level of (read up to class five) education, but she was very successful in managing local problems involving and employing local administration very successfully. Her success was also credited to extending many social services and benefits to the poor people. Getting an award from the International Mother Teresa Foundation and winning the "Best Chairman Award" as recognition of her outstanding achievements in the UP have questioned the role of education. Nargis case also testifies the fact that education has little relation with performance.

(20) **People Value Honest Leadership:** In some cases it was found that people show respect to the women leaders due to their honest leadership image. One feature was also interesting: Parul and Baroi were elected Chairpersons after their husbands' assassinations. They both were first elected during the same tenure period for which their husbands were elected. Later on both were reelected by one term more. In the case of Nargis it was found that her husband was paralyzed. In the case of Mina, after she was elected, her husband passed away. Did people consider all of these factors when they voted for them?

(21) **The Chair Makes a Man or Woman:** From the words of Parul it could be easily understood that given a suitable environment and enabling legislation, women can

justify their roles and responsibilities properly, and in some cases they can even surpass men's performance. For example, Nargis is a case in point.

(22) Need for Change in Legal Provisions: Almost all of the women leaders identified the limitation of the existing legal provisions practiced in the case of reserved seats members and they deemed that it was a major problem in UP governance. Pointing to the existing weakness of the legal provisions, Nargis, a community-minded leader, aptly suggested raising the reservation quota from 33% to 50%.

5.1.12 Summary of the Findings on Leadership by UP Women Members

Based on the analysis of the salient features and significant factors of all five cases for both the UP Chairpersons and women members, it was found that except for a few uncommon issues, most of the issues were found paradoxically similar. Some of the common issues and uncommon issues are briefly discussed here to show how they are similar and dissimilar for women Chairpersons and women members.

5.1.12.1 Common issues identified for women members

The following issues were found to be more or less similar among women members and women Chairpersons:

(1) Family Legacy: It was evident from the cases that Fatema and Kakoli had deep roots in their family legacy, but in the case of Sufia, Hasnara, and Nazma, they did not have a legacy to become leaders in the UP.

(2) NGO background: Regarding NGO involvement, it was found that except for Kakoli, the other four women members were found to have been involved with NGOs.

(3) Linkage with political parties: It was found that out of the five women, 3 women members had political affiliation from their student life, which might have helped them obtain a leadership position. It was found that 3 of them were directly involved in political parties currently.

(4) Family support: Except for the legacy cases of 2 women members, no information regarding family support was found in the case of the other 3 women members.

(5) Socio-economic background: It was found that except for Nazma, most of the women members had a relatively low socio-economic base.

(6) Linkage with local MP: It was found that among the 5 UP women members, only Nazma had a linkage with the MP. It can be asserted that this is quite natural for the women members. In the case of the Chairmen, access to the MP is quite easy, but as a women member it is not easy to maintain a linkage with him or her.

(7) Training received: It was found that almost all of the women members attended various training programs during their tenure, which might have helped and influenced their job performance at the UP.

(8) Linkage with local administration: It was found that among the 5 women members, except for Nazma, 4 had a good linkage with the local administration.

(9) Reelected issue: Among 5 women members, 3 were found newly elected. The remaining 2 women members were elected more than one term, while Fatema was elected 2 times and Hasnara was elected 3 times.

(10) Male domination and patriarchy: Regarding male domination it was found that Fameta and Kakoli encountered male domination more than the other 3 women members because the others maintained a good relationship with their male Chairmen, which helped them get more benefits.

(11) Mismatch between representation style and their entitlement: Most of the women members identified that there was a problem between legal provisions and their entitlement.

(12) Prevalence of Corruption: Most of the women members identified that corruption was creating a problem for the effective participation of women members in the UP.

(13) Women support women's cause and interest: The same issue was reflected in the women members' case also. It was observed that Hasnara, being an experienced woman member who was elected 3 times in the UP, always upheld the rights of the other 2 women members. As a result, she boldly raised the issue of the rights and privileges of the women members before the UP Chairman. Therefore, to develop the women's position in the society, it was quite justified to empower more rights to the women members in the UP so that these women members could help with the overall development of the rural women.

(14) Coping strategies for women members: It was found that both members and the Chairpersons adopted different coping strategies to overcome the problem of patriarchy. In the case of Kakoli, it was observed that in order to tackle and intimidate the male domination imposed through the primordial patriarchal problem, the coping strategy she adopted was to uphold the strong logic and argument attached to it, choose the right technique for fighting for her rights without listening to others or paying attention to social stigma. Her resilient attitude, forceful personality, and indomitable force of will helped her to tackle male domination, etc. Thus Kakoli successfully overcame the challenges of male domination and established her equal rights in the UP.

5.1.12.2 Uncommon Issues That Emerged From the Cases of Women Members

(1) Providing community services through culturally-appropriate decisions: From the cases of Fatema and Nazma it was found that women members were providing community services, which were non-existent when women members were not in the Parishad. By participating in the salish some women members are providing community services in their jurisdictional area. Such an act i.e. participating in of social justice shows that women have proper capacity to deal with life-related matters with proper dignity and honour. Women can play a role for the women like a messiah, which is quite evident from both the case of Fatema and Nazma. Playing such roles by the women members is the most desired role for the rural women. Previously the male members could never deal with such matters at the grassroots level, but now the women members are playing a formidable role in safeguarding the interests of the life-related matters of the women in the community and these women are contributing to establishing the rule of law and social justice, which are the basic twin objectives of ensuring good governance in the rural society. The judgments that women are providing through the salish and solving the problem of women's life may not be substantively rational but they are providing culturally

appropriate solutions for the women. There is no denying the fact that men and women both live in a specific culture-bound, value-laden society, where all norms, values, actions, thoughts and beliefs are properly governed and applicable in line with that culture in a specific manner. According to the social norms of Bangladesh it can be judged that they were giving culturally-appropriate decisions, but in true sense or rational ground, not all of their judgments or actions could be accepted. Therefore, not all of their decisions could be supported, which in fact calls for necessary value changes in the society, where men and women can both enjoy the same rights and privileges without any discrimination.

(2) No brother in the family: It was found that some women members did not have any brother in their family. It was evident that in the case of Kakoli and Hasnara Begum, both of them emerged a little more empowered in their leadership style. For those women leaders, they need not face patriarchal problems in their family life as they had no brother in their parental family that could detract their power and authority from them. Therefore, it was observed that they both played a strong role against male domination.

(3) Some women members have a lack of knowledge and interest: Hasnara pointed out that in the UP, some women are not quite equipped with the necessary knowledge and expertise. Some were found to be unwilling to engage themselves as real development actors; rather, they were very much guided by their husband and they were playing some sort of proxy role in the UP. However, there is no denying the fact that after having their required knowledge and experience, they never played the same proxy role in the UP.

(4) Patron clientele relationship: From Sufia and Nazma it was observed that many male members were hardly able to implement more infrastructural projects during the tenure of 2 years, but some women members were getting more and more projects from their Chairman. This implied that they maintained a patron-client relationship with the UP Chairman. The patron-client syndrome was discussed in detail in the chapter devoted to the idea of male domination.

(5) Women members are secondary: Most of the women members faced discriminatory behavior from the UP Chairman, as most of the time

the Chairman distributed the large projects to the male members first and giving infrastructural projects to the women members was found to be a secondary issue always, which implied that that women members' position in the UP was secondary to that of the male members. This was the case everywhere in Bangladesh except where there are women Chairmen in the UP, although they also face challenges in ensuring equal rights for women. The general trends represented evidence of the deprivation and negligence of women members in the UP.

5.1.13 Summary of Both Women Chairpersons and Members of the UP

Based on the salient features and significant factors of all ten cases of women UP Chairpersons and members, the following summary has been prepared. Through a rigorous analysis and in line with the author's research questions and objectives, combining summaries of the findings of the cases of the Chairpersons and members, this conclusive summary has been categorized under the following themes: factors contributing to the leadership process, their major challenges and coping strategies, how women are changing rural governance, other important findings and suggestion for improvement, etc.

(1) Factors Contributing to the Leadership Process

It was observed that in most of the cases, the women leaders entered into political space by using their family network and dynastic political legacy, being surrogates for their husbands or fathers. Their NGO involvement helped them unleash their potential to grow as leaders. Women's prolonged association and work experiences with NGOs helped them to achieve social mobility, conscientization, enough practical knowledge, courage and mental strength, etc. This in turn might have helped them to form their attitude and behavior, beliefs and thinking patterns to develop their personality and achieve some managerial capacity. The combining effects of all those above factors might have resulted and also contribute to their assuming a leadership role in the community. Obtaining family support and their socio-economic background provided a supportive role to help them play an effective role as a leader. Their interaction and linkage with political parties and linkage with the local MP also helped them to play a role in the leadership position.

(2) Challenges of Women Leaders

The major challenges behind developing women leadership were identified as follows: patriarchy; structural bottlenecks created by a mismatch between a representation style and their legal entitlement; lack of support from the UP Chairmen, male members and unfavorable attitude from the local administration and MP in terms of paying attention to the cause of women's interests; massive corruption promoted by an unholy alliance through a patron-client linkage, and above all an omnipotent draconian autocratic authority structure of the Chairmen position—all of those have emerged as inhibiting factors in playing an effective role and regarding the participation of women in the UP. In some cases women members lack required knowledge and interest, and this also causes problems in terms of their taking part in the overall affairs of the UP. Due to the discriminatory behavior from the UP male Chairmen and members, women members have become secondary and they are being deprived of their due rights and shares in the UP.

(3) Coping Strategy Adopted by the Women Leaders

Most of the women Chairpersons tried to cope with the male domination boldly and courageously. The coping strategy adopted by the women Chairpersons were using knowledge gained through rules and regulation; following honesty, integrity, transparency, and accountability in their all actions; garnering public support; bearing/fostering a resilient mentality with confidence, strong argument, commitment, patience, strong and indomitable will power, an uncompromising attitude toward their own value judgments, etc. Having experienced those coping strategies, and also realizing the fact that Chairpersons are holding the superlative power in the UP domain, the male members, despite their absolute majority, have ultimately accepted the Chairpersons' rationale for ensuring gender equality in the UP.

(4) How Women are Changing Governance

Women members have ensured better governance in the UP through their sincerity, honesty, and integrity, which also helps them provide various community services, enhancing the scope of pro-poor services and benefits, promoting transparency, accountability, reducing corruption, and increasing

community participation using participatory, consultative, and cooperative governance. Through the salish women are upholding their voice and choice at the community level, which helps the women members play a formidable role in safeguarding the interests of the life-related matters of women in the community and thus women are contributing to the establishment of the rule of law and social justice, which are the basic twin objectives for ensuring good governance in the rural society. Women are changing rural governance by possessing qualities such as commitment, honesty, sincerity, pursuance of strong value judgments in the case of women's rights and entitlements in the UP.

Some women leaders have emerged as supra-social workers, fostering a strong community mind through providing extensive community services and bringing about transformative changes and development at the grassroots. Some women were found to be promoting the cause and interests of women's issue at the UP level and thus they are striving to ensure women's rights and equality in the UP among the serious male domination imposed by their male counterparts. In some cases it was found that people are giving value and showing due respect to the women leaders due to their honest leadership image. Given the suitable environment and enabling legislation, women can prove their worthiness through upholding the position of the Chair and playing their roles and responsibilities properly, and in some cases they can even produce better performance than their male counterparts.

(5) Other Important Findings

It was found that those women leaders that had no brother to detract their power and authority in the family were playing an empowered role and doing excellent job in their assigned role, overcoming the challenge of patriarchy. In some cases it was observed that the women's education played an insignificant role in their being successful as a community leader. In analyzing their socio-economic background it was found that women leaders had a moderate education, the majority of them were married, and most of them belonged to the middle age group (30-40 age).

(6) Suggested Interventions by the Women Leaders

Almost all of the women leaders identified the limitation of the existing legal provisions practiced in the case of reserved seat members, as they

deemed that it was a major problem in UP governance. Pointing to the existing weakness of the legal provision, some of them suggested raising the reservation quota from 33% to 50%.

5.1.14 Some Commonalities between the Chairpersons and Women Members

There were other common experiences and features among the women Chairpersons and members (discussed in Table 5.3). In the field of leadership process, WLs come to the leadership position using their legacy, NGO involvement, and political network. They both tried to maintain a relationship with the local-level administration. They both received family support from their family for becoming leaders in the UP. Both leaders attended various training programs after they were elected to the UP. They both had a moderate education level and all of them were married.

Table 5.3 Some Common Features for both Women Chairmen and Members in the UP

Women Leaders with Name and Position	Some Indicators for Women Leadership					
	Family Legacy	NGO Background	Linkage with Political Parties	Linkage with MP	Linkage with local Administration	Reelected issue
<i>Chairpersons</i>						
Mina	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Fresh
Samsunnahar	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	2 times
Nargis	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	2 times
Baroi	Yes	Yes	No		Yes	2 times
Parul	Yes	No	No	Yes	Yes	2 times
<i>Members</i>						
Fatema	Yes	Yes	No	No	Yes	2 times
Sufia	No	Yes	No	No	Yes	Fresh
Kakoli	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	Fresh
Hasnara	No	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	3 times
Nazma	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Fresh

They both identified male domination, lack of support from the administration, corruption and lack of legal provision, and the autocratic role of the Chairmen. Both of them adopted suitable coping strategies to adjust and overcome the challenges they faced in the UP. They both used strong arguments and their own value judgments to intimidate the self-willed attitude of the male representatives and they both tried to support women's causes and interests to the best of their capacity. It was found in both cases that they both were rewarded by their constituency due to their honest and sincere efforts and demonstrative and scholastic achievements. Thus in both cases they were elected for more than one term to the UP. They both tried their best to ensure good governance through their sincerity, integrity, and reducing the corrupt practices in the UP, and extending pro-poor benefits and services to the community, thus making a difference in rural governance.

5.1.15 Dissimilarities between the Chairpersons and Women Members of the UP

Regarding the legacy issue, it was found that most of the Chairpersons came to the UP using their family tradition and dynastic roots, but in the members' case the phenomenon was rather weak. Rather, in the case of the linkage with political parties, the members had a strong relation with the Chairperson. In the case of the relationship with the MP, a strong relationship was observed for the Chairpersons but on the other hand the UP members have very little role in it. It was quite natural that the Chairpersons had a better socio-economic background than the women members in the UP. All Chairpersons, except one, were reelected, but on the other hand, 3 members were newly elected. However, one was reelected 3 times, which was not found in the Chairpersons' case. In the case of the women members it was found that some of them lacked knowledge, but in the case of the Chairpersons, this was not reported. Providing community services through establishing social justice was also unique in the members' case. Patron-client features were found in the members' activities but they were absent in the case of the Chairpersons. Some women leaders were elected as UP Chairpersons after their husbands were assassinated. On the other hand, all women members were married.

5.1.16 Uniqueness between the Chairpersons and Members of the UP

In the case of the Chairpersons: In the case of the Chairpersons one woman leader was found to provide benevolent services, possessing a strong community mind and thus she appeared as a supra-social worker at the grassroots level, which was non-existent in the case of the members.

In the case of the Members: The issue of having no brother was observed in the members' profiles, which was not seen in the case of the Chairpersons.

5.1.17 Analytical Implications of the Findings of Both the UP Women Chairpersons and Members

In this part of the present discussion some of the findings obtained from the 10 case studies were analyzed in the light of the available literature from other studies. The issues included in the empirical analysis were family legacy, NGO involvement, political involvement, linkages with the MP, socio-economic background, and family support and training received by the women representatives. Moreover, other issues have also been analyzed with empirical evidence in the relevant sections.

1) Family Legacy: In the present study it was found that out of the 10 cases, 6 women leaders (4 Chairpersons and 2 members) directly come to politics using their family legacy. This corroborates the findings of other studies. A few research findings were obtained in the case of the legacy issue of the women members in the UP in Bangladesh. Quddus, Begum, Zahid, & Biswas (2001) found that 61% of the women leaders' nearest relatives and kin were actively involved in political activities. Among these, around 50% of the husbands of the women leaders were actively involved with different political parties. Regarding the family legacy of the women members, Rahman and Sultana (2005) found that 17.95% of the women member's relatives were previously involved in the UP, followed by 54.84% in 2006 and 65% in 2013, which implies that over a long period the number of women members coming to the UP leadership position using their family network and family political legacy was increasing gradually (Rahman, 2006a, 2013). In a traditional society like Bangladesh where the women's role is highly confined to the household and reproductive activities and they are subjugated and differentiated everywhere due to myriad socio-cultural, economic, and political problems, this may happen so.

From the South Asian perspective, evidence shows that many national-level women leaders entered into political office using their legacy or political dynasty and as surrogates of their husbands or fathers. It was found that “South Asia has a strong legacy of family politics where the phenomenon of daughters and wives standing as surrogates for their fathers or husbands is particularly apparent in regions of the world where women in leadership positions would be least expected” (Jalalzai, 2004).

It was observed that the first women Prime Minister of the world, Sirimavo Bandaranaike (1960-1965, 1970-1977, 1994-2000), and her daughter Chandrika Kumaratunga (1993, 1994) from Sri Lanka; Indira Ghandhi (1966-1977, 1980-1984), Sonia Ghandhi (wife of Rajiv Ghandhi and daughter-in-law of Indira Ghandhi) and Rabri Devi (1997) from India; Benzir Bhutto (1988-1990, 1993-1996) from Pakistan; Corazon Aquino (1986) from the Philippines; Yingluck Shinawatra (2011 to date); Khaleda Zia (1991-1996, 2001-2006) and Sheikh Hasina (1996-2001, 2009-2014, 2014 to date) from Bangladesh—all belong to that political group of individuals that became leaders using their family legacy or political dynasty (Paxton, & Hughes, 2007; Anderson, 1993, p.52; Boudreaux, 1991; quoted in Saint-Germain, 1993; Moraes, 1980, p. 127, quoted in Everett, 1993; Wikipedia, 2014). Scholars opine that the surrogate route to power may be most common where the attitude towards women is especially traditional (D’ Amico, 1995, p. 18; Burn, 2005, p. 234).

It was observed that in most of the cases surrogate leaders refer to their father’s or husband’s achievement during their public address. The fact might be that after assassination or being hanged or spending a great deal of time in prison, they try to make their husbands or fathers as martyr or heroes in the eyes of the public, and people vote for those surrogate wives or daughters as symbols of the continuing struggle that their fathers or husbands were engaged in. Analyzing the surrogate path to power, it was found that the “female widows of politically-powerful husbands often have little political experience before standing in as a surrogate for their husband. In contrast, daughters of political figures may have substantial political experience before taking power” (Genovese, 1993, pp. 212-3). Another important phenomenon is interesting here—that in most cases the sons, daughters or relatives of those surrogate

women leaders also followed their footsteps to come to the political sphere. India and Bangladesh are special cases in point.

2) Linkage with Political Parties: In Bangladesh the political identity of women leadership remains clandestine because elections are not held on a party basis. However, it was found that among the 10 cases, 5 women leaders (2 Chairpersons and 3 members) had political affiliations from their student life. Quddus et al. (2001) revealed that 39% of the women members were actively involved in politics but a few of them held positions in the political party. Gani and Satter (2004) found that 16.80% of the women members had a political linkage in the UP. Rahman & Roy (2005, 2006) found that 80% of women members were involved in political parties, and this was followed by 53% in 2013 (Rahman, 2013)⁵³.

3) NGO Background: Most of the women Chairpersons and members in the UP were found to be involved with NGOs. It was evident that out of the 10 cases, 8 were (4 Chairpersons, 4 members) were directly involved in different NGOs before they were elected to the UP.

Rahman (2006a) found that 64.52% of the women leaders had a linkage with various NGOs and socio-economic development organizations⁵⁴, 39% and 72% in 2007 and 2013 respectively (Rahman, 2007). Gani, & Sattar (2004) found that 50% of the women leaders were involved in NGOs.

4) Socio-economic Background: A strong socio-economic background played a significant role in the efficacy of the women leaders. Among the 10 case studies, 5 women leaders (4 Chairpersons and 1 member) had a strong socio-economic base, but the other 5 women members had a relatively low socio-economic base. Here a few issues have been considered in terms of looking into the socio-

⁵³These data were collected by the researcher during his field trip using a short checklist.

⁵⁴The UP women members were found to be involved in various NGOs which included BRAC, Grammen Bank, Social Welfare Sangstha, CDA, NFP, FPAB, Nari Punarbashan Kendra, BRDB, KARITAS, CCDB, VARD, Nari Uddog, Palli Bikash, Manabik Unnan Seba Sanstha, CARE, Jatiya Mohila Sangstha, World Vision, CICP, Women's Affairs Samity Member, Bureau Bangladesh, SDC, ASA, Protigga Parishad, Nari Kollayan, Legal Aid, Vission, Proshikha, Podokhep, Satota Samity, Prime, CVDP, WEINIP, Uddogh, FIVDP and various socio-economic development organizations including Ansar VDP, educational institutes, some insurance companies such as Delta Life Insurance, Progati life Insurance, Meghna Life Insurance, Alico Life Insurance, National Life Insurance, and Islami life Insurance.

economic profiles of the women leaders, which included age, education, income, and marital status. Different researchers have conducted studies on this issue, which are summarized below.

In the study conducted by the World Food Program (WFP, 1998) it was revealed that 42.78% and 25.56% of the women leaders belonged to the age group of 30-39 years and 20-29 years respectively. Quddus et al. (2001, p. 8) found almost similar findings, where 46.27% and 38.70% of the women leaders belonged to the 25-34 and 35-44 age group respectively. Rahman, & Sultana (2005) found 46.15% and 21.80% of the women leaders in the age group of 26-30 years and 31-35 years respectively. Most of the studies found a lower number of women leaders that belonged to below the age group under 25 years and the age group above 50 years. Rahman (2013) found that 72% of the women members belonged to the 30-39 age group, and 19% of the women were from the 40-49 age group and only 14% belonged to the 50-plus age group.

Regarding the women members' education the WFP (1998) study revealed that 56.11% of the women had a secondary level of education. It also showed that 15.00% and 6.94% of the women leaders had an SSC and HSC level of education. Only 5.28% of the women members had a bachelor level of education. Quddus et al. (2001) pointed out that 44.00% of the women had read up to the secondary level. In the same study it was found that 15.10% and 3.90% of the women had achieved SSC and HSC level of education respectively and only 2.90% obtained bachelor and master level of education. Rahman and Sultana (2005) found that 41.03% of the women leaders had an education up to the secondary level. It was also found that 24.36%, 8.97%, and 3.85% of the women leaders had an SSC, HSC, and bachelor level of education respectively. Rahman (2013) found that 39% of the women members had an education below the SSC level whereas only 19% of them had an HSC, and 8% of the women members had a bachelor level of education. The above findings show that the women members in the UP were moderately educated.

A WFP (1998) study revealed that 74.44% women members did not earn any money, while 15% of them had an annual income ranging from Tk. 6000.00 (77 US\$) to Tk. 20,000.00 (257 US\$). Only 9% of the women leaders had an annual income of Tk. 21,000.00 (270 US\$) and above. Quddus et al. (2001) exhibited that

16.82% of the women leaders had an annual income of Tk. 25,000.00 (322 US\$) whereas 17.77% and 15.14% of the women leaders belonged to the earning income group of Tk. 45,000-55,000 (579-707 US\$) and Tk. 85,000 (1093 US\$) per annum respectively.

5) Marital Status: In different studies it was revealed that most of the women leaders in the UPs were married. The WFP (1998), Quddus et al. (2001), and Rahman and Roy (2005) found that 84.72%, 85.8%, and 83.33% of the women leaders were married respectively. Rahman (2013) found that 95% of the women members in the UP were married.

6) Land Ownership by Women Leaders: A WFP (1998) study found that 53% of the elected women's families owned more than five acres of land and none of the elected woman was totally landless. This was supported by the study findings of Rahman, & Sultana (2005), where no women leaders belonged to the landless category. However, in a study conducted by Quddus et al.(2001) it was found that 2.73% belonged to the landless group. It was also revealed that 60.88% and 28.50% of the women leaders belonged to the small and medium farmer's group having land size of 0.05-2.45 and 2.50-7.49 acres respectively. Only 7.89% of the women leaders had 7.50 acres or more land. This differed however from the findings of the Rahman, & Roy (2005), which revealed that 61.74% of the women leaders had more than 7.50 acres of land. It was also revealed that 51.51% of the leaders had 0.5-4.99 acres of land. In the present study, it was found from the case studies that the women Chairpersons belonged to the relatively upper landed class because most of them had more than 5 acres of land (average 8.3 acres), but in case of the women members they belonged to the 0.5-4.99 acres of land group.

7) Issue of Being Reelected: Among the 10 cases, it was found that 6 women leaders (4 Chairpersons and 2 members) were elected for more than one term. Among them one contested 3 times and one was elected 3 times to a leadership position, and all 5 were elected for 2 terms in the UP. Rahman (2006a) found that only 14.52% of the women members were reelected in 2004. Gani, & Satter (2004) found that 55.80% of the women members were reelected. Again, Rahman (2013) found that 19% of the women members in the UP were reelected.

8) Role of Education: From the cases it was found that education had an insignificant role in terms of the women leaders being successful. This finding was corroborated by the findings of Siddiquee (2008), who found that compared to the women UP members with relatively higher levels of education, women having relatively lower level education were significantly more likely to have knowledge about their roles and responsibilities in the UP, and also those women were found more to be involved in the social welfare affairs in their communities.

9) Training Received by the Women Leaders: It was found that almost all of the women Chairpersons attended various training programs during their tenure, which might have contributed to their better job performance in the UP. Quddus et al. (2001) found that 89.78% of the women members received training for at least 3 days. Rahman (2006a) found that 76.56% had received training in the UP. Again, Rahman (2013) found that 98% of the women members in the UP attended various training program in different GOs and NGOs.

10) Linkage with the local MP: It was found that among the 5 UP Chairpersons, all had a linkage with the MP. Undoubtedly, in terms of playing an important role in a political institution, the linkage with the MP is extremely essential, as the MP has a direct role in local development, so it is quite natural to maintain a good relationship with the MP. Rahman (2013) found that 61% of the women members in the UP had a linkage with the MP.

CHAPTER 6

PARTICIPATION OF WOMEN LEADERS IN THE UNION PARISHAD: UNHEARD VOICES REGARDING THEIR PERCEPTIONS, CHALLENGES, AND COPING STRATEGIES

6.1 Introduction

This is the crucial part of the present research. After establishing initial contact through cell phone, the research participants were interviewed personally in the Union Parishad office. As the author's principal participants were women leaders, it was essential to maintain a pre-fixed schedule so that they could understand the sincerity of the research purpose and feel a sense of obligation to render their services properly. Then on meeting them, efforts were taken to establish a good rapport and trust with them so that they felt free and mentally to share their lived experience without hesitation. After the rapport and trust-building stage, some of the demographic, socio-economic and political profiles of the women leaders were collected and thereafter the women leaders were engaged in sharing their lively experience regarding UP affairs.

As soon as the short questionnaire was completed, the WLs were invited one by one to share their perceptions and experiences regarding their participation in UP activities. Sometimes the WLs were allowed to respond in groups as well. All of these discussions took place in the UP complex. The women members were asked some open-ended questions, which began with their perceptions of participation and ended with few suggestions for improvement of their participation in the Union Parishad. All of the discussions were in Bengali and recorded with a voice recorder after obtaining their informed consent. As the lion's share of the present research participants were people's representatives, instead of using pseudo names, their original names were used in the research. On completion of the entire data-collection process, at first, a transcription in Bengali was prepared and thereafter the whole transcript again was translated into English. While doing so, tireless and meticulous efforts were employed to translate it, keeping the exact meaning concerning what they said but at the same time in a few cases, it was really challenging to translate those

Bengali narratives into exact Bengali words. However, in doing so highest care and attention were taken on behalf of the researcher himself.

After preparation of the textual briefings into English, efforts were made to seek out some broad themes and after several rehearsals the thematic arrangements of the research were more or less grasped and the following subtitles were in fact the thematic arrangements which were basically developed by the researcher purely based on the narratives generated by the research participants.

After observation of the whole transcription the following themes were arrived at: 1) Participation of Women Leaders in the Union Parishad: Perceptions and Experiences; 2) Do Women Leaders Promote Better Governance?; 3) Are Women Members Different from Male Members?; 4) Do Women Leaders Work in Their Entire Jurisdictional Areas (3 wards)?; 5) Do Women Members Come to the UP Office Regularly?; 6) Perception of Reservation System for Women Members; 7) Are Women Proxy Leaders?; 8) Perception of Women Leaders; 9) To Whom Do People Generally Go for Services or Benefits; 10) Whether Membership Position Has Transformed into a Profit Seeking Position; 11) Coping Strategies of Women Members after Being Elected for the First time; 12) Diversified Experience of the Elected Functionaries; 13) Performance and Project Experiences of Women Leaders in the UP; 14) Women Members Encountering Extremely Male-Dominated Atmosphere in the UP; 15) Quarrels with Male members: Women Members Challenging the Serious Male Domination; 16) How Women Members Have Become UP Leaders; 17) Prevalence of Corruption in the UP; 18) General People Have Less Interest in the UP: UP Activities Are Not Demand Driven Rather Supply Driven.

During the second stage, the above themes were reorganized in terms of 12 broader themes, merging some of the themes into sub-themes such as: i) Participation of Women Leaders in the Union Parishad: Perceptions and Experiences; 2) Perception of Women Leaders; 3) Diversified Experience of the Elected Functionaries; 4) Performance and Project Experiences of Women Leaders in the UP; 5) Do Women Leaders Promote Better Governance?; 6) Are Women Members Different from Male Members?; 7) Women Members Encountering Extremely Male Dominated Atmosphere in the UP; 8) Quarrels with Male Members: Women Members Challenging the Serious Male Domination; 9) Coping Strategies of Women Members

after Being Elected for the First time; 10) Whether Membership Position Has Transformed into a Profit-Seeking Position; 11) General People Have Less Interest in the UP: UP Activities Are Not Demand Driven but Are Supply Driven; 12) Prevalence of Corruption in the UP.

In qualitative research it is very difficult to summarize the findings and make final conclusions from a huge amount of field notes⁵² (Mills and Huberman, 1984). Data analysis contains three interlinked sub-processes: data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing/verification (Miles and Huberman, 1994). One of the major challenges in qualitative research is data reduction. In line with the research questions, conceptual framework, the case and instruments, the entire data universe needed to be reduced. From the actual field notes, interviews, tapes, etc., the data needed to be summarized, coded, themes found, and clustering carried out and stories written. In the present study, the same process was adopted while field data were being managed.

Finally, in line with the research questions and objectives, all of the above themes were rearranged in only four broader themes: 1) Perceptions of Women Leaders; 2) the Major Challenges of Women Leaders towards Participation in the UP; 3) Coping Strategies of the Women Leaders; and 4) How Women Leaders Are Changing the Governance in the UP. Through such an exercise much of the data was reduced and synchronized based on a holistic framework for analysis in order to answer the research questions and objectives properly.

6.1.1 Perceptions of Participation of Women Leaders in the UP

At the start when the women leaders were asked about their participation of the overall affairs of the Union Parishad, the answers were a little bit surprising. As a researcher it was expected that the participants would produce responses in line with the research questions and objectives, but the ground reality was completely different, which was not unwelcomed by or unprecedented for the author. After the initial tour of a few UPs, some modifications in the research questions were made.

⁵² Mills and Huberman (1984) commented that analysis methods are rarely reported in enough detail for the readers to follow how a researcher got from 3,600 pages of field notes to the final conclusions. Again it was learnt that the database they consulted in the preparation of the 1994 edition of **Qualitative Data Analysis: An Expanded Sourcebook** had more than tripled since publication of the first edition (Mills and Huberman, 1984, 1994).

Perceptions help us to know how women leaders have understood their roles and participation in the affairs of the UP. Therefore, important responses gained through prolonged discourse with the women leaders relating to their perception of participation and a few issues were incorporated into the study.

According to the UP ordinance it was learnt that the activities performed by the Union Parishad cover a wide range of community services, such as maintenance of law and order; protection and maintenance of public property (roads, bridges, canals and culverts); maintenance, building, and development of physical infrastructure; lighting of public ways, public streets and public places; maintenance and regulation of huts and bazaars, and cattle compounds; planting and preservation of trees; promotion of cottage industries and family planning; preservation of UP records and issuance of birth and death registration and various kinds of certificates and licenses; settlement of petty disputes; and excavation of derelict ponds for pisciculture; regulating community behaviour; improving environment, forestry and disaster mitigations, etc.

Being asked about what they understood by the simple word “participation” in the sphere of the Union Parishad, one woman member from Bijoypur Maddham stated that: “We mean participation by doing projects and salish in the village on behalf of Union Parishad” (Woman Member, Bijoypur Maddham UP, 22 August 2013).

Regarding the same matter, one male member from Wahedpur UP, Mirsarai also opined that “Participation in the UP means, doing salish and constructing road, culverts and giving reliefs to the poor” (Male Member, Wahedpur UP, 30 August 2013).

This was really interesting to note that like the other elected representatives in the UP, women have the same opinion about participation. In fact, by doing projects women members can take part in the development process of the Union. Carrying out development projects in the community is one of the most important functions in the UP. Most of the resources at the UP level are disbursed through such undertakings. Therefore, irrespective of the Chairmen, and male and female members, all are interested in undertaking such projects in the UP. Most of the important decisions are mainly concerned with undertaking development projects at the UP level. Through

such endeavour women would like to ensure their due share of the rights which have been enjoying hitherto by the male representatives. Based on the theoretical/conceptual understanding of participation (discussed in literature review section) it was quite evident that the women leaders were taking part in sharing, controlling, priority setting, policy making and resource allocation and managing public goods and services and that this really affected community life in the rural setting. The intrinsic underlying meaning associated with such a perception uncovered the fact that women have pragmatically and intelligently opted the correct strategy to strike the right point just after stepping into the public domain. Likewise, salish is another popular service provided at the grassroots by the UP. Through the salish women leaders have been providing community services by establishing social justice and becoming popular faces in the community. They were born and brought up in entirely male-dominated patriarchal social constructs, where they found that males were deciding all of the important decisions that govern the whole society. From their whole life experience they found that dynasty after dynasty, kings after kings, rulers after rulers, through such an informal, unstructured quasi-judicial role the influential rural elites played a crucial role in exerting their control over social matters and thus they maintained and mediated the interests of the unholy alliances of those powerful luminaries through an in-built mechanism of a patron-client relationship. Now the time has come to take part in the governance of the society for women. The salish in fact appeared as a symbolic platform where women have aptly and tactfully integrated themselves in upholding their voices and choices regarding the society. Therefore, extracting the meaning and essence from the above quotation, we can say that women leaders have the perfect attitude and perception towards participation in local governance where they can exert their voice and preferences for giving justice and welfare to the community people.

One woman member from Gunabati UP mentioned her perception of participation, stating the following:

“In every day we need not do work everything. We generally do some works in UP such as birth registration; do village salish; help health and family planning; serve in school managing committee; attend

school meeting; implement development projects; distribute VGD and VGF cards; provide 40 days' work to the poor people and so on etc. But I do not know about land related problem so I never attend such meetings" (Woman Member, Gunabati UP, Choddagram Upazila, Comilla District, 9 September 2013).

The essence of the above-mentioned statement reveals the fact that women leaders have understood their roles and perception of participation properly, as they are taking part in deciding, sharing, and controlling many social services that directly affect the lives at the local level. Evidence also suggests (discussed elaborately in the relevant themes later) that women's participation in the abovementioned areas were found to have positive impacts on their life and wellbeing in the local community.

6.1.2 Are Women Proxy Leaders?

During the data collection it was never thought that such a theme would come out but in a very few cases it was found that women leadership in the UP was not entirely free from the proxy syndrome. The proxy leadership connotes an idea that "it is leadership mechanism that helps one to exercise Constitutional power by persons not enjoying the Constitutional mandate" (Aziz, 1996). Regarding proxy leadership a very insignificant number (3 WLs) of women leaders were found to be "proxy leaders" in the UP. Although at the initial level of their assuming a leadership position, this syndrome might have been visible, but in the course of their learned experience and after being pressured by their colleagues such a syndrome gradually diminished and soon after they emerged as a real leader in the UP. This can be understood from the following textual description of the WLs, which will be followed by an analysis.

During interviewing with the Chairperson of the Manikdaha UP, Vanga Upazila, Faridpur District, being asked that whether she found any woman that was just acting as a proxy leader, the Chairman replied in the affirmative and confirmed the idea with the following:

"I had got a woman in the last term who always came with her husband and she had very little interest in UP activities because her husband did

everything in her favour. Then I told her that if you come to the meeting always with your husband, general people spoke ill of you and they criticized you. I advised her that if you did not understand anything, I would rather help you understand what you did not understand but please do not come with your husband always” (Chairman, Manikdaha UP, 31 October 2013).

Again in another case one woman member from Wahedpur UP, Mirsarai stated the following:

“Her husband wants that she always share about all UP activities with him. When my husband asked about the meeting if I failed to say the exact reason he always criticized me and told that if you do not know then what do you know as a woman member? In fact, my husband always tries to keep me in his grip” (Woman Member, Wahedpur UP, 30 August 2013).

The same woman explained again as follows:

“In fact I am also member and he is also member, he runs UP and I also run UP... My husband always leads me from behind the screen. If I make any late⁵³ then he always ask me what are you doing there till now? Our husbands still want to keep power in their hand” (Woman Member, Wahedpur UP, 30 September 2013).

In the same UP, another woman member’s husband told her the following: “You need not do any job, whatever I can earn we would share it, so you can quit your job” (Woman Member, Wahedpur UP, 30 September 2013). Another woman

⁵³In the context of Bangladesh and more specifically in the prevailing age-old value system of Bangladesh, when a woman goes beyond the four walls of domestic life she needs to inform her husband and seek permission from him or her guardians (may be father, father-in-law or mother-in-law, etc. who act as the household head) and she needs to inform them about the possible time of her return from outside. If the time has already passed, everybody becomes worried about her. Here late refers to that context.

member from the Wahedpur UP, said that her husband forced her to sign the nomination paper and later she had developed some interest but she needed to do everything in line with the wishes of her husband.

The underlying assumptions for being a proxy leader lie with the fact that due to proper knowledge about their rules, functions, role and status, both men and women can be found to play a proxy role in the UP. Evidence also supports an unequal mode of representation, lack of proper knowledge about their power and resources, and an absence of proper guiding rules and regulations hinder women's effective participation in Union Parishad bodies (Islam and Islam, 2012). There are other reasons behind such a proxy role, which include the fact that female members do not get expect support or cooperation from their male counterparts while performing their duties. They are being harassed by their male colleagues in the work place (Panday, 2008; Rahman and Roy, 2005). It was found that elected female members have not yet reached equal status with their male colleagues in the Union Parishad. Even worse, they are not allocated equal shares in project distribution or committee memberships, and their opinions regarding Union Parishad decision-making are generally ignored since they are only a minority (Pandy, 2008; Siddiqui, 2005). All of these factors have inhibited many women members from playing an active role in the UP. From such a point of view, many male members also suffer from a lack of minimum knowledge about their role and functions, and also belong to such a proxy group. This was evident from the Indian context, where there persists the belief that women in the reserved seats are proxies and their husbands and male relatives exercise power and responsibility on their behalf. There is inadequate understanding of the way that women combine their multiple roles and perform their panchayat functions, but in the case of Pradhan (Chairmen) and Upa-Pradhan (Vice-Chairman), they have their husbands, who do not interfere in their wife's work and in fact supportive their work (Buch, 2009: 8-9). There is evidence that the proxy syndrome is not confined to women members alone but it can be seen among the elected male representatives as well (Sivanna and Gayathridevi, 2012). In the UP, there are directly-elected women Chairpersons and they also perform independently, so the same conclusion can be made in the case of the UP. Having an understanding of the cases studies and also from the phenomenological analysis, it was not observed

that many of the women have received assistance from their husbands or male relatives.

6.1.3 Major Challenges of Women Leaders in the UP

Regarding the women's participation, the women members identified three major challenges: male domination, corruption, and faulty legal provisions imposed on the women members in the UP. Due to these in-built or built-in problems imposed by the systemic arrangement of the UP, the women members encounter serious impediments that blocked their fullest, robust, and spontaneous participation in the UP, which is elucidated below by incorporating relevant evidence from other studies.

6.1.3.1 Women Members Encountering Difficulties: An Extremely Male-Dominated Atmosphere in UP

There is no denying the fact that the entire structure of the UP represents the major cause of male domination, whereas out of 9 male members, there were only 3 women members, and the Chairman, being the male, also promotes the cause of male hegemony in the UP. At the initial stage, the existence of women members was not accepted by the male members, but through the constant fighting of women members concerning their rights and privileges, now the women members to some extent have been able to establish their rights but still they face a constant male domination in every UP in Bangladesh.

The major bottleneck, more specifically the number one challenge regarding women's participation in the UP, is male domination, which can also be called in terms of "patriarchy." This male domination can be explained in many different ways. Women's lower level of power and status can also be described in many ways, but common terms include gender stratification, gender inequality, female disadvantage, sexism, and patriarchy (Chafetz, 1990). Patriarchy is a term used to describe the social system of male domination over females, where male domination is built into the social, political and economic institutions of society. Patriarchal societies are characterized by male control of economic resources, male domination of political processes and positions of authority, and male entitlement of sexual services. According to the feminist perspectives, though some societies are

more patriarchal than others, all modern societies have a patriarchal structure (Paxton and Hughes, 2007:24).

Male members never accept women as their colleagues but are rather obsessed with patriarchal beliefs and tenets; they always judge women and perpetually subjugate them to their wishes and demands, which is vividly reflected in the words of a male member. During my discussion with women members of the South Durgapur UP, Comilla Sadar, Comilla District, an old male member, was seriously annoyed with the present author, observing that the entire discussion was going on with women members, and stated the following at the top of his voice:

“It is the male members who brought you in the UP and gave rights to you. He warned the women members not to claim with their rights and said that if they further bother for their rights, we would take away it from you again” (Male Member, South Durgapur UP, 26 August 2013).

The above quotation is an extreme opinion enunciated by an old male member. He viewed that instead of discussing with him, the whole discussion was going on with women members, who were talking about some important problems of the UP and at one point he vowed to utter such a sweeping but bold utterance, which in fact was a true reflection of the attitude of male towards female members. It was observed that across the region, older, less educated, politically-conservative, Muslim citizens were less supportive of women in politics than their younger, more educated, more liberal, and Christian counterparts (Wilcox, Stark, and Thomas, 2003).

When male members cannot win in depriving women of their due rights in the UP, they try to create problems using different means. Being very much imbibed and brought up with patriarchal norms and values, the male members' mental make-up is entirely textured by and composed of the mentality of the domination over females, and these male members are never ready to relinquish an iota of power and or authority to the female members, a stance that they have enjoyed from the primitive colonial days to date. In early history examples of such male domination are numerous, and this began even before state formation, and the structural domination of males over female has been continuing without having any change in its forms or

styles. Drawing evidence from long ago it was found that Aristotle was the first politician that offered a comprehensive theoretical account of the supremacy of men's virtue, reason, and status (Gardner, 2006). In Aristotle's theory, women were seen as a deformed or inferior version of men, and this influenced political thinkers around the world (Ahmed, 1992:29; Okin, 1979). Ideas about women's inferiority were carried through the Middle Ages, a period that transmitted an image of woman as "lacking judgment and reason; as vain, duplicitous, capricious, seductive, weak-minded, generally inferior and often as downright evil" (Coole, 1988: 70). In a recent world-wide survey of female politicians, 76% of those interviewed claimed that prevailing values about gender roles limit the participation of women in politics (Inter-Parliamentary Union, 2000).

According to one of the female politician from Central America, it was learnt that "the patriarchal ideology prevailing in the society is the biggest stumbling block towards participation of women" (Inter-Parliamentary Union, 2000: 61). The same is the case in the UP in Bangladesh. This is evident from the following example of a woman member in Bethkapa UP, where having a female Chairperson in that Union, their Chairperson tried to distribute projects to women members there equally with the male members but the male members did not accept that and therefore the male members tried to impose their domination using unjust, cruel, and illogical means, which was vividly reflected in the following quotations from a female member, who stated that "when the male members could not defeat or deprive us of our rights, then they tried to suit fake cases against us so that they could dominate over us" (Female Member, Bethkapa UP, 7 November 2013).

Anywhere in the world, men's power and authority are ubiquitous and there is no way that they can accept equality with women, and that is why from time immemorial, it has been found that the state was structured from its inception to benefit men and that it has a continuing interest in the maintenance of male domination, both in Western countries and Non-Western countries (Lerner, 1986; MacKinnon, 1989; Charrad, 2001).

In another case it was found that by struggling with huge male domination the women members were questioning the affirmative action of the government. During the present author's discussion with the women members of the

Garidaha UP, Sherpur Upazila, Bogra, a female member, mentioned that some male members thought that there was no need of woman members in the UP and she stated the following: “Government had created a problem for us by incorporating us in the parishad rather it was much better if government did not bring us here” (Female Member, Garidaha UP, 8 November 2013).

Being frustrated from struggling with her rights in the UP, she made the above utterance as she was not able to judge whether the government has blessed her with an opportunity or not. However, bereft of women’s minimum rights and shares in the UP, she judged her existence in the UP as a “problem.” In fact, the female leaders have to face additional problem because they must serve two roles at a time: their role as a leader and their role as a woman. The two sets of expectations can be very different and, in fact, conflict with each other. This puts a female leader in a difficult position (Paxton and Hughes, 2007:91). Sometimes leadership requires exhibiting “masculine” behavior, such as aggressiveness and dominance. If female leaders choose the second path, research demonstrates that they will be negatively evaluated. In a review of research, Eagly, Makhijani, and Klonsky (1992) found that people evaluate autocratic behavior by women more negatively than the same behavior by men.

Ensuring women’s equal political and economic rights has seemed to cause controversy, disinterested, and denial everywhere (Giele and Asmuck, 1977). The situation in Bangladesh is not at all different. Despite having women leaders at the top, women remain highly excluded from government and politics and subjected to oppression and discrimination in Bangladesh. Male members hardly care about the legal provision; rather, they are not mentally ready to share anything with the women members and they would like to continue the age-old male domination over women. All over Bangladesh, there is perhaps no UP where such male domination is non-existent; rather, it is ubiquitous, which has been explicitly reflected through the utterance of a woman member from Suvapur UP, Chuddagram UP, Comilla, who noted the following:

“Always problems occurred particularly with the male members. In Bangladesh there were hardly any UP where such problems were not

prevailed. We want our shares and we will never give up our due shares”
(Woman Member, Suvapur UP, 9 September 2013).

Bangladesh in general is still considered as one of the countries with the highest level of gender discrimination and patriarchal structures, embedded at all levels of society. Women suffer from gender-specific discrimination, such as early marriage practices, gender-based violence, biased inheritance and property laws, restriction of mobility and access to services, participation in public spaces, etc. (Sikder, Engali, Byrne, & Tabet, 2011). Inequality of women’s representation in politics is also a consequence of a “number of factors, including women’s responsibilities for family and children, the negative attitudes and discrimination of political parties, conservative religious and cultural doctrines, discriminatory socio-economic conditions, electoral systems, and the nature of a regime and financial barriers” (Rule, 1994a, 1994b; Liswood, 1999; Harris, 2001).

The problem of male domination in the UP cannot be exaggerated. One woman member from Gunabati UP, Chuddagram Uazila, Comilla District, mentioned that “You know every time problem occurs with VGD card distribution. I told the male members that the villagers for whom I have prepared the list, they will come to you if I could not give them VGD cards.” Furthermore, she added the following:

In fact, the root cause of all problems in UP are the male members, the Chairman did not create much problems but the main culprits are the male members. We are 3 female members but they are 9 male members, so here lay the problem (Woman Member, Gunabati UP, 9 September 2013).

In a highly-traditional socio-cultural structure and belief system, ideally women’s proper behavior involves four virtues: piety, purity, submissiveness, and domesticity. Clearly none of these virtues suggests that women should engage in public political participation or try to run for office. Instead, women are encouraged to assist the church, a task that did not threaten to take women away from their proper sphere or make them less domestic or submissive. If any woman wanted more than

the four virtues, “she was thought to be tampering with society, undermining civilization, and was untrustworthy” (Welter, 1966; cited in Paxton and Hughes, 2007: 26). Under such a patriarchal value system, women may still lack control over important decisions regarding how resources should be allocated within the home, but the private sphere is generally considered a female domain. According to this perspective, women should be focused on their family and children and making their husband happy (Paxton and Hughes, 2007:24).

In most cases the elected women members are systematically discriminated by males, verbally abused, always assigned to a specific development committee, excluded from arbitration committee, etc. (ADB, 2001; quoted in Gani and Sattar, 2004). Due to male domination women leaders were excluded from many important decisions in the UP such as budget, infrastructure projects, financial management, etc, based on the assumptions that only men are capable of dealing with these issues (Khan, 2009: 9). Women representatives at the local level do not have specific responsibilities, their opinions are not heard during decision-making, and male colleagues behave negatively toward them (Shamim and Nasreen, 2002: 52). The sufferings of women members are not restricted to problems of identity only; sometimes they are treated badly if they speak up for their rights. Khan (2008) also found in his research that the women members of the reserved seats blamed their male counterparts for non-cooperative behavior and said that inadequate training and lack of proper opportunity to participate in different matters of the UP were major constraints. Most studies and assessments have found that female members are generally excluded from major decision-making arenas. UP membership does not itself provide any guarantee of influence over the activities in which the body engages. The Chairman is placed in a relatively powerful position, and often takes decisions in conjunction with a small circle of associates, from which female members, in particular, are likely to be excluded (Aminuzzaman, 2011: 200). Women’s participation in the UP planning exercises are limited in some cases due to dominance of men, conservative social culture and values and lack of education (UNDP, 2003a). In some UPs, it was found that even women were massively maltreated by their male counterparts (The Prothom Alo, 24th April, 1999). Gani and Sattar (2004) found that UP 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 decision-making committees. Even in instances in which they are involved in the committees, their position is marginal. Male members think that women members have nothing to do with the development of the UP, which we can observe from the utterance of a woman member from Chadpur UP, Boalmari, Faridpur, who opined the following “the male members deemed that in the UP the women members do not have any rights and obligations to do anything as they are only reserved members in UP” (Woman Member, Chadpur UP, 31 October 2013).

Scholars have opined that there are a very few differences between men and women and there is no proof that on intellectual grounds males are superior to females; on the other hand, it has been seen that women are basically more creative and innovative than men. Except for some physical differences, there are hardly any differences between males and females, but they are treated differently in the UP. Men want to have the major share of everything always whereas and the residual or leftovers are kept for females. The same scenario prevails in the sphere of the UP also. During interview with a woman member of Bijoypur Moddham UP, she opined the following: “Women members were not given big projects rather they were provided with small projects and all the big projects were given to the male members, these were the general trends in most of the UP” (Woman Member, Bijoypur Moddham UP, 22 August 2013).

Male domination is omnipresent in the family, society, and states where women have traditionally lower positions in all spheres. In the family, the husband or father occupies the leading role. In the society it is an entirely male paradigm, and the state, the highest organ, has the right to create all policies and programs that protect the rights of men whereas the women’s role is acknowledged with some affirmative actions only. Sharing her grim reality and experience, one woman member from the Wahedpur UP, Mirsharai, stated the following:

“The women members need to be elected in the husband’s residential area, so most of the women members dare to protest any wrongdoings of the male members due to their prestige concern and for avoiding

criticism and for saving their due respect in the bridegroom's family"
(Woman Member, Wahedpur UP, 30 August 2013).

Obviously, no one ever thinks the above reality like the woman member of Wahedpur UP. Most of the women members in Bangladesh are married. In consonance with Bangladeshi values, norms, and cultural standards, it is considered bad when a woman is bold and courageous in establishing her due rights and privileges in the family and society. On the other hand, the women that consume or subsume everything and just avoid all odds, injustice, violence, oppressions and tyranny without noticing the males, especially their husband, are deemed as an "ideal" woman in the society of Bangladesh. Again, its roots are deep in the patriarchy and paternalistic social structure. When a girl is born and brought up, she enjoys a subordinate position in the family, where all decisions are generally taken by her father as the head of the family; and when that girl is married, her husband takes all the decisions and in fact, she is virtually excluded from all spheres of the family, either her father's or husband's family, and from the society and state. The above fact quoted by the woman leader of the Wahedpur UP testifies to this again. Males should remain superior against any arguable or discernible logic and rationale. Therefore some women will try to remain submissive, in some cases giving up their due rights in the UP, which is not illogical and unwanted by Bangladeshi standard.

The whole social structure and the power relations and mechanisms through which society is governed are entirely male biased and ruled by patriarchal values and ethos. Therefore women members position themselves in such a manner that they are simply innocent consumers and receivers of unjust oppression, wrongdoings, and massive tyranny towards them. They find no messiah to save them from such a draconian and devastating social enemy, which has been profoundly engrained and engulfed by patriarchy and which is deemed quite insurmountable by the women members. According to Khan (2008), monopolization of the use of power by the Chairman prevents UP members from playing their effective and rightful role in UP development. This dictatorial tendency of the Chairman also creates problems in decision-making, project formulation, and financial management. Cross-nationally, research has shown that what people think about women and women's place matters

in terms of women's ability to attain political power (Norris and Inglehart, 2001; Paxton and Kunovich, 2003). In Bangladesh, the average person has the same attitude towards women: from the birth to death, a male is born and brought up in those patriarchal values, which no one can easily change, and this male domination is perpetuated dynasty after dynasty, generation after generation without undergoing any change in it.

Women and the local government in Bangladesh have bearing on the rural life where traditional values prevail and tend to inhibit social mobility. The age-long orthodoxy in traditions and rituals dominates the outlook and aspirations of the people in the villages (Solaiman, 1998). Values function as social structure (Jahangir, 1982) and provide a background to social integration by cherishing values as an instrument of social cohesion, preventing social disorder from growing (Mashreque and Amin, 1994a). The social order of the backward rural community in Bangladesh is characterized by kinship, factionalism, and elitism (Mashreque and Amin, 1992a, 1992b, 1993a, 1993b, 1994b). With such patrimonial social characteristics or composition, the culture of women's participation cannot be thought of. In fact, the domination of male members is still taken for granted in the public world of politics. Moreover, these male members use their patronage networks to influence the decision-making process. The existence of "de facto politics" clearly hinders the meaningful participation of women in politics despite the introduction of quotas (Vijaylakshmi, 2002; cited in Mukhopadhyay, 2005: 31). Women's vulnerability is aggravated by the practice of early and arranged marriage, polygamy, veiling or purdah, and the seclusion of women, which restrict their mobility, public exposure and opportunity to improve their condition. Therefore, women are to face problems of their husband's polygamous marriages, divorce, dowry demand and violence (Shamim, 2001; Shamim & Nasreen, 2002).

Evidently, the culture of effective participation in formal community activities is still non-existent (Mohammed, 2010). Though NGOs have worked hard to develop some client-based community groups (some form of social capital), still they are more concerned with their own group interest than visible community involvement (Sharmin and Aminuzzaman, 2006 quoted in Aminuzzaman, 2011: 201). There is no denying the fact that women's participation in local government has far-

reaching ramifications for social mobility, acting on caste, occupation, sect, kinship and factionalism, which are responsible for the process of segregation and exclusiveness. The patriarchal social system runs on the recognition of male superiority and female subordination, and women are attached to low status and unequal sex relationship. The rural community in Bangladesh, therefore, is on the verge of threat of disequilibria (Amin & Akhter, 2005: 2).

Apart from the above socio-cultural factors, women's participation is also negatively viewed from religious perspectives. There are strong arguments about women's inferiority to men, which are present across all dominant religions, and religions have long been used to exclude women from aspects of social, political or religious life across the world. Susan Moller Okin (1999: 11) described how in myths and religious stories, women's importance is undermined or denied: "The Founding myths of Greek and Roman antiquity, and of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam...consists of combination of denials of women's role in reproduction, appropriations by men of the power to reproduce themselves, characterizations of women as overtly emotional, untrustworthy, evil or sexually dangerous, and refusals to acknowledge mothers' right over the dispositions of their children."

6.1.3.2 Challenges Faced: Extreme Corruption Has Plagued Women's Role in the U

Before explaining the issue of corruption, how this theme came into being should be described first a little. As soon as it was learnt that the women leaders were interested in infrastructural development projects to the village, which prompted the present author to ask whether they faced any challenges in creating projects, immediately the women members started sharing their lived experiences with the author, which were recorded in toto. Therefore, based on their perspectives, the second major obstacle that the women leaders identified in the UP was corruption. The full description of the prevalence of corruption in the UP is portrayed below with the textual narratives obtained from the women leaders in Bangladesh.

Corruption is highly prevalent in most of the third world countries and Bangladesh is no exception to this case. Due to massive corruption these women leaders have miserably failed to adjust themselves to the UP. There is evidence from many reports and research studies that corruption is abundant in the spheres of local

governments, especially in the UP in Bangladesh. Since 1996, Bangladesh has been cited as one of the most corrupt countries in the world times as reported by the Transparency International Bangladesh Chapter (TIB). In those reports it was learnt that among many other state organizations, the local government, namely the UP, was found to be severely involved in corrupt practices in Bangladesh, which corroborates the findings of the present study. In the following section how corruption takes place in the UP has been explained elaborately. In reply to a question about whether the respondent needed to pay money when she brought a project to or got a project from the Chairman, one woman member stated the following:

“You know that in Bangladesh everywhere there is an established system that we have to bring project fulfilling all the shares of Ministers, MPs, DC, UNO, Upazila Engineers and Upazila Chairman, because all have their respective shares in it which is the conventional system and Union Parishad has no exception to this” (Woman Member, Khadimpara UP, 28 September 2013).

In the above quotation, the prevalence of corruption in the sphere of local government has been perfectly reflected. The underlying meaning reveals that the entire country of Bangladesh is unfortunately involved in such a social evil that undermines the country’s development at a considerable level. The above women included the entire state machinery in the realm of corruption. The legislators, the administration, and the public representatives are all epitomized as the influential parties involved in corruption in Bangladesh. Transparency International of Bangladesh (TIB, 1999: 2)⁵⁴ has stated that “Corruption in Bangladesh originates from both politics and administration. In most of the cases it takes place in the form of bribery. Besides, misuse of power, nepotism, fraud, and patron-client relationship also give rise to corruption. If the political process becomes corrupt, then naturally, administrative corruption also rises.”

⁵⁴For details please see “Corruption in Public Administration” TIB, www.ti-bangladesh.org/index.php?page_id=373, accessed on 19.3.2014.

It is very interesting to note here that being the chief executive of the UP, the Chairman also demands a bribe from the members, which can be seen from the statement made by a woman member of Khadimpara UP, Sylhet, who stated the following: “When we finished our projects, sometimes we share profits through mutual understandings with the Chairman” (Woman Member, Khadimpara UP, 28 September 2013).

A study conducted by the University of Stockholm shows that “corruption in Bangladesh shifts public resources to unproductive sectors, reduces the efficiency of the public administration driving officials towards rent seeking, impedes the government from implementing good policies, and undermines public confidence in the state” (Pulok, 2010 quoted in Wickberg, 2012). In order to have an in-depth and sharpened understanding about the perception of corruption at the community level, an interview with the manager of a cooperative society was made and in the wake of our discussion on the issue he opined that “No one could do work for the whole budget in the UP. In most cases, 20-30% money is leaked out” (Manager, Hatigara Comprehensive Village Development Cooperative Society, Comilla, 31 August 2013).

Furthermore, being asked who was involved in such corruption, he answered as follows:

“I did not know who were involved with it but the UP functionaries must have this answer to them. If the members could do work with the full amount, the quality of the work would be much better because having less amount these members (meaning both male and female members) used very low quality materials when they conducted a project” (Manager, Hatigara Comprehensive Village Development Cooperative Society, 31 August 2013).

There is no doubt that due to corrupt practices, Bangladesh has to pay a lot for that. It is one of the most draconian enemies in terms of the development of Bangladesh society. Due to massive corruption, the pivotal share of the public

resources invested for the development of Bangladesh is drained out. The worst victim of such a phenomenon is the poor people of Bangladesh. This was quite evident from the above utterance—that due to corrupt practices, women members cannot deliver their best work for the local people and they suffer a lot because women tend to be honest in their activities, but being compelled by the ground realities these women leaders have learnt to compromise with the social system.

Corruption is endemic in Bangladesh. Bangladesh was ranked the lowest in the global ranking on the Corruption Perception Index (CPI) developed by Transparency International (TI), consecutively for five years from 2001 to 2005. Bangladesh has been recognized by Transparency International as the most corrupt country in the world five consecutive times (TI, 2005 in Rahman, 2006: 33). In the following two years (2006 to 2007), its position marginally improved with only a three decimal point increment in the score.⁵⁵ The change over from an authoritarian to a democratic system of government in the 1990s has not had any effect on the nature or dimensions of corruption. The Washington Post estimated that by October 2007, some 170 members of the ruling elite, and perhaps 15,000 political under bosses, local government officials, and businessmen had been incarcerated on corruption and tax-evasion charges (Hagerty, 2007: 178).

According to National Household Survey 2007 on Corruption in Bangladesh, conducted by TIB (2008), it was found that the local government was the second most corrupt sector in Bangladesh. From the data collection of the present study it was also found that corruption was rampant at the UP level.

Corruption takes place at the local government level due the existence of the patron-client relationship in the rural milieu⁵⁶. The UP Chairpersons and some

⁵⁵Corruption Perception Index 2001-2007, Transparency International. Bangladesh was ranked one of the most corrupt countries from 2001 to 2005 measured on a scale of 0 - 10, 0 being the most corrupt and 10 being the least corrupt. Its score in this year interval went from .4 to 1.7. In 2006, its position improved and it received the score of 2.0 and in 2007 the score remained the same.

⁵⁶The findings of the study reveal that a powerful network termed dalal chokra (mediators) play an important role in the local governance in Bangladesh. They play an intermediary role between the villagers and the ruling party leaders and the civil servants. The study confirmed that there are three categories of mediators. The first category includes the leaders of the ruling party and dominant opposition, student leaders and the UP Chairman. The second category comprises local contactors, and the trade union. The third category of that dalal

dominant members tend to maintain strong patron-client relations with a section of the rural community. Unfortunately such clients are not necessarily the weaker or poorer section of the rural community. The UP therefore tends to take some of its development management and distributive decisions on the basis of such a patron-client dependency syndrome (Aminuzzaman, 2011: 204). Corruption is prevalent in the distribution of safety net benefits also. Most of the safety net programs and some development activities are run by non-elected political channels. Such programs are designed and managed by the political workers/leaders of the ruling party under the administrative and political support of the members of parliament. The UP has been kept on the sideline in administering and managing the projects (Aminuzzaman, 2011: 206). It has been reported by Asian Human Rights Commission-Hunger Alert Program Bangladesh (2011) that the VGF cards distributed by council and committee, which are composed of government officials or political activists, have failed to reach the poorest. These cards are often distributed to the families or relatives, or are used for the purpose of political activities. One of the main causes is that those that distribute the cards are either public servants or politicians that practice corruption widely.

Klitgaard (1998) states that “corruption is a result of weak state management and exists when individuals or organizations have monopoly power over a good or service, discretion over making decisions, limited or no accountability, and low levels of income.” Corruption has direct effects on many aspects of development and some scholars opine that corruption is part and parcel of development and it is a concomitant and corollary of the development process everywhere, but it has serious adverse effects on the country’s overall development. Gupta, Davoodi, and Alonso-Terme (1998) found that “corruption tends to increase inequality and poverty through lower economic growth; biased tax systems favoring the rich and influential; lower social spending, unequal access to education and poor targeting of social programs; interest-group lobbying that perpetuates asset inequality; and increased risk for investment decisions of the poor”.

chokra belongs to lower rank employees at the Upazila level that include office assistants, clerks, peons of different offices and the servants of the high officials (see Asaduzzaman, 2008).

Example of Corruption

Here 2 cases of corruption in Chiora UP, Comilla are illustrated briefly with a view to presenting an idea of the forms and nature of corruption practiced in the UP.

During the data collection from the women members in the Chiora UP, a woman member shared a case of corruption of the Chairman of Chiora UP, which she had experienced very recently. That woman member experienced this case of corruption when she came to know that she was given a project of one lack taka (1286 US\$), which was obtained from a 1% land transfer tax from Upazila Parishad. After getting the project the Chairman advised her to sign a check and thereafter the check was cashed. As soon as the check was cashed the Chairman took away the whole taka from her giving her 5,000 taka (64 US\$) in her hand.

Another woman member shared another incident of corruption of the Chairman of Chiora UP with the author. She said that once the Chairman tried to pass a few projects by the UNO office using fake signatures of woman members and having doubt about its authenticity the UNO immediately probed it and he was caught red-handed because it was completely concocted and fake. At that time the UNO warned the Chairman that he would be suspended from his Chairmanship but that for the present he could manage everything with a stay order from the high court.

6.1.3.3 Faulty Legal Provision in the Reservation System for Women Leaders in the UP

The women members identified a reservation system as one of the formidable challenges in ensuring their participation in the UP. However, a reservation system is necessary for a nascent democracy everywhere. In developing women leadership some sort of affirmative actions is needed from the government, especially evidence-based findings that reveal the fact that most of the developed and developing countries are following this path. As Bangladesh is a developing country, the government of Bangladesh is also following the same strategy for bringing women

into the public life. Before discussing the problem of a reservation system, it is better to have a broad overview of it.

Being predominantly an agrarian society, the entire socio-political milieu of Bangladesh is complexly intertwined and enmeshed with cultural lack with a patriarchal social structure that inherently has inhibited women's role in the public domain since time immemorial. There is evidence that among the political, socio-economic and cultural factors, culture remains the most influential factor in terms of ensuring women's political representation in public life (Moore and Shackman, 1996; Paxton, 1997; Matland, 1998; Kenworthy&Malami, 1999). Norris and Inglehart (2000: 3) also found that "in traditional cultures women may be reluctant to run for political office and political elites may appear hostile to women by imposing tough selection criteria". It has also been observed that both in developed and developing countries, women's participation in politics at local and national levels is comparatively lower than that of men. In Bangladesh, women are comparatively in a subordinate state in all spheres of socio-cultural life; however, politically they are placed in a marginal state (Qadir, 1994). It has been found that historically, women's participation in formal representative politics in Bangladesh has been low (Nazneen & Tasneem, 2010).

In the context of the above-mentioned reality and socio-cultural perspectives, women's political participation at both national and local levels should be promoted through some affirmative action from the government. Political participation has been defined as "the process of any voluntary action, successful or unsuccessful, organized or unorganized, episodic or continuous, employing legitimate or illegitimate methods, and intended to influence the choice of political leaders at any level of government, local or national" (Winer and Chowdhury, 1995; quoted in Kabir, 2003). Rule and Zimmerman (1997; cited in Reynolds, 1999: 547-8) argue that "a parliament would fail to recognize or comprehend issues of great importance to women in society if there were few women members, an observation which raises broader questions of answerability, openness, and isolation." European Network of Experts (1997: 8) has observed that a balanced representation of women and men at all levels of decision-making guarantees better government. It was found that "women have their own and unique perspective, they have different values and ideas and

behave differently. It is expected that increased participation of women in decision-making will help create a new culture and shed new light on how power should be exercised and how issues of women could be prioritized.” Women attach great importance to the quality of contact between people and are less individualistic than men. Hence, without women’s integration with the political system, the development of women will be complex and difficult. It is quite evident that due to lack of opportunities to intervene at the policy and decision-making level, women will have a minimal impact in the planning, management, and implementation of policies (Mahtab, 2007). Although there have been debates on the linkage between good government and gender equality over the past decade (Morna, 2002), Husain and Siddiqi (2002) have asserted that the sustainability of the economic and social empowerment of women depends on the extent of their integration in the political decision-making process.

The core idea behind the reservation system is to recruit women into political positions and ensure that women are not isolated from political life. A reservation system aims to ensure that women constitute at least a critical majority to make a visible difference. Under the reservation system certain parliamentary seats may be filled only by women, regardless of the number of female candidates or nominees. Therefore, although women may still compete for unreserved seats, a minimum percentage of women in parliament should be guaranteed. Countries with reserved seat systems include Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Eritrea, Jordan, Morocco, Rwanda, Somalia, Sudan, Taiwan, Tanzania, and Uganda (Dahlerup and Nordlund, 2004). It is beyond doubt that where a reservation system has been implemented, the popular political culture has gradually become more accepting of women taking part in politics. Women's issues have been nurtured well in emerging democracies in which the governments of these countries have shown commitment to women's increased representation. In fact, enhanced political representation of women depends more on the political will of the government than on a nation's world economic standing or any other economic factor (Tripp, n.d.: 7).

Based on the above premise, the importance of women’s participation in decision-making, the government of Bangladesh has made provision to widen the scope of women’s participation in the development process. Immediately after the

liberation period since 1972 until today, through making provisions by presidential order, a reservation quota for women was ensured in the national parliament of Bangladesh. Again through making amendments to the local government ordinance in 1997, a 33% reservation quota for women members has been ensured in the UP, and the municipal level as well. In Bangladesh, a wide women's network, strong and visible presence of NGOs at the grassroots level, and the active role of the international donor agencies have contributed immensely to develop the discourse of gender equality, mobilizing women at the local level, and funding their support and training (Goetz, 1996, 1997; Kabeer, 1994).

Viewed from the rational ground, it was observed that rather than the national level, women's political participation at the local level can play an active role in growing the local economy and development by reinvigorating the socio-economic condition of the poor women because local government is the closest and most acceptable level of government to women. Local governments generally provide services such as electricity, safe drinking water, waste disposal, public transport, schools, health clinics, infrastructural development, and poverty reduction programs that have a direct bearing on women's life and on the family, and therefore women must be integrated into the local democratic structure in order to represent the interests of women in the local government (IULA, 1998). O'Connell (2010) also opined that it is hoped that local government will provide women from the most marginalized communities with the chance to engage politically—to vote, lobby, and run for election.

It was observed that today the average percentage of women in national legislatures around the world is 16% (Inter-Parliamentary Union, 2005a). Women in Asia achieve rather better representation at the local level than at the national level. In 2001, the Philippines had 16.5 percent women; Thailand 18.1%; China 22.1%; Nepal 24.1%; Vietnam 26.6%; India 33%; and Bangladesh 33.3%. The last two of these are the result of the imposition of reserved seats. Although not ground breaking, these results match much of the rest of the world, and show gradual improvement. Sri Lanka at 2 per cent and Japan at 6.2 percent, on the other hand, are very poor (Drage, 2001).

Goetz (2004) and Beall (2004) have noted that “affirmative action for enhancing the participation of women in local government elections in many countries has been taken as an extra measure, rather than considering women as credible and legitimate political actors” (Mukhopadhyay, 2005: 14). The Local Government (Union Parishad) Amendment Act 1997 of Bangladesh is a milestone towards ensuring women’s equal access and increased participation in political power structures (Khan & Ara, 2006). Having been elected in the UP election in 1997, women members found themselves helpless as there was no legal provision and guideline about their roles and responsibilities. During the preliminary stage, women members were not involved in any activities of the UP. Thereafter, in a bid to involve the women members the concerned ministry made some legal provisions in 2002. According to the legal provision through memo No/Prajai-3/Micellaneous-14/2001/80/5500, dated 10 September, 2002 by the Ministry of Local Government, Rural Development and Cooperative (LGRD&C), women members are empowered to enjoy a few specific rights in the UP such as: 1) one third of the members of all the standing committees will be filled by women members; 2) one third of the total 12 standing committees will be chaired by women members; and also 3) one third of the total project committees will be chaired by women members in the UP (see Rahman and Sultana, 2005). Still there is a lack of clarity and vagueness in the legal provision regarding the roles and responsibilities of the women member in the UP.

In the present author’s opinion, the cardinal problem with enjoying women’s rights in the UP is not the reservation quota; it is due to the attitude of the male members. Women are being deprived of their due rights in the UP. Labeling women members as reserved seat members, the male members propagate the idea that as women are elected through reserved seats they have nothing to do with the development process in the UP.

According to the opinion of a woman member from Chadpur UP, Boalmari, Faridpur, “Male members think that women members have nothing to do with the development of the UP,” and she also commented as follows: “The male members deemed that in the UP the women members do not have any rights and obligations to do anything as they are only reserved members in UP” (Woman Memembr, Chadpur UP, 31 October 2013).

Another woman member from Alkora UP, Chuddagram UP, Comilla, stated the following:

“In fact the reservation system is problematic, if government changed this system, it would be better. That’s why I wanted to contest election in the general ward. Without any bargaining we could not bring any project in the UP” (Woman Member, Alkora UP, 9 September 2013).

The underlying assumption of the above utterance is that women are to struggle immensely for establishing their due rights in the Parishad, but since the males occupy absolute power and authority, the women are time and again neglected and denied their enshrined rights and shares in the UP. If we analyze the scenario from the facts it would be easy to grasp the meaning of it. Due to the provision of direct election, women candidates during local elections rose to about 44969 for 12,882 seats because of the fact that the direct election of women to local bodies 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 inquiries to have their terms of reference and spheres of activity defined. NGOs have come forward with projects to develop the skill and capacity of these members elected directly in seats reserved for women (Chowdhury, 2002). This event was very inspiring and had a positive influence on the ideas regarding leadership of women and their consciousness of increasing political knowledge. From the report of the election commission it was clear that in that election, 85% of the women voted (Islam, 2000; Begum, 2002:101). However, being deprived of their rights in the UP, in the election of 2003, the total number of women contested was 39,419 women for 12,669 quota seats, which shows a declining trend in the number of women contesting quota seats (Steps Towards Development, 2003: 7).

Women members have little power in the decision-making process compared to male members and they are also denied access to mainstream activities. As a consequence, the number of female candidates declined from 44,969 in 1997 to 39,419 in 2003, which is about a quarter (12.3%) less within six years. Around half of

women members (47%), were elected in 1997 but did not compete in the 2003 elections (Karmaker, 2006)⁵⁷. Khan found that women are excluded from all important activities in the UP due to the fact of labeling the women leaders (reserve seat holders) as a separate category, which helped to create un-clarity and vagueness in the existing law and provided scope for taking all decisions by men (Khan, 2009: 9).

Out of 4498 UPs, it was found that there were only 24 women Chairpersons and the rest 4474 UPs were run by the male Chairmen and the UP structure was structured in such a way that it has become a one-man Parishad, as all powers and authority are vested in the Chairman. This Chairman is an important symbol of the male domination and patriarchy supported by 9 other male members in the UP. Therefore, female members are deprived of their due rights and shares in the UP. However, after getting the legal provision of distributing one third of the total projects, amidst fighting to establish their legal rights, some women members have become successful to get a few projects. Nevertheless, while they implement projects, the male members of that ward sometimes create obstacle for the woman. Therefore, all women members have a skeptical view of the reservation system in the UP.

Many researchers have been found to be critical of the reservation system. The reservation system as a strategy to ensure women's political participation is as controversial as elsewhere and in Bangladesh as well (Panday, 2008). According to Dahlerup (1998: 92), “quotas may be applied as a temporary measure, that is to say, until the barriers for women’s entry into politics are removed.” Because reserved seats are often criticized as anti-democratic, these quota systems are more commonly found in nondemocratic and semi-democratic countries (Dahlerup and Nordlund, 2004).

Chowdhury (2002: 1) argues that “instead of contributing to women’s political agency and autonomy,” the reserved seat system in Bangladesh accentuated their dependence in politics and reinforced their marginality. The reserved seats

⁵⁷In the 1997 UP election, 44,969 women contested in quota seats reserved for them, and of them, 13,437 women were elected. In the same year among 13,437 women members, 592 were elected unopposed and uncontested. In the 2003 UP election, 39,419 rural women contested in 12,669 quota seats in UP (see Islam, 2000: 112-13; Begum, 2002; Karmaker, 2006; Pandey, 2008; Islam and Islam, 2012).

served as an extra block of votes for the party in power, the party usually responsible for filling the seats. Though a few women that entered politics through the quota system grew to become active participants in national politics, many more served as placeholders. Often, the party in power elected wives or daughters of deceased members of parliament or women that had close blood or marriage ties to the political leadership (Chowdhury, 2002). However, Chowdhury (2002) as a veteran woman leader, has enough authenticity to make the above comment but in a highly male-dominated traditional society, still some sorts of affirmative action is extremely exigent to increase women's role in the political sphere, more specifically at the grassroots level, because there is the argument that female political leaders act as role models for young girls and women. Having a visible presence of women in positions of leadership helps to raise the aspirations of other women (Burrell, 1994; Campbell and Wolbrecht, 2006; Mansbridge, 1999; Wolbrecht and Campbell, 2005).

6.1.4 Coping Strategies of the Women Leaders in the UP

At the proposal stage there was a question about the coping strategy of the women members in the UP, but on return from the field, having failed to have sufficient data from the women leaders leaving out this question was considered. However, while preparing the transcript it was observed that some women members shared their experiences regarding their coping strategies.

Coping strategies refer to the techniques, mechanism, and strategies used by the women leaders to ensure their jurisdictional rights and obligation from the Chairman and the male members in the UP. In order to learn about the coping strategies of the women members it was observed that some women members that were elected for two terms (10 years) in the Parishad shared their experiences regarding their coping strategies in the UP. Based on their lived experiences and grim realities, a few coping strategies WLs adopted, this theme was arranged. This section will provide a discussion of how the women members were successfully adopting some of the coping strategies or pattern in establishing their due rights in the UP.

Being elected by the direct adult franchise, when women leaders came to the UP, they were severely undermined and their rights were neglected. They went to the local administrations to seek remedies but they failed to redress the problems faced by

them. Meanwhile, some of the women members after obtaining legal rights to one-third of the benefits and shares in the UP they had to adopt ceaseless fighting with the male members, who allowed them to obtain a few projects, which were shared with other members and thus they had started their journey “from scratch,” and this has continued to date.

A woman member from the Wahedpur UP, Mirsarai explained the following:

“In the first time when I came in the UP being elected, my experience was quite bizarre, we never know what were going on in the UP, we did not know what was happening with VGD⁵⁸ and VGF⁵⁹ cards, old age pensions or allowances⁶⁰ and whenever any project came we never know about it. During that time nobody gave us any weightage. And there was no chance of even bargaining or making quarrel with anybody

⁵⁸Vulnerable Group Development (VGD) is a multi-dimensional food-based Social Safety Net Programs in Bangladesh, sponsored by the World Food Program. The target group of the program is mainly destitute women covering landless, and asset less women that are widowed, divorced, abandoned, having under-nourished children, lactating mothers and women with handicapped husband, etc. In recent times, the program has moved from its role of relief provider to a larger development role like providing training on life skills and income generating skills to women beneficiaries. The aim of the program is to enhance food and nutrition security of women and children through improved food consumption, education, skills development, livelihood diversification, and risk mitigation. To achieve the objective of the VGD program, currently about 3.75 million beneficiaries from ultra-poor households are provided with the provision of a monthly food ration of 30 kg of wheat or 25 kg of fortified wheat flour (atta, in Bangla) for a period of 24 months, and a package of development services for human capital development.

⁵⁹VGF is the acronym of Vulnerable Group Feeding. The VGF program is one of the food-based social safety net programs in Bangladesh. It originated in the 1970s by the World Food Program (WFP) for emergency aid caused by disaster. Now the government provides food subsidies for the poorest under this program. The criteria targeted by the program are: i) daily labourers whose income is low or irregular; ii) the landless or those that have fewer than 0.15 acres of land; iii) persons with disabilities or their wives; iv) poor women/men affected by natural disasters.

⁶⁰Old age allowance is one of the Safety Net Programs of the Bangladesh government being implemented by the Ministry of Social Welfare. Being illegible for getting old age allowances older people who: i) are at least 65 years of age; ii) have an income equal to Tk. 2000; iii) have worked in the formal sector; iv) whose number of beneficiaries is determined on the basis of category union; iv) and 50% of the beneficiaries are women and the other 50% are men. For livelihood support old age allowance card holders receive Tk. 220 per month from the nationalized commercial Bank of Bangladesh. The UP helps select the beneficiaries and obtains funds from the Bank.

because nobody cared about us in the UP” (Woman Member, Wahedpur UP, 30 August 2013).

The underlying assumption of the above quotation testifies to the fact that male members just tried to ignore the women members’ presence in the UP. In a male-dominated or patriarchal society it is quite usual for men to overlook the rights of women members. Male members and the Chairman considered them as “reserved-seat” members and in fact during the initial stage there were no clear legal guidelines concerning the roles and responsibilities of the women members. In a patriarchal culture women are never thought of or considered equal to men, so the male members do not care about the women members. The male members were not mentally ready to share any benefits with the new entrants, the female members in the UP, and this resulted in problems for both the men and women. As new entrants women members lack knowledge about UP affairs, so it is quite easy to deny the women members their rights. It is no wonder that in a highly hierarchical patrimonial society women rights will be ignored by males as was the case in the UP. It was found that “patriarchal societies are characterized by male control of economic resources, male domination of political processes and positions of authority” (Paxton and Hughes, 2007: 25).

Another woman member of the Wahedpur UP, who was elected for the second time, described her experience in the following manner:

“At the first time I had to pass a very terrible/bad time. At that time nobody showed any respect to us but now our present Chairman respected us a lot. Now-a-days everywhere women were given more importance. We never knew that among the total projects women would get one-third of the total projects but now we came to know more details about our charter in the UP from the training we received in Khan Foundation⁶¹. Women are now fully conscious and expert in the UP activities” (Woman Member, Wahedpur UP, 30 August 2013).

⁶¹The Khan Foundation, a private non-profit philanthropic organisation, is devoted to democratic and socio-economic development in Bangladesh with international vocation

Like the previous woman member, the above woman member (WM) also had to experience a terrible time because at the initial stage WMs were not welcomed by the male members. Although WMs were highly spirited and enthusiastic about working in the UP because this was the first time in the history of the UP, they came to the UP through directed adult franchise but all of their enthusiasm was “nipped in the bud” as soon as they asked for their role, responsibilities and rights in the UP. The women members in every UP in Bangladesh were looked down upon by the male members during their first term (1997-2003) and the WMs were kept ignorant about their jurisdictional rights. It was quite rational that like the male members the women members should share the same responsibilities in the UP, but due to their cultural preoccupation with patriarchal values they just negated women’s existence in the UP. However, when the government made provision for them and other donor agencies also extended support to the UP following that provision, the Chairman and male members found themselves helpless and had to accept WMs’ rights in the UP.

During the initial stage of the entry of women members into the UP, the Chairmen in tandem with the male members expressed their utter negligence and disrespect to the new female members. At that time, the male members could successfully avoid the demand of the WMs in the UP because there were no clear guidelines about the roles and responsibilities of the WMs in the UP. Using this prerogative, the male members were able to deprive women of their rights in the UP. Immediately after being elected through the direct adult franchise the women members started exerting their rights and shares, and raised their voices about their roles and responsibilities in the UP. At the same time two factors helped them to obtain their rights in the UP. First, the NGOs, coupled with donor agencies and

which brings together both horizontal and vertical cross sections of the society, e.g. parliamentarians, academicians, professionals, members of civil society executives, business community and at the same time peasants, skilled & unskilled workers, women & children and other disadvantaged groups at the grassroots level, aiming at poverty alleviation and productive employment generation through advocacy and training to promote the cause of “Democracy for Development and Development for Democracy.” The Khan Foundation has provided a lot of training programs to the women leaders in the Union Parishad in Bangladesh since their entry into the UP, from 1997 to date.

women's organizations, being empathetic with the ground realities, began advocating and lobbying in favour of women's interests. Secondly, on the other hand, being deprived of their rights by the UP Chairman, some women members also sought help from the local administration. Henceforth, having feedback from the street level functionaries of the government coupled with the demand placed by the women's organizations, the government promulgated an office order chartering a few rights and privileges for the women members in 2002. In fact, stipulating such rights in the legal frame provided a massive impulse to the women leaders in the UP. However, it was quite difficult for the women members in UP to enjoy those rights.

One woman member from the Manikdaha UP, Vanga Upazila, Faridpur District, stated the following:

“When I was elected first time as a woman member in the UP, at that time whether we were in Parishad or not, there would have no differences because we always got information of just only one meeting whereas 10 meetings were already held in the UP and by just hearsay we came to meeting because Chairman and male members never informed us about the meeting date in the UP. I came to this stage through ceaseless fighting with the male counterparts and I could realize that now the prestige and importance of woman members had increased since from the initial day” (Woman Member, Manikdaha UP, 31 October 2013).

Basically such was the case happening with almost all of the women members in the UP in Bangladesh. As long as they had gotten used to the state of the art of the UP functions and activities, they began to bargain for their rights and prerogatives with their male counterparts. Information and knowledge have universal power. Previously, when the WMs were denied their due rights, they could not do or say anything because the male members just used subterfuge and bluffed the WMs saying that that there was no provision of their duties and rights in the local government ordinance, but when government specified some of their rights, the male members could not but to comply with the jurisdictional rights to the UP women members.

Even though in some cases their full jurisdictional rights were not recognized, after repeated claims some of the women were approved and granted some project assignments with their male counterparts. Thus after a sustained and ceaseless struggle, the Chairman and male members were bound to share some of the rights already declared by the local government (UP) ordinance. Thus being vehemently compressed by an overwhelmingly male-dominated and highly-patriarchal environment, women are still obsessed with a resilient mentality that helped them secure some jurisdictional rights in the UP. The strength for adopting the coping strategies by the women members has deep roots in their own intrinsic moral force and indomitable will, and they have never lost their desire to obtain their rights and shares in the UP. The basic reason behind it was that they were spirited and enthusiastic enough, with a sense of empowerment by being elected by the direct adult franchise in the local government since 1997, and therefore the women members had a firm belief that it would help them enjoy some opportunities towards achieving equal rights and privileges in local politics and development processes.

Sharing the experience of one woman member of the Chiora UP, Choddagram Upazila, Comilla District, stated the following:

“We had heard that in the nearby Jagannathgong UP, members mercilessly bit UP Secretary and then they shutdown UP by hanging lock in the UP and after that through a thread-bare discussion in a meeting the matter was dismissed amicably” (Woman Member, Chiora UP, 9 September 2013).

The above is an extreme case of violence. Due to holding important positions and responsibilities, some office holders do not behave properly, and this has led to the adoption of violence in the UP. Sometimes violence is inevitable due to illogical behaviour from the office holder. The UP secretary plays a seminal role in the overall affairs of the UP. No job can be done without the assistance of this secretary in the UP. Following such a strategy is an extreme example of adopting a hard coping style for the UP functionaries.

Having been asked that if the Chairman did not give her any project, what she would do at that time, the woman member replied that “in the meeting we would protest. If the Chairman did not pay heed to our say, we would go to the UNO⁶² sir” (Woman Member, Gunabati UP, 9 September 2013).

The underlying meaning of the above statement reveals the coping strategies that the women members resorted to in establishing their rights in the UP. Through adopting both formal meetings and informal channels, they began to exert their rights in the UP. Being pessimistic about obtaining any rights from the Chairman, she resorted to the assistance of the local administration. Sometimes it worked and sometimes it did not. When the Upazila executive officer was sympathetic to the cause of women, he tried to solve their problem, but as in most cases, the UNO also represents and protects patriarchal interests, for example the male functionaries in the UP, so sometimes the UNO just listens to the grievances but does not come forward to help with the WMs’ cause.

Women members were nowhere in Bangladesh accepted warmly; rather, the male members and Chairman found them to be a burden to the UP and they were afraid to share one iota of facilities and services with the female members. The leaders of any gender are expected to behave in certain ways. Traditionally, “effective leadership is associated with aggression, competitiveness, dominance, and decisiveness. People have different expectations of women and men. Male stereotypes suggest that men are assertive, aggressive, dominant, independent, and competitive. Women, on the other hand, are stereotyped as nurturing, helpful, likeable, gentle, and polite” (Paxton and Hughes, 2007:91). The match between the stereotype of men and leaders is much better than the match between women and men. For this reason, women face prejudice as leaders because people tend to assume that leadership is a masculine trait (Eagly and Karau, 2002). Further, it was found that “women have traditionally been in a subordinate position to men, and cultural beliefs lead people to assume that men are more competent and legitimate as leaders than are women” (Ridgeway, 2001).

⁶² UNO refers to Upazila Nirbahi Officer, meaning the Executive Head of the Upazila, who is in charge of helping with the integration and coordination of all activities in this important administrative unit of Bangladesh.

Being asked why she was elected 2 times to the Union Parsiahd, Fatima Akhter Parul, a woman member, Khadimpara UP, Sylhet District, replied as follows:

“In fact, I contested UP election 2 times and I was elected 2nd time as 1st time I did not win the election. The motivation and encouragement came from the people because I devoted enormous time for the cause of villagers’ interest, that’s why they evaluated me properly. You should know that I never compromise with my rights in the UP” (Woman Member, Khadimpara UP, 28 September 2013).

The underlying assumption expressed in the above text was that by fighting with the UP Chairman and male members she was able to create some projects and benefits for the poor people of her constituency, which in fact helped her win for the second time. By becoming empowered by her NGO experience⁶³, she was successfully using suitable strategies to cope with the UP environment. She persistently pressed for her rights in the UP amidst ceaseless and never-ending struggle with her male counterparts. Through her uncompromising attitude toward ensuring her rights, she was finally successful in obtaining success in the UP. Using such a “I’m not going to give up my rights in the UP” attitude helped her to cope with the prevailing extremely male dominating environment, which was the real saga of all the UP women members in Bangladesh.

One male member from the Mirzapur UP, Sherpur Upazila, Bogra District stated to the following:

“In the UP, at present women are very active than before, and now in every aspect they claim a one-third share, they are quite skilled now, fully aware, they are implementing or doing projects side by side, shoulder to shoulder with male members using their mobile phones” (Male Member, Mirzapur UP, 8 November 2013).

⁶³This was learnt while the author was interviewing her.

This statement reveals the positive achievements of the women leaders in the UP. Following a resilient mentality, these women members rightly unfolded their demands and rights in all important activities in the UP because of the fact that nowadays all international donor agencies also extending their project support based on the condition that a one-third share should be given to women members. For example in the LGSP⁶⁴ operation, the provision of giving one third of projects to the women members has been made and many other donor-driven projects are also following this provision for women members. It is interesting to note that by taking advantage of the modern ITC they were able to achieve success, overcoming many of the stumbling blocks and hurdles imposed on them by the male representatives. Sometimes, being deprived, they even went to the district administration about the corrupt practices of the UP Chairman and also contacted the concerned MP⁶⁵ by cell phone. Now male members are quite aware about using such weapons by the women members. The Chairman also often feels concerned about it, as it has become an established reality in the UP—that the government, NGOs, and international donor agencies, all have recognized women's rights in the UP, so no more rhetoric will work now. The only choice is to accept women's rights in the UP.

An Extreme Example for Coping Strategies Followed by the Women Members in the UP

The following is an extreme case, presented in order to provide a vivid picture and stark realities concerning how the women members have struggled to establish their rights and what the coping strategies adopted by them have been to combat the highly corrupt Chairman in an extremely male dominated atmosphere. When the present author learned about this case from a journalist during his pre-fixed visit to talk with the women members at the Chouddagram Upazila Complex, where a huge

⁶⁴LGSP is the acronym for Local Governance Support Project (LGSP). It is a World Bank-supported project to strengthen the Union Parishads (UP) of Bangladesh. Under this project performance-based financial support (grants) is directly given to the UP. Like the government system, in the LGSP, there is a provision that thirty percent of the total projects have to be given to women members. Moreover, according to the LGSP rule, woman members of the respective ward will have to play a role as Chairperson of the Project Implementation Committee (PIC) in the LGSP-supported projects.

⁶⁵MP stands for Member of Parliament.

number of women came to attend a conference on “Violence against Women: Bangladesh Perspectives,” he personally waited until the seminar was over. Then upon the author’s request, 3 women members gave him time and out of those 3 women members, the senior-most woman member disclosed the whole matter to him. This story will be narrated in the third person because it would not be reader-friendly if it were narrated in the quoted text. The whole case is narrated below.

The following happened in the Chiora Union Parishad, Choddagram Upazila, Comilla district, where after the oath taking the Chairman convened the first meeting without the involvement of 3 woman members. In that first meeting it was decided that through the VGF card, rice would be distributed among the villagers. One woman member disclosed that the women had been deprived of their rights when all of the VGF cards had been given to the male members by the Chairman. After that, all of the women members protested severely against such a decision by the Chairman and said that because they were women, the Chairman did not give them VGF cards. Moreover, the women members told the Chairman that they had come there under the auspices of the adult franchise not by the mercy or whim of others, and they said that they had received more votes than the Chairman. Immediately after that, the Chairman gave only 3 women members 18 VGF cards, 6 cards for each member, but they decided not to take the cards. That was the very start of the women members’ oppression in the Chiora UP. The Chairman personally offered one woman (who was speaking with the present author), 6 cards. On the other hand, the Chairman gave 100 cards to the male member of her ward and then she requested him (male member) to distribute the cards given to her also. The following day she (that woman member with whom the author was speaking) submitted a list of VGF card applicants for only 15 villagers that were extremely poor people in her village. She told the author that those people were so poor that they waited for the whole day with a hope of getting 5 kg. of rice each, which was supposed to be distributed through the VGF card system, even while they were fasting during the Ramadan⁶⁶ month. However, the Chairman

⁶⁶According to Islamic rituals Ramadan is one of the Five Pillars of Islam. Muslims worldwide observe Ramadan as a month of fasting that starts before sunrise and ends after sunset with the taking of food and drinks. Fasting is “obligatory” for adult Muslims, except those that are ill, traveling, pregnant, breast-feeding, diabetic or going through menstrual bleeding. While fasting from dawn until sunset, Muslims refrain from

did not give her rice for those people while there was enough stock of rice in the UP, and after that she went back home with a heavy heart and started crying when she reached home and became bewildered, saying that: “being a woman member I could not give rice to these 15 poor people” (Woman Member, Chiora UP, 9 September 2013).

Following this incident, all women and male members became united against the Chairman and decided to propose a “no confidence vote”⁶⁷ against the Chairman to the DC⁶⁸ office, Comilla. After that move, hearing all of this from the general public the Chairman came to her home many times because she and the Chairman both were elected from the same ward. Then the Chairman requested her from moving against him, promising her that he would give her everything according to her shares or rights or privileges in the UP. Then being sufficiently convinced by the utterance of the Chairman she thought that no one should be judged by only one occurrence and she also deemed that the Chairman could be given one chance more. Then the Chairman asked her to sign the resolution and she signed it. After that the Chairman made her one of the signatories of the checks that deal with UP fund management.

After she was given signatory power, the Chairman always sent her blank checks for her signature. Then she asked the Chairman why he always sent her a blank check. In reply the Chairman informed her that the UP Secretary signed that check, and he also signed it and asked her what the problem was with her signing it. The Chairman also notified her that if she did not give her signature, there would be no problem in withdrawing the money. In fact, all of these blank checks which were being signed by her were for LGSP projects and represented huge money, which was

consuming food, drinking liquids, smoking, or engaging in sexual relations. According to Islam, there are enormous rewards for observing fasting and it is believed that the offering of prayers, recitation of the Quran and other religious activities are multiplied during the Ramadan period.

⁶⁷There is a provision in the Local Government (Union Parishad) Ordinance (Amendments) of 2010 that says that “no confidence” charge can be framed against any act of the Chairman, members or the Parishad (council) and any elected member can submit such a charge to the UNO in written form having signatures of the majority of the elected members along with the particular complaint.

⁶⁸DC refers to the Deputy Commissioner and the DC is the administrative head at the district level. The activities of the nation building departments are coordinated by the DC. It is the third tier of the local government unit in Bangladesh, although there is no representative of the local government body at this stage.

sanctioned for undertaking many projects in her name. The money was withdrawn by the Chairman without her knowledge. This incident made every member (irrespective of male and female) seriously angry with the Chairman and they altogether, 8 members jointly, filed a written complaint giving all of the details about the whole matter to the DC, and the UNO both and they also sent a copy to the concerned Ministry. In its wake, the DC formed an enquiry committee to probe into the matter and the committee then came to the UP and investigated the whole case. In line with their complaint the committee found that their written complaint was perfectly true and accordingly the committee accused the Chairman of stealing or misusing 5 lacks 60 thousand taka (7200 US\$). Based on the probe committee report, the Chairman's position was declared vacant by the Ministry in April, 2011. Immediately after that the Chairman went to the High Court and requested a stay of the order of the Ministry for 3 weeks from the High Court. Thereafter, the Chairman managed the stay order but after that he continued his illegal activities avoiding 8 members in the UP. She then stated that except for those 8 members, 4 other members (one woman and 3 male members) were now working with the Chairman. She said that one might be astonished to know that to stop her from protesting against the wrongdoings of the Chairman, he also employed hooligans/thugs to threaten her so that she could be stopped and still the Chairman's hooligans constantly threatened her. She informed the Upazila Woman Vice-Chairperson of this incident so that something could be done about them and they were trying to bring the issue to the media but nothing has happened to date. The Chairman continued his wrongdoings apparently without caring about anything. She said that she believed that nobody might have heard about such an incident anywhere in Bangladesh. While sharing their painful experience, the women members even demanded justice from the present author and the media and they asked him how this was possible in Bangladesh.

Coping Mechanisms, Processes, and Methods Adopted by the Women Leaders in the UP

Based on the ground reality and significance of the above cases and textual narratives provided by the women members, and the information received from the UP secretaries, male and female members from different UPs in Bangladesh, a brief

summary of the coping strategies opted by the women leaders has been described and analyzed here. In order to cope with the prevailing situation and to overcome their constant denial and deprivations of their rights in the UP, the women members adopted various mechanisms, processes, and methods to fortify their position and to reinforce their rights and prerogatives in the UP. Among those coping mechanisms some were formal and some were informal processes and methods, which are described briefly below.

a) Formal Means

The following are the formal means with which the women members sought to exert their rights and to cope with the UP:

1) Debates for forwarding argumentation in favour of their rights

Debates were the usual mechanism through which the WMs tried to address their challenges of deprivations by the male members in the UP. As a first approach the women members themselves tried to overcome the challenges by using their acquired knowledge and arguments with the Chairman and male members. They always tried to solve their problems of deprivation, misbehavior and injustice done to them through their usual arguments and the rationale attached to them. Having learnt about their rights from various training programs offered by diverse GOs and NGOs, the WMs began demanding their jurisdictional rights in the UP. Sometimes they became successful using such strategy when the Chairman was a moderate gentleman and taking decisions based on arguments and facts. The challenges that the elected women leaders encountered first was that the male representatives never approved of women's equal rights due to the in-built attitudes they obtained through a long tradition of patriarchy, religious fundamentalism, seclusion, and social control that they exerted on the females. Based on such a social premise, when women members obtained some knowledge of the rules and regulations through attending different training programs, some intelligent and assertive women were able to gain access to some of the important areas in the UP through their constant struggle with their rights. It was evident that over the years, there occurred some changes regarding the female UP members' motivation to become involved in social activities, to participate in the

decision-making process, and to raise their voice regarding UP affairs (Islam and Islam, 2012).

2) Protests in meetings

Expressing resentment or protesting against their deprivation in meetings was another *modus operandi* used to ventilate the grievances of women members toward the UP Chairman and male members. This was a widely-used coping strategy adopted by the women leaders. In the regular monthly or during any special meeting, they always tried to protest against the Chairmen and male members as and when they faced avoidance and deprivation in the assignment of any projects, safety net benefits, and other programs or opportunities in UP affairs. Being informed about their rights and privileges, the women members became extremely vociferous when they experienced deprivation and discrimination by their male counterparts, and through their constant struggle to achieve their rights, the Chairman was ultimately forced to comply with the requests and demands of the WLs in the UP and the women were provided with a few project assignments. Thus, using meetings as a platform for addressing their grievances and the injustice imposed on them, the women members gradually began to enjoy their rights in the UP.

3) Seeking assistance from the local administration

The Upazila administration serves as a local controlling authority of the UP and in general the government funds flow to the UP through the Upazila administration, and this is why when the women members failed to get justice or redress concerning those above measures, most of the women members resorted to assistance from the local administration. It was quite evident that during their initial stage, when there was no legal support for them and when using arguments and protestations in the meetings did not produce any results, they immediately meet the UNO to inform him or her their grievances and the injustice experienced in the UP. Furthermore, when any case of malpractice or corruption occurred in the UP, the women members tried to get remedies using protests and debates, but in most of the cases failing to get redress from the Chairman, the women members tried to resort to the UNO and in most of the cases such incidents ended with compromising with extending or sharing some sort of benefits with the women members. Thus the WMs instilled their position and roles in the UP.

4) Vote of no confidence

This is an established mechanism enshrined in the local government (UP) ordinance of 2010, which is being practiced as a controlling mechanism to address the massive corruption and injustice occurring in the UP. In a situation where extreme defalcation or deprivation occurs, sometimes the women members, together with the male members, resorted to a “vote of no confidence” move against their Chairmen. This was the last resort or weapon adopted by the deprived members against the massive injustice, corruption, and anomalies caused by the Chairman and his unholy alliances.

b) Informal Means

Sometimes rather than formal means, using informal means work better. The following were some of informal means that the women members generally adopted when they faced deprivation and injustice by the omnipotent Chairman and his allied male members in the UP.

1) Informing their husband and near relatives

Being utterly frustrated about being able to obtain their rights, sometimes the women members found themselves helpless in the UP. In such a situation having experienced deprivation by the UP Chairman and male members, in most cases, as one of the primary options, they often discussed with their husbands and near relatives when they failed to do anything. In most cases, problems occurred with assigning development projects and the distribution of VGD cards, VGF cards, old age pension, and rest relief facilities, where male members were very reluctant to provide due share to the women members. Their husbands or relatives took initiatives to solve the challenges using their usual political network. Sometimes they even expressed their concern to the Chairman with a sober approach and thus the WMs were able to mitigate their deprivation a little.

2) Using social capital

Being deprived of their legal rights in the UP many women members tried to use social capital to address their multifarious problems. Social capital refers to the resources such as trust and solidarity, social networks, information and communication, association, ideas, and support that individuals are able to obtain by

virtue of their relationship and interactions with other people. These “resources” or “capital” have a social meaning and they are only accessible in and through these relationships, unlike the physical (tools and technology) and human capital (education, knowledge, and skills), which are essentially the properties of individuals (Grootaert, Deepa, Jones, & Woolcock, 2004: 3). Scholars are of the opinion that building social capital in the society can help solve many critical problems. The formation of social capital takes place in a given society through interactions, relationships, networks, and cooperation among human beings. It does not grow overnight; rather, it grows over a long time through social customs and traditions, norms and values, culture and religions. Robert Putnam defined social capital in a broader framework. According to Putnam (2000: 19), “Whereas physical capital refers to physical objects and human capital refers to the properties of individuals, social capital refers to connections among individuals - social networks and the norms of reciprocity and trustworthiness that arise from them”. In the UP many women members were elected from an NGO background, so in many cases these women leaders successfully used this social capital to handle their problems in the UP. Some of the coping strategies adopted by the WLs based on social capital are portrayed below.

Using mobile phones: Nowadays as we are living in a global village, mobile phones have emerged as a powerful instrument to safeguard justice and protect the WMs from deprivation in the UP. In an age of technological revolution, by using mobile phones women members have developed huge networks and social capital in rural society. By using mobile phones it has become very difficult to keep secret any information from the WLs. With the blessing of mobile technology, WLs now have become able to maintain relationships with relevant nation building officers and relevant actors. Thus WLs are being informed of all the benefits and facilities that are expected to be channelized to the UP and they even collect such information before those arrive at the UP level using their network and social capital, so the Chairman and male members can never hide any such information. Most of the UP secretaries informed the interviewer that nowadays, with the use of cell phones, it seems that it has become almost impossible to deprive the

women members in the UP anymore, at least those that have a good linkage with the local MP.

Contact with MPs: Most of the MPs, for their own sake and self-interest, maintain linkages with local governments, although there was huge criticism about their direct involvement in the affairs of the local government because officially they were given an advisory role in all local government bodies in Bangladesh, and even the Union Parishad is not beyond their purview. Therefore, the MPs are well aware of the local development undertakings in the UP jurisdiction. Hence, UP representatives always try to maintain good relationships with the MPs. In many cases, the women members have a good relationship with the concerned MPs. Most of the women members stated that in a bid to ensure their rights and privileges in the UP, some women members contacted the concerned MP, as some women leaders maintained a good network with the ruling party MPs. Thus the WLs sometimes were able to manage the challenges they encountered in the UP.

Using the NGO network and legal aid advocacy group: NGOs and legal aid groups often emerged as a messiah for the women members. Having experienced non-cooperation from the UP Chairman and male members, sometimes the women members sought advice and assistance from the NGOs. From the initial stage and hitherto the NGOs were providing various training programs to sensitize women members about their roles and rights. Thus the women members were more or less aware of the services and roles of the NGOs and legal advocacy groups in the rural society. When the WMs claimed one-third of their rights to project assignments and other benefits enshrined in the UP rules and acts, the male members and Chairman in most cases denied them these rights and in such a situation some women members went to NGOs in order to be informed about their rights and privileges in the UP as the Chairman and male members did not show them the ordinance or handouts when they faced any challenges from the UP Chairman and male members. These women members were even often found seeking advice from the local legal aid NGOs for in order to redress their deprivation in the UP.

Approaching the Upazila Woman Vice-Chairman for help: In a male-dominated society, it is quite natural that the males would favour the cause of men and hence women generally garnered support and favour from women when they

faced any difficulty in the UP affairs. According to the existing legal frame, Upazila Parishad is also governed through a representative structure and in that body one of the 2 vice-chairmen positions is elected by women. When the deprived women leaders in the UP encountered problems caused by the Chairman and male members, sometimes they sought recourse from the woman Vice-Chairperson at Upazila Parishad. In such a case, to help the deprived women leaders Upazila Women Vice-chairperson generally came forward to extend their support and to provide suitable advice or support to redress the problem. Thus in some UPs some of the WMs were able to address their problems.

Using patronage through local political parties: Although UP elections are not conducted in Bangladesh on a party basis, the Chairmen and members are more or less found to be associated with political parties. As soon as the UP representatives were elected and began working with the Parishad activities, within a short span of time their political affiliations were exposed to each other. It was found that being deprived by the Chairman and the male members, in some cases the women members sought assistance from local political parties so that they could ensure their rights and privileges in the UP. Having been informed about the Chairman's political linkage, the WMs opted to use political leverage, using their husband and relatives so that they could be ensured of some of their shares from the Chairman through using a sense of fellow feeling and belonging to the same party.

3) Ventilating grievances with the community and constituents

As women members being directly elected by the villagers, they foster a feeling of obligation for providing services and benefits to their constituents and to the community people. For example, poor people sought safety net benefits from the women members. Sometimes they (WMs) prepared lists for the poor people, but due to a lack of cooperation from the male members, the women members were deprived of their due rights and thus they could not provide safety net benefits according to their prepared list. In such a situation, being a victim of male domination and devoid of rights and privileges in the UP, some of the women members disclosed their grievances to the concerned constituents and community so that those poor villagers

could understand their limitations. Sometimes the Chairman got feedback from this and offered some favours to those deprived.

4) Compromise with the Chairman and influential alliances

Compromise is always a good mechanism to overcome the state of suppression, deprivation, and being a victim of political opponents. Although the women members mostly fostered an uncompromising attitude towards wrongdoings, sometimes a few of the women members were not able to sustain such an attitude for a long time. Some of them were found to be very pragmatic because when they observed that some women members were maintaining a good relationship with the Chairman and his allies, and were getting various benefits from the UP, sometimes some of the women members chose this type of strategy in a bid to secure a few rights and privileges in the UP. In some cases the UP Chairman even threatened the WLs and employed extreme non-cooperation to keep them quiet regarding their protests against the malpractices and wrongdoings. In such a situation some of the WLs found themselves extremely vulnerable regarding the protection of their existence in the UP, which ultimately led some of the WLs to compromise with the Chairman. It was found that based on the ominous notion received from the Chairman, some women members even tried to manage the Chairman by offering him a bribe in order to secure VGF and VGD cards for the poor people (Alim, 2007). However, it is worth mentioning that getting feedback from the villagers, it was observed that the women members did not want to give a bribe to the Chairman. Sometimes being extremely suppressed by the overwhelming male domination and deprivation, the WMs opted to compromise with the prevailing environment in the UP. In most cases after the compromise with the Chairman, some of the women members were able to secure more rights and benefits in the UP in adopting a win-win strategy. However, in a few extreme cases, the women were also found to be uncompromising regarding the malpractices of the UP Chairman and this sometimes led to the no-confidence strategy.

5) Using media

Nowadays the media have become one of the most powerful instruments of ensuring accountability, transparency, and good governance in Bangladesh society. They have been epitomized as the greatest watchdog for ensuring

justice and protecting civil and private rights for individuals, groups, and state and non-state organizations. Likewise, WMs are also known to use the media to expose their deplorable grievances, and denial and deprivation. It was evident that some of the cases of deprivation and bewilderment of the women members had already been published in the news media. When the women members found themselves helpless to get any sort of redress from any corner, some of the women members resorted to informing the whole matter of their distress to the local journalists, who in turn helped to get the ideas published in the media. After being revealed in the media, some of the malpractices dwindled and the Chairman was even suspended in some cases.

Causes of Failure

Let us now discuss how such coping strategies adopted by the women members became abortive. In some cases, it was found that those assertive women members, who were successful in securing their rights in the UP through constant fighting with the Chairmen, were elected for multiple terms. However, in some cases the women members' efforts were quixotic due to the following causes:

1) Lack of solidarity: From the colonial period, most of the rulers adopted one of the important strategies, "divide et empera" (Misra, 1982)⁶⁹, meaning divide and rule. It was found that in some cases the UP Chairmen tried to intimidate some of the members from the rebellious groups by providing some of the facilities and benefits from the UP and thus the Chairmen became successful in creating a rift in the solidarity among the deprived members' alliances. Such was case of failure with the women members in the UP.

2) Patronage of unholy alliances among the UNO, Chairmen, and ruling party network: In most cases, in order to combat the resentment and dissatisfaction of the women leaders, the Chairman was found to pursue the patronage of influential rural elites. It was found that the Chairman was maintaining a very good

⁶⁹In the context of the South Asian Military regime, Jitendra Mishra (1982) observed that in order to ensure sustenance and survival of military rule, the military rulers generally opted six strategies, i.e. (i) co-option of civilians into the government, (ii) intimidation of political opponents, (iii) divide et empera, (iv) expansion of political participation, (v) constitutional legitimacy, and (vi) populism. Military intervention during the Ayub Khan Regime in Pakistan, and the Ershad and Zia regime during the Bangladesh period, testify to this fact.

relationship with the local administration, ruling party MPs, and other plundering groups surrounding the UP and local administration. It was quite evident that the complete social milieu of rural Bangladesh was entirely engulfed with the syndrome of the patron-client relationship. The findings of the study (Asaduzzaman, 2008) reveal that a powerful unholy⁷⁰ network, termed dal chokra (mediators), plays an important role at the local governance in Bangladesh. Dalal chokra plays an intermediary role between the villagers and the ruling party leaders and the civil servants. The study confirmed three categories of mediators. The first category includes the leaders of the ruling party and the dominant opposition, student leaders, and the UP Chairman. The second category comprises local contractors and the trade union (Asaduzzaman, 2008). Scholars have termed this situation the “patron-client relationship” or “clientelism”⁷¹. In the above context, using that patronage, most of the time women members could not become successful in their moves against a powerful and establish structural arrangement at the local level of governance.

3) Decree from the Court: Drawing lessons from the Chiora UP, it is well understood that in addition to the family and society, the state itself has emerged as anti-women, as legislators, lawmakers, civil bureaucracy, and above all the courts often play a role in promoting the interests and causes of males instead of females. In the case of the Chiora UP, the suspension order of the Chairman was carried out for only 3 weeks by the high court, but the Chairman ultimately managed all intermediary groups where some male members and one female member joined him to sustain his misgovernance and supremacy in the UP. This is how women and some male members became unsuccessful in their move toward a “vote of no confidence.”

6.1.5 Summary

⁷⁰Unholy in the sense expressed in the concept of clientelism, which is heinous and precarious in terms of the flourishing of local democracy in Bangladesh.

⁷¹Clientelism is one of the major drawbacks in the governance landscape of Bangladesh and it has wide implications for local institutional reforms and people’s participation. Clientelism is a direct product of the undemocratic political culture of Bangladesh. The empirical findings of this study have also clearly demonstrated the fact that the clientelist relationship is a major threat to people’s participation in the local development programs. However, the local people of the study area acknowledged that their participation in the local development activities through the local institutions is in two forms: as manual workers and as voters. They have very little opportunity for participation in the decision-making and planning process of local development programs (see Asaduzzaman, 2008).

Here summaries of the perceptions of the participation, challenges, and coping strategies are portrayed below sequentially.

6.1.5.1 Summary of Perceptions

1. The women's perceptions of their participation in the affairs of the UP are quite interesting. They saw their participation in the UP as involving themselves in a few major activities performed by all of the elected representatives in the UP. Through taking part in local development projects these women members have ensured themselves of one of the important areas of the decision-making process because most of resources are being disbursed for undertaking such development projects and most of the decisions are mainly concentrated on and enmeshed with development projects at the UP level. This is how they have become a part of the UP governance, through which they have ensured their visible and vibrant presence in sharing, influencing, and controlling resources in order to bring about a qualitative change and the transformation of poor people's life at the local level. The perception of the participation of the women leaders concerning salish also represents another important area through which they could ensure their voices and choices for the rural community, which hitherto was fully occupied by the males. Moreover, by viewing the distribution of social safety nets programs such as VGD, VGF, old age pension/allowance, maternal allowance, 40 days' work, allowance for destitute women etc. to the community people, they decisively perceived their participation in the right direction as well because by being involved in such activities the women leaders could bring transformative change to the women's life through such interventions at the community level in the best possible ways. All of these above perceptions of the women leaders have helped them instilling a sense in the heart of the rural people that women leaders have appeared as a truly "change agent" for the community.

2. The entire issue of proxy governance revolves around the systematic subjugation of the women by according symbolic status in governance. Sometimes either the husband or other male members of the family not only help the women but also play a role of elected representatives on behalf of the male and female both. Therefore, it is mention-worthy that some male members also suffer from proxy problem in the UP. Such male members also represent their elderly relatives. In order

to assume some power and prestige in the rural society, they become UP members, but they have less interest in the overall development affairs of the UP. There is no denying the fact that out of a huge number of women leaders in the UP, a few of them came to be elected by the instigation from their husband, and many such women played a proxy role, unlike many empowered women in the UP. It can be asserted that most of the women leaders in the UP were the product of the NGO revolution in Bangladesh. Not only this study, but also many studies support this view. Nevertheless, the positive phenomenon lies with the fact that although they play proxy roles for their husband or any other male counterparts during their initial stage, by being repetitively deprived by the male members, being neglected by other women members, and finally having attended various trainings and seminars, these women do not remain proxies for a prolonged period and shortly they are transformed into empowered women. Moreover, in a highly patriarchal society, it is not uncommon to remain a proxy for a few women leaders in Bangladesh. However, as soon as their level of consciousness increased, they remained no longer a proxy leader. Referring to the case study section, it was found that the women members themselves were managing the infrastructural projects independently, meaning that they were estimating the projects' location, buying required materials, hiring manpower, and engaging themselves in project supervision and monitoring.

6.1.5.2 Summary of Challenges Faced by Women Leaders

The women leaders have decisively identified three major challenges towards ensuring their participation in UP governance, which are described below briefly:

1. From the above textual narratives and supported by evidence obtained through the relevant literature, we can easily understand how male members look into the issue of the emergence of women members in the UP. The male members are not mentality ready to accept the women members as their colleagues. The best example of the male hegemonic attitudes has been reflected in the utterance of a male member of South Durgapur UP, who thought that it was the males that brought the women into the trajectory of the UP and in his utterance he also dared to withdraw the power of female members if they bothered for their rights and shares in the UP. In his utterance we can get an extreme view of the male domination in the UP. The male members are not yet ready to share an iota of benefits or shares with the female members, although

legally the government has made provisions to give thirty percent of project responsibilities to the women members in the UP. The male members think that the women members have come there to create problem for them, especially in terms of taking away their shares. It appears that in the UP the women members have emerged as a threat to the male members, as they have been well accepted by the community and the general villagers because of their better performance and good behaviour. Hence, the male members are afraid of such an image of the female members. It was observed that in some cases the female members succeeded in obtaining some rights and shares from the UP Chairman after serious bargaining and struggling for their due rights. But being defeated, some male members still bear a grudge and impose hegemony over the women members by unnecessary filing cases against them and adopting various means of enmity with their female colleagues in the UP. More concretely, we can substantiate the fact that the women members are encountering serious male domination everywhere in Bangladesh. In a male-dominated society, man never wants to accept equal rights or shares with women. Women's subjugated rights are accepted by them but they never accept equal rights for women. The major cause of such a mindset lies with the concept of patriarchy and paternalistic social systems, which has been continuing until now without having any change in its form, nature, or structure.

2. Women members have become the worst victim of corruption in the UP because they are deemed relatively less corrupt and when they experience the corruption of the Chairman and male members in the UP, they are not able to coexist with the malpractices. In a true sense, corruption has plagued the potentiality for the smooth functioning of the local governance in the UP, which directly affects the participation of the women leaders in the UP. The whole society is engulfed with corruption, a draconian enemy for the efficacious development of Bangladesh. The ground reality revealed the whole gamut of how corrupt practices are perpetuated in the scene of local governance through a conglomerate of patron-client relationships among the UP Chairman, the local administration, contractors/suppliers, local political parties, and concerned MPs. However, the most striking phenomenon here was that, given the structural challenges imposed by those established mechanisms,

coupled with cultural bottlenecks for misgovernance, the women leaders were striving to create a desirable tomorrow for Bangladesh.

3. Reservation no doubt paves the way towards positive discrimination in favour of women's causes and interests. In a highly hierarchical patrimonial social structure, women's political participation should be properly guided, patronized, and sponsored with the axiom of some sort of positive discrimination. In a nascent democracy, a reservation system is quite the sinequanon to bolster and buttress the cause of women's development, given the fact that fifty percent of the population is women. There are valid reasons why women leaders have identified the affirmative action provided by the policy framework of the government as a "problem" instead of viewing it as an "opportunity," because the Chairmen and male members, being obsessed with patriarchal values, are constantly imposing insurmountable barriers, labeling them as "reserved seat members" for example. Being extremely prejudiced with the patriarchal social structure, coupled with other cultural barriers imposed by religious ideology, kingship, factionalism, and the patron-clientele syndrome that governs the rural society, all of the elected male functionaries are depriving women of their due rights in almost all spheres of UP governance, which has led the women members to identify the reservation system as a "problem." Furthermore, the reservation system in the UP is designed in such a way that women members have found themselves marginalized there. Holding membership in a jurisdiction 3 times wider than that of men, they are enjoying only one-third of the facilities in the UP, which is tantamount to mockery of the rights of women in Bangladesh. This system reflects the true intension of public policy towards women in Bangladesh. This again refers to patriarchy and the paternalistic attitudes in the case of the policy making of the government machinery in Bangladesh.

6.1.5.3 Summary of Coping Strategies

1. In fact since colonial time, the local government has remained the domain of men. In fact traditionally it was believed by the society that public spheres are not for women and are only for the males' space; and when women were ensured of their first entry in the UP, they were simply nominated and they hardly got any opportunity to involve themselves in any activity in there. However, when the government

declared a thirty percent reservation for the women in the UP, there was no problem, but as soon as they came to the UP after being elected and started asking for their rights, the problems began. That was never thought of by the male members, but when they found that the government also made provisions for women members—that thirty percent of the development projects should have to be allotted to the women members, they started creating problems for them.

2. From the textual narratives and also from the cases of the Chiora UP, it was found that the Chairman, in tandem with the male members, imposed an embargo on the women members. The Chairman conducted meetings without informing the women members, and the Chairman never gave any responsibility to the women members. The women were totally neglected in terms of their rights, despite their legal entitlement, which led some assertive women to seek a remedy from the Upazila administration and the concerned MP. After that some women began to get a few project assignments and gradually they began to receive their rights and shares, but still the Chairman and male members could not accept them in their innermost mindset and still thought these women members were of no use and they were treated like auxiliary elements in the UP.

3. It seem to the present author that the male members have not yet accepted the women member fully and still they also feel that these women members are competitors because during their empire ruling for hundreds of years nobody challenged their authority. Now the women are challenging their authority by means of honesty, integrity and community services, whereas the male members are not at all ready to relinquish their stake in power and authority, let alone able to share their benefits from the UP. As the women members have sometimes challenged the male domination, sometimes they have faced violence by the male members. Now male members shall have to understand the reality that these women members are the reality of today's Bangladesh, so there is no way but to accept them by all means, according to their rights, the sharing of responsibilities, and everything in the UP.

4. In almost all of the UPs, a conflicting situation between male and female members prevails. Mainly such conflicts occur because of project assignments and the distribution of various benefits to the villagers from the UP. Last, fighting and struggling with the hegemonic exercise of the male members, these women have now

obtained huge bargaining power and they have successfully encountered male domination and through adopting various coping strategies, these women have become more and more empowered at the grassroots local of government. Evidence shows that in Bangladesh myriad donor-funded projects are aimed at strengthening the women's situation in the UP, providing immense support through imparting various training to the WLs that have helped to raise their awareness and conscientization about women's role and power and the implications of this role regarding participation, inclusion, accountability, and transparency. The formal means that the WLs have adopted for coping strategies are seeking arguments from legal sources, protests in meetings, seeking assistance from the local administration, and votes of no confidence. The informal means that the WLs have chosen for coping strategies are seeking help from their family and community people, using NGO networks and political patronage, seeking help from concerned MPs, compromising with the Chairman, and seeking remedies using the media. Coupled with those aforesaid formal and informal means of coping strategies adopted by the WLs, the above interventions advocated by the government, NGOs and donors, in turn, have helped the WLs' ability to express their opinions about the decision-making process and in upholding their convincing arguments in public hearings and debates in meetings, *salish*, and the entire governance of the UP (Sikder et al., 2011). Thus "not to give up my rights" attitudes were briefly the women members' coping strategies in almost all of the UPs in Bangladesh.

CHAPTER 7

HOW WOMEN LEADERS ARE CHANGING RURAL GOVERNANCE IN BANGLADESH

7.1 Do Women Leaders Promote Better Governance at the Grassroots Level and How?

In answering the above question, discussing with the different participants it was obvious that the women members were contributing to better governance in the trajectory of rural society. In line with the research question, at the initial stage the participants were asked whether the entry into of women members has contributed to better governance. After frequently asking the same question to a few respondents, it was observed that they could not understand the question, which led the researcher to change the question. Thereafter, the question was reframed in a different way so that women members could understand the question. When the women members were asked whether and how the inclusion of the women members helped or benefitted the villagers, then the answers began to emerge, through which the theme on women's contribution to governance was created.

From the textual narratives of the WLs it was observed that they were contributing to UP governance in diverse ways. In establishing or promoting governance in the UP, the WLs were making a real difference in the rural society. In fact, the women were changing the rural governance in Bangladesh. They were striving for ensuring pro-poor and better governance in almost all aspects of the village life amidst severe constraints by the socio-political milieu and reinforced by structural and cultural impediments imposed and textured by the patriarchal value system. These women have engaged themselves to a greater extent in transformative politics for the greater interests of the poor people of the rural society. The themes obtained here have been reorganized in some sub-themes, for example, women are ensuring transparency and accountability, social justice and reducing corruption, which are elaborated below.

7.1.1 Women Leaders Facilitated the Promotion of Transparency and Accountability in the UP

The women leaders are trying their utmost to contribute to governance of rural society in diverse ways. Through the entry of women members into the structure of local governance, it was found that they were trying hard to establish transparency and accountability in the sphere of UP affairs, which could be understood from the utterance of the Chairperson of the Jolla UP, Wazirpur Upazila, Barisal, who stated the following:

“As per government rules, when we undertook any development project in any ward, the respective ward member should have to serve as the head of the Scheme Selection Committee and the respective woman member should have to serve as the adviser of that committee and other village respectable elderly and few socio-cultural village elites also served in that committee but the main point here that due to the women members’ involvement in the Parishad, transparency, accountability and participation of the people had increased a lot” (Chairperson, Jolla UP, 31 October 2013).

In replying to a query about how people were getting benefits from the women members, the women Chairperson of the Manikdaha UP, Vanga Upazila, in the Faridpur district opined that “due to the entry into the women, transparency, accountability in the overall affairs of the UP had enhanced immensely.” Another woman member, Fatima Akhter Parul, from the Khadimpara UP, Sylhet, shared her experience in the following words:

“Yes we get VGD cards tantamount to male members but despite that people just run after to get that card, especially when it is VGF we face lots of problem because poor people never loose hope to get it from me. You know sometimes when I could not give them VGD card I just give 100 taka from my own pocket” (Woman Member, Khadimpara UP, 28 September 2013).

An analysis of the above quotation from Fatima shows her respect for the voters and her accountability to them. Due to scanty resources in the UP, it is hardly possible to satisfy all of the demands of the general mass, so she chose an appropriate way to satisfy her compliance with the voters of her jurisdictional area. Thus she proved that she was accountable to her voters. Furthermore, this also shows how women members maintain their commitment with the community people. This is unique; she provided better services to the community and her constituents also rewarded her when she contested the election for the second time because she was elected by the villagers for the second time also. Khan (2009: 23) also found that nowadays, the Chairmen and male members are becoming more and more inclined to gradually open up to the women members and help in maintaining transparency and accountability in UP affairs.

7.1.2 Women Leaders Contributing to Social Justice through the Rural Salish System

Despite serious male domination, women members are contributing to better governance by mitigating family feuds and establishing social justice. This has been substantiated by the utterance of a school teacher of the Kalirbazar UP, who said that the “involvement of women has eased women to get social justice and previously when the women became victims they could not tell their real problem to the male members but now these helpless victim women could easily share their painful saga to the women members.”

Siddiquee (2008) found that about 74% of the women leaders responded that they played a role in the cases of divorce, child marriage, dowry, acid throwing, women’s repression, rape, etc. Women members’ participation in issues such as divorce and child marriage aspects is much higher compared to other areas, such as acid throwing and rape. Amin & Akhter (2005: 8) found that 76.25% of the villagers have reported that the women members have been successful in resolving conflicts in the community; 13.75% have reported that they have been partially successful; and the rest, 10%, have asserted that they have not been successful in resolving local conflicts.

Supporting such a view one villager of the Chandpur UP, Boalmari, Faridpur district, added that “as there are women members in UP, sometimes they can help mitigating family quarrel, cases of violence and separation very easily taking help from relevant NGOs” (One Villager from Chandpur UP, 31 October 2013).

In response to a question about how these women members were contributing to ensuring better governance, some villagers opined that “due to such provision, women have got opportunity to flourish their leadership potential and thus they can represent the women and uphold the needs and wishes of the women through a structured arrangement.” Evidence also shows that female politicians view women as a distinct part of their constituencies or that they feel a special responsibility to women (Childs, 2002; Reingold, 1992). Replying to the relevant question a woman member from the Amratali UP, Comilla, immediately replied as follows:

“Due to entry of the woman member into UP, the women folk are getting huge benefit from us because when they experience male oppression and violence they immediately come to the woman member for remedy and they demand justice to us and they never go to male members for seeking justice for oppression and violence against woman. Sometimes we went for taking advice for legal action against that violence to the Upazila Officer for women affairs” (Woman Member, Amratali UP, 25 September 2013).

Siddiquee (2008) found that 66% of the women members were found to participate in salish on regular basis, which was quite high. Amin & Akhter (2005: 6) found that 75% of the women members have taken part in salish and the judgment of the UP like the male members; 15% of the women members reported that they were at times called in to attend the salish and judgments; and 10% reported that they have never been called in to attend the same. In reply to the question whether and how the general public benefitted by the presence of these women members in the Parishad, Fatima Akhter Parul, a woman member from the Khadimpara UP, stated the following:

“I do not know how general public are being benefited by the inclusion of women members in the Parsishad but I can firmly assure you that women would get enormous benefits by us. Especially in the village salish where women members remain present, the victim woman can share her personal experiences or opinions or grievances to us easily without hesitation and with enhanced courage and will force. Previously when women members were not in the Parishad, they never get courage to open their mouth before the male villagers and members during the local arbitration/dispute resolution process. At that time women became more victims by the judgment given by the male villagers but now the situation has completely changed due to the involvement of women UP members in the Parishad” (Woman Member, Khadimpara UP, 28 September 2013).

In a lively discussion with the Chairman of the Tukerbazar UP, Sylhet Sadar, Sylhet district, being asked what benefit people were getting from the women members in the UP, replying to the researcher’s question, stated the following:

“People had been benefited a lot by women members because in some familial issues male members had nothing to do but in these issues woman members had been playing excellent role in the village society. Still women in our society are lagging behind and we are to address all these problems through proper education in the society” (Chairman, Tukerbazar UP, 28 September 2013).

A long discussion session was employed with the male members in the Wahedpur UP, Mirersarai, where efforts were taken to know how the women members were contributing to the rural society nowadays. One male member answered the researcher’s question saying the following:

“When a woman falls prey to victim and gets oppressed by her husband or anyone, women member can interview and see everything how her husband or others tortured her personally checking the cut mark in her body but it was never possible for a male member” (Male Member, Wahedpur UP, 30 August 2013).

Supporting the views of the above male member a female member from the Wahedpur UP also indicated that “sometimes women members come forward to help women and help them get an employment, what cannot be think of when women members were not there in UP.”

Through analysis of the above utterance it is understood that the women members in the UP are trying their utmost to establish social justice by improving the outcome of the rural salish. Before their entry into the UP, the male members could not see women victims and based on verbal description from others, the salish council provided judgment, but after women’s inclusion in the salish process, now women members have resorted to their prerogatives to check the cut marks in their own eyes or marks of physical torture done to them by their husband or other actors, and being direct witnesses of the physical assaults, the women leaders are contributing to establishing improved social justice in the rural society.

7.1.3 Women Leaders Contributing to Improved Governance through Maintaining Integrity

Among the important components of governance, ensuring integrity and controlling corruption cannot be overemphasized; rather, for Bangladesh it is one of the most exigent issues for overcoming the problems of governance. It was learnt from the ground reality that the women members have challenged conventional corrupt practices, although sometimes they have needed to adjust to it being compelled by the stark realities embedded in the local governance system. Nevertheless, these women members themselves are striving to stick to their inherent sense of integrity.

It was learnt from the common people of the Chandpur UP, Boalmari, Faridpur district, that male members usually took money ranging from 400-1500 Taka

(5-20 US\$), while people came to them to ask for various services from the UP. The villagers informed the researcher that at the time of giving out the old age pension card, the widow allowance card, disabled people allowance, succession certificates, and other services rendered by the UP, the male members took money from the people that wanted to have those services but in general the female members never took any money from the people. The women members generally allotted these cards based on rational judgment and justified grounds, but the women members were given very few cards for distribution among the poor people and that is why the women members had to experience a lot of pain because they could not provide services to the poor people of the UP. The following quotation from one woman member from the Wahedpur UP, Mirsarai, is a glaring example of how women leaders are contributing to ensure the integrity in the UP:

“Not always we get money because we have to maintain the quality of the project when we construct any road. You know people want this road, so considering prestige concern we never think of doing profit and we don’t run after money because people voted for us. So we try our best to deliver the best and we never practice corrupt practices like male members” (Woman Member, Wahedpur UP, 30 August 2013).

Kaushik (1993: 6) also found that women are more sincere, stable, committed, capable of hard work, and above all, not corrupt. Schein (1989: 154 quoted in Genovese, 1993: 10) opines that “women’s leadership has been linked with enhancing world peace, reducing corruption, and improving opportunities for the downtrodden. If women, as keepers of the values of social justice, nurturance, and honesty, are put in charge, then the conflicts, corruption and greed around us will go away.” That such is the case is quite evident with the new women entrants to the leadership in the Bangladesh. Desai (1997: 53) describes how individual women have resisted the corruption that plagues the Indian local government, have used their budget carefully, and cleared the debts of their locality. The women that he interviewed pursued different goals from the men elected in their areas, particularly in relation to combating domestic

violence, controlling the sale and consumption of alcohol, safeguarding drinking water, improving sanitation, establishing girls' education, and caring for women's health and maternity.

7.1.4 Women Leaders are Providing Pro-poor Community Services

The women leaders in the UP have improved the pro-poor services in the UP in various ways, among which the formidable here are improving the delivery of safety net programs at the grassroots level. Now the government of Bangladesh is providing various kinds of safety net programs for the poor and vulnerable people of the country and the UP functionaries have been vested with the responsibility to distribute many of those safety net programs. Field data analysis revealed that the women leaders are contributing enormously to the improvement of service delivery in the UP. Replying to a question concerning whether the people were getting more services from the women members in the rural society after they were elected to the UP, a male member from the Amratali UP, informed the researcher that women were serving the society in different ways. He noted the following:

“All 3 women member are helping in distributing VGD cards, old age pension and VGF card, birth registration and many other things. When the beneficiaries of old age pension scheme withdraws money from the bank the women members are required to attest the form and sign with their seal. As they represent 3 wards, so when the beneficiaries of all those wards need to withdraw money from bank the women members need to be present always and thus they are serving the community”
(Male Member, Amratali UP, 25 September 2013).

Amin & Akhter (2005: 6-7) found that in distributing VGF and VGD cards 60% of the women members were allowed to be fully involved; 25% had partial involvement; and 15% had no opportunity to become involved. However, it was found that not only women leaders have integrated with distribution of VGD cards and VGF cards but they have also enhanced the number of beneficiaries, which can be

grasped well in the following quotation from a woman member from the South Durgapur UP, Comilla Sadar, Comilla District, who described the following:

“After we enter into the UP, the service delivery has improved a lot. In the previous day, the villagers get only 30 VGD cards, whereas now we distributed 120 VGD cards in just one ward, so whether we are doing well to them or not, they understand easily. We select the beneficiary very consciously, if the villagers see any slur to it, they just inform the Chairman immediately. We are available for the public as and when necessary and even when it was 12 am at 0 hours” (Woman Member, South Durgapur UP, 26 August 2013).

In the same study, Amin & Akhter (2005: 6-7) found that 60% of the women members were seen to be involved in disbursing funds for the old-age women. Based on the researcher’s field experience it was found that these women members were also involved in providing safety nets for women and the same was the case with maternal allowances. In line with this, a woman member from the Wahedpur UP, Mirsarai mentioned the following: “In our society government has started maternal allowance in every village. In such activities women members’ help and cooperation is a must for the smooth implementation of this program” (Woman Member, Wahedpur UP, 30 August 2013).

Obviously, the above quotations imply that women are getting better support and services from the women in the UP now. Although while they claim to be providing VGD and VGF cards to the Chairman, the women members are required to engage themselves with the male members, but due to their easy access to the poor women, the right selection of the applicants, their modest approach and their integrity, community people find these women leaders to be enormously beneficial and helpful to them, which has helped them to improve the service delivery of the UP to a great extent. Evidence also shows that there is no denying the fact that by ensuring selection of a fair list of eligible beneficiaries for safety net programs, local governments can contribute to increasing the access of excluded groups (Sikder et al.,

2011). Rahman (2005) found that engaging local communities proved better implementation of the development schemes at the grassroots level due to ensured transparency and accountability as well as improved service delivery by the UPs. These findings have also been corroborated by Nazneen and Tasneem (2010), where they found that both the communities and women councilors value the role they play in implementing safety net related programs and development projects, even though the female councilors' responsibilities are not fully demarcated from those of the male councilors.

Being blessed with some intrinsic human values, the women leaders have accelerated the provision of various community services, which are directly affecting the wellbeing of the poor rural women in today's Bangladesh. With their interactive leadership, which combines modest behavior, integrity, sincerity, fellow-feelings, easy access and friendly attitude, the women leaders have gained good acceptance in the community. Khan (2009: 16) found that greater interaction of the women members with the community members has helped change the perceptions of the male co-colleagues regarding women's public roles and responsibilities. Finding the community people to be appreciative of the women members' efforts and importance of the women in their families is also being enhanced. Amin & Akhter (2005: 7) found that 96.25% of the rural dwellers reported that the women members fully interacted with all sections of people irrespective of religion, creed, or caste; 2.75% reported having partial interaction; and 1.25% reported having no interaction without regard to religion, creed, or caste.

During an interview with a male member the researcher was informed of the following: "There might have little conflicts between male and female members in the UP but anyway we have accepted them" (Male Member, Mirjapur UP, 8 November 2013).

The underlying assumption behind the above utterance represents the idea that due to their community feelings and better service for the villagers, their popularity and acceptance reached such a level that the male members were trying to accept the women members, who were hitherto denied by the male members.

Example of community service by women leaders

The following case will reveal the real fact concerning how women leaders are providing community services for rural women. During the researcher's field visit, a woman member from Amratali UP, Comilla shared her experience about how she provided community service to one woman victim, which is narrated below.

Nazma Akhter, a woman member, Amratali UP, Comilla informed the "interviewer" that as an aftermath of a trivial family feud, one non-commissioned soldier in military service one day severely bit his wife and demolished all of the valuables in the house. After that he went away to Dhaka and the victim woman came to a UP woman member and asked for her help. Then the woman member advised the wife to collect the address of the higher authority of military services at Dhaka. After that she (woman member) sent a complaint against that man to the higher authority. And at the same time, she also talked over cell phone with that soldier and requested to meet her immediately. The soldier immediately came and informed her that if the Union Parishad did not withdraw the complaint against him, the authority would suspend him. Then she told the husband that if he stopped all of this family violence and lived happily with his family then she would help him. After that the woman member took a written undertaking from the husband where he proposed that he would never do such misbehaviour with his wife in the future. Then the woman member informed again the higher authority about his current promise and thus served the woman member and saved the woman's family. From the innermost sense of humanity and community feelings, Nasima provided this community service for one of the constituents in her jurisdictional [Retold by Nasima Akhter, Woman Member from Amratali UP, Comilla, 25 September 2013].

Women have better community feelings and from this standpoint the women leaders in the UP are now serving the community in many different ways. Examples of such community service provided by the women leaders all over the world are numerous. Siddiquee (2008) found that 77% of the women members assist the women of their area in obtaining access to micro credit from various sources. According to a research conducted by the Inter-Parliamentary Union in 2000, 89% of the 200 women from sixty-five countries believed that women had a special responsibility to represent the needs and interests of women (Waring, Greenwood and

Pintat, 2000: 133; Sawyer, 2002: 8). In the study of Buckley (1997: 173) it was found that women in the Russian Duma claimed that “they acted differently from their male colleagues. They emphasized that their commitment to hard work, describing themselves less aggressive, less envious, more progressive, more productive, more pain-staking, scrupulous, conscientious, more hard working, more pragmatic and opposed to war.” In Uganda, following the implementation of a 30% reservation policy in local councils, it was found that women began participating more in community services (Johnson, Kabuchu, and Kayonga, 2003). The same finding was also corroborated by Drage (2001), who found that women have a greater sense of social issues, well-being, and welfare for their communities. It was also found that women members have contributed enormously to areas such as housing, safety, clean water, sanitation, environment, and education, social implications of policies, health services, childcare, poverty alleviation, and community development. Explaining the policy choice of US state representatives, researchers found that compared to men, women are more likely to prioritize bills related to children, family, and women (Thomas 1991; Thomas and Welch, 1991) and healthcare and social services (Little, Dunn, and Deen, 2001). In the case of Sweden, it was found that female members of parliament are more likely than men to give high priority to issues such as family policy, elderly care, and healthcare (Wangnerud, 2000; Skjeie, 1991, 2002; Solheim, 2000).

7.1.2 How Are Women Leaders Contributing to the Overall Positive Performance of UP Affairs through Their Participation?

Judging from different angles and the experience from the ground realities it appeared that there was little controversy that women are contributing to better performance due to the having fair involvement and following different approaches in the affairs of the UP. In fact, men and women have different perspectives and roles in the society. Although women are born and brought up in a highly male-dominated atmosphere, there is evidence that due to different socializations and life experiences, women may simply be different from men (Phillips, 1991; Molyneux, 1985). Thus “women bring to politics a different set of values, experiences and expertise. Women have different interests than men do, and those interests cannot be represented by

men; therefore, women must be present themselves in the political arena. Not only that, but there are also cultural differences as women often have different experiences and different views on certain issues. As women come across and move through previously male-dominated positions and therefore when they are empowered, new perspectives and new competence are added” (Phillips, 1995: 6). At a particular time and place, men and women have difference experiences of life as a result of laws and customs. Those experiences mean that men and women understand the world differently, live in the world differently, and value things differently. As a result, they come to politics with different priorities, different goals and different ways of going about things. These differences may be extreme or quite minor, depending on the circumstances and the individual politician (Stokes, 2005: 232). It was learnt that women’s representation in parliament helps bring new skills and vision to society and different styles in politics, which ultimately results in creation or revision of laws in order to improve existing ones. Most of all, women sometimes serve as role models for future generations (Inter-Parliamentary Union, 2000: 41).

Many scholars have found such differences in the roles of women leaders, where they observe that in general male law makers are less likely to initiate and pass laws that serve women’s and children’s interests (Berkman and O’Connor, 1993; Bratton and Haynie, 1999; Childs and Withey, 2004; Schwindt-Bayer, 2006; Swers, 1998; Taylor-Robinson and Health, 2003; Thomas, 1991). They less often think about rape, domestic violence, women’s health, or child care.

Drawing inferences through the present author’s prolonged field work, lived experiences, understanding of the ground realities, and above all judging from different angular perspectives, it was learnt that through their active and qualitative participation women leaders are transforming rural governance positively and making visible differences in the entire jurisdictional affairs in the UP. The differences made by women leaders are reflected in their overall contribution to the positive performance in the UP, which can be thematically categorized in some areas, such as the following: women are maintaining better quality in development projects in the UP, women leaders are following different styles of participatory governance, women are more sincere in their assigned responsibilities, women members are preferable to

male members, all of which is described, explained and analyzed sequentially beneath.

7.1.2.1 Women Are Maintaining Better Quality Development Projects in the UP

During the data collection at the Union and village level, it was learnt that women are engaging in a lot of development projects, which prompted the researcher to visit some of the projects implemented by the women and male members as well. In the wake of data collection, delving into the case in point it was learnt from the villagers that in some cases, the women members are doing an excellent job. Following that a Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA) was done, taking villagers from different professional and occupations groups in order to obtain deeper insights concerning the quality of the work of men and women members. After discussing this with various participants in the UPs, the findings were found to be very interesting. A detailed summary of those textual descriptions is portrayed below, which will be analyzed regarding the meaning and essence in the concluding section.

Undertaking development projects for community people is one of the sinequanon responsibilities of the UP leaders. Siddiquee (2008) found that more than 60% of the women UP members reported participating in UP development activities such as infrastructure, health, education, peace and discipline, etc. but most of the respondents were found to be involved in infrastructure development. Amin & Akhter (2005: 6) also found that 65% of the women members stated that they have fully taken part in developing roads, khas land, and hut bazaar; 25% reported that they had receive partial chance to do so, and the rest 10% said that they did not have a chance at all to be involved in the same. Compared with their male counterparts, the women were implementing development undertakings with sincerity, honesty and commitment, which is reflected in the following quotations from the women leaders and the villagers as well. While the researcher asked the general people of Chandpur UP, Boalmari, Faridpur district about the quality of the project performance of the male and female members, the villagers opined that “the quality of the women’s work was much better than that of the male members.” The same finding was derived from Fatima Akhter Parul, a Woman Member, Khadimpara UP, while the researcher was

speaking with her, and at one point, addressing the differences between the quality of work of men and women leaders, she stated the following:

“I think that the quality of our work is better than male member because I implement my projects in my presence in the work sites and I never expect any profit from it and I think it is a great challenge for us to ensure the quality because if I could implement the projects better people would praise me and I would be respected more by the villagers. After implementations of the projects in the UP, I get some profits and even sometimes I get nothing. To me work is the main issue. In reality if the work is relating to cement, sand and bricks, it is hard to make profit because the estimates are calculated much below the market rate” (Woman Member, Khadimpara UP, 28 September, 2013).

This is how the women members have valued their work performance, and they are working in an entirely male dominated environment, but the main issue here is that they have taken their work as a challenge for their acceptance in the society. They never think of making a profit out of it; rather, their main concern is maintaining the quality of the work and fulfilling the community’s development demands. Through this utterance it appeared to the researcher that they are firmly committed to their work rather than motivated by other mundane interests and compulsions. Other ramifications reflected in her quotation are no less formidable, such as the suggestion that the “guesstimates” prepared by the Upazila engineering office for development projects did not reflect the market rates properly.

During the researcher’s discussion with the woman Chairperson of the Manikdaha UP, Vanga Upazila, Faridpur district, at some point in the conversation one of the villagers, who was attending the discussion, reiterated that “relatively women were sincere and their work quality were better than the man’s work.” During the discourse with the Chairpersons at the Manidaha UP, she has also agreed with that, saying that “When I assign any work to the female members I need not think about the quality but when I assigned any project to the male member, I must look into those projects” (Chairperson, Manikdaha UP, 31 October 2013).

The underlying fact behind this is that women are more sincere than the male members. Due to their inherent positive and philanthropic mental make-up, the Chairperson, being another woman, found her to be quite sincere and committed to her assigned work. Such a perspective on women was also gauged by a male member of the Amratali UP, who firmly confirmed this idea, stating the following: “Women are relatively more honest than the male members and there are less tendency and thinking for corrupt practices among the women members” (Male Member, Amratali UP, 25 September 2013).

Again in congruence with the view of the above male member, another male member of the same UP also supported the view of that previous male member and opined the following:

“Male members have a tremendous propensity for corrupt practices whereas women members never have tendency of such thinking. Men are very prone to think about number two things first⁷², they never think positively” (Male Member, Amratali UP, 25 September 2013).

Supporting a positive view, another male member added the following: “Women members take the work more seriously and they take the work for themselves” (Male Member, Amratali UP, 25 September 2013).

The above utterance was very significant. Female members have epitomized themselves as sincere and honest in their endeavour. They can be efficient and trustworthy as well. The community people have also faith and accepted these new faces. In a research conducted by Amin & Akhter (2005: 7), it was asserted that among the interviewed rural dwellers, 88.75% stated that women members’ activities were fully acceptable to the villagers; 2.75% said that their activities were partially acceptable to them; and 8.75% said that their activities were not acceptable to them. Based on the above quotations it can be easily concluded that women members were widely acceptable by the rural dwellers through their informal interaction with the masses, their role in community decision making, resolving local conflicts and

⁷²In the context of Bangladesh if anyone tell other that he or she is number 2, it denotes that man or woman is not good rather he or she is dishonest, bad or not pure or clean.

creating equal opportunities, which helps bring harmony and peace in the rural community (Amin & Akhter, 2005: 9).

7.1.2.2 Women Leaders Follow Different Styles of Participatory Management

During the researcher's field visits and interaction with the women leaders, practical insights were obtained concerning how the women leaders were managing their affairs in the UP, which uncovered the fact that these women leaders are following a participative style of governance in their day-to-day affairs. Following such participatory management, some of the women members were performing relatively better in the sphere of project implementation amidst a very complex social milieu. After the women members were interviewed, it was realized that they were doing well amidst the tremendous hegemony imposed by a patriarchal sociopolitical structure. From the pragmatic experience of the lived experiences of the woman members, the following textual descriptions were prepared. The women leaders' participative management style was made more intelligible from the following quotation of a woman member of the South Durgapur UP, Comilla Sadar, Comilla district, who stated the following:

“I have already implemented 9 projects in the UP. In case of those projects which need to be approved from Upazila, those project proposals were prepared by UP secretary but those projects which could be done by UP, in those cases we prepared the project document in consultation with male member, secretary and engineering assistant. The projects those were supposed to prepare by the UP were undertaken through convening meeting in the respective ward by informing all stakeholders through micings and then in the meeting we set priority according to the public demand and after that we finalize the project decision” (Woman Member, South Durgapur UP, 26 August 2013).

The underlying significance in the above quotation implies that women members are pragmatic enough to follow a participatory management style in their approach to adopting a mechanism of inclusion of all stakeholders so that they can

overcome many problems of arbitrary management. Evidence suggests that the women tend to be more democratic and participatory in their leadership style than the men, for example, allowing subordinates to participate in decision making (Eagly and Johnson, 1990). Men in contrast, tend to be more autocratic and directive. Studies of female legislators suggest that “women tend to be more collaborative in their leadership styles than men are, answering more positively when asked whether they try hard to find a fair combination of gains and losses for all sides, pull people together, and share power with others” (Rosenthal, 1998: 855). From interviewed state legislators from California, Georgia, Mississippi, Nebraska, Pennsylvania, and Washington, Thomas (1991) also found that female legislators saw women as advocating different style of politics—one that is more consensus and compromise oriented.

Women leaders are quite accommodative in their approach, which can be found in the words of a woman member from the South Durgapur UP, Comilla Sadar Upazila, Comilla district, who informed the researcher of the following:

“My brother (one male member) implements project in one side and I implement project in another side of the ward. If the project is bigger, then we implement project together and whenever the project is small (done from 1% land transfer tax) we implement project separately” (Woman Member, South Durgapur UP, 26 August 2013).

The verbatim quotation above shows that women members are maintaining a harmonious relationship and cooperative management between the male and female members. This also demonstrates the competency of the women members, as they are implementing development projects independently. This was possible due to their having obtained relevant knowledge and skills from various training programs given by a host of government and non-government organizations, and thus the women representatives have shown their potential to become change agents for rural women, which also has enabled them to manage various development-related issues, and their roles and functions, effectively (ADB, 2001).

Amin & Akhter (2005: 8) found that 78.75% of the respondents confirmed that the women members provided various opportunities to the rural masses without discrimination. Gani and Sattar (2004) found that women members were relatively young and modestly educated, but they felt that they had good leadership qualities. Democracy Watch (n.d.) found that about 75% of the women member's endorsed themselves as acting the Chairperson of project implementation committees and they were found acting as Chairpersons of some of the standing committees; namely, law and order committees, the family planning committee, the women and children committee, etc. The study found that about 73.4% of the women members did not face any obstruction in working at the UP, and the rest 26.6% faced difficulties from their male colleagues. It is deemed that playing all of those leadership roles successfully required different management styles on the women leaders. There is evidence that "women are more likely to exhibit cooperative, compassionate, and humane types of behaviors than men" (Schein, 1989: 154 quoted in Genovese, 1993). Women generally prefer to follow a soft approach, being very polite and convincing in their utterances so that they can manage the state of the affairs efficiently and effectively, which has been reflected well in the convincing style in the quotation of a woman Chairperson of Palashbari UP, Gaibandha, who opined the following:

"When people go to get services to the male members, they cannot give them services always and when they did not get any benefit from them, they came to women members and we explain the real situation patiently to them and they become happy with us" (Chairperson, Betkapa UP, 7 November 2013).

This was evident from a study conducted by Chatukulam and John (2000: 66-101) in Kerala, India which upheld the fact that despite facing numerous problems, women's performance on the basis of qualitative and quantitative indicators was in no way inferior to than that of male members. A sizeable segment of the society has come to accept the fact that women are perhaps more suitable than their male counterparts. Experiences from other states of India revealed that the women

elected to these bodies (Panchayats) have shown startling results in their performance, particularly in the sectors of health, education, access to basic services, and in ensuring a significant change in the living conditions of their respective communities. Even in a strong patriarchal culture these reserved women have been encouraged to demonstrate their leadership (Kot, 2007).

Scholars opine that by nature women are inherently sober and polite in their demeanour and approach. They value their voters properly, and listen to their problems and grievances attentively, which was confirmed by one male member from Amratali UP, Comilla, who stated the following:

“General people were benefited a lot by the presence of the women members because women generally went to women members as they could share their problems with women members politely. Women also listened to them very minutely and followed them whatever the women members said and also women members could convince the women very well and they could disseminate any message nicely” (Male Member, Amratali UP, 25 September 2013).

Women’s participatory approach has other positive ramifications in the society as well. Recent studies have shown that the political participation of women has positive effects on the country’s prospect for development: for example, countries with more women in parliament typically have lower levels of corruption even after national income is controlled for and other factors are shown to affect corruption (World Bank, 2001). Moreover, it is empirically evident that where the influence of women in public life is greater, the level of corruption is lower, and some scholars have also observed that women may have higher standards of ethical behavior and may be more concerned with the common good (Dollar et al., 1999; Reiss and Mitra, 1998; and Glover, Minnette, Bumpus and Ciesla, 1997).

7.1.2.3 Women Are More Sincere About Their Jurisdictional Responsibilities

Performing one's jurisdictionally-assigned duties is one of the important aspects of office holders everywhere. Women's sincerity concerning their jurisdictional roles and performances are also reflected in the available literatures and thus Siddiquee (2008) found that as a whole, participation in the monthly meetings of the women UP members is quite high; 74% women members participate in the monthly meeting. Also in India, several micro-level studies have pointed out that about 80-90% of the women attended panchayat meetings on regular basis. Considering their visible presence in local government affairs, one might conclude that democracy has become more participatory than before, at least at the grassroots level (Mohanty, 2001). Drawing lessons from the previous section and the women's attendance in the UP office, it can be claimed that women are more sincere than their male counterparts. Women member's sincerity about their assigned roles is aptly reflected through their sincerity in coming to office regularly. In the present author's opinion, given the congenial atmosphere of the UP, women members were found to come to the UP office every day, which was revealed through the utterance by Sufia Begum of Kalirbazaar UP, Comilla, who stated that "Almost every day I need to go to the UP because I am working as a panel Chairperson and that's why I need to sign many documents when Chairman remains absent in the Parishad" (Woman Member, Kalirbazar UP, 27 August 2013).

The above quotation from Sufia Begum is very significant. It was learnt that Sufia Begum needed to come to the office on a regular basis. Although the legal provision allows one woman member to be one of the 3 members selected for a panel Chairman in the UP, anyone from this panel needs to act as UP Chairman during the absence of the extant Chairman. The most significant point for the researcher was that out of those 3 members listed as the panel Chairman, the existing Chairman chose Sufia to play the role of the absentee Chairman, which implied that the Chairman had full trust in her. In a real sense, women are more trustworthy regarding their honesty, integrity and perseverance, which through Sufia's quotation appeared to be true.

Coming to office is an important aspect of performing one's role in the office properly. Although as a public representative, coming to the office regularly may not be as essential as any other office, this is of course an imperative to follow for playing one's assigned role and functions in the UP. In responding to the same question regarding her coming to the UP, a woman member from the South Durgapur UP, Comilla Sadar, Comilla district, replied as follows:

“We have to come to office almost every day because if we do not come to office, the male members will frown us telling that have you become members for keeping/sitting idle in the home?” (Woman Member, South Durgapur UP, 26 August 2013).

The above statement by the woman member from South Durgapur is another very important point to ponder seriously. Her statement is a glaring example of how badly male members behave with the female members. Male and female members both are colleagues in the UP, so they should have mutual respect, understanding, and fellow-feelings, but here we can see that instead of that, the male members engage themselves in teasing their female colleagues. In fact, still male members could not accept them as equal partners. The deep root of such an attitude, norms, behaviours and beliefs is deeply engrained in the patriarchal social structure, which positions and conditions women to be subjugated to men.

In the UP, among the many important functions, salish and doing projects are two of the most important functions as perceived by the UP functionaries and possibly also by the rural people. Women leaders have given proper importance to both the popular functions in the UP, and their sincerity in the rural salish can be seen in the following statement provided by a woman member:

“Our Chairman conducts salish everyday in the presence of 150 villagers. Previously the members conduct salish and deliver justice by taking money from the contending parties but it has now stopped completely. So we are bound to come to UP every day” (Woman Member, South Durgapur UP, 26 August 2013).

This implies how sincere the women members are because most of the time salish is conducted outside the regular office hours in the UP. Women need to play a very challenging role in all spheres in the family, society and the state. In a highly-traditional rural society such as in Bangladesh, apart from women's household and reproductive roles, these women leaders are also playing political roles, where they are attending the UP office and salish on a regular basis and this is an exigently important phenomenon in judging their level of commitment and sincerity related to their assigned roles, duties and responsibilities in the UP.

The most realistic utterance was the following given by a male member from the Garidaha UP, Sherpur Upazila, Bogra, which indicates that male members do not come to the UP until and unless they are bound to. The male member's basic intention for coming to the UP varied; for example, they can come to the office to get the formalities done concerning a development project; to obtain a development project; to get other benefits to be distributed to the villagers; to attend regular UP or special meetings; to give company to the Chairman; being present on salish day or hut day⁷³, and for other practical purposes. Most of the time they kept themselves busy outside the UP office doing their private business. We can easily understand the real scenario with the following quotation from a male member:

“In true sense, the male members remained busy or needed to keep busy in various outward activities and therefore they might not come to UP every day, sometime they needed to join salish but women members try to be present at list 6 days in a week for the benefit or interest of the local people” (Male Member, Garidaha UP, 8 November 2013).

⁷³In the rural Bangladesh hut concept refers weekly bazaar in a certain location of a village. Instead of regular daily bazaar, hut operates at a particular time of a day, once or twice in a week. Generally, villagers used to buy or sell their home-made or home grown agricultural or horticultural produce, livestock, poultry, hides, skins, meat, fish, eggs, milk, milk products, vegetables, spices, groceries, clothing, potteries, furniture, cosmetics and other daily necessities of life in the nearby hut. Sometimes hut is located at the out skirt of a regular bazaar. Hut is deemed as the part and parcel of rural life in Bangladesh.

It is interesting to note that women's sincerity was expressed by a male member, as in most cases, the facts could not keep secret for a long time; temporarily we can subsume the potential of women leaders. Overcoming or managing the patriarchal hurdles, these women leaders are trying their best to bring about change and transformation in the rural society through their inborn sincerity, honesty, and commitment.

The women members' sense of responsibility was quite different from that of the male members. Women are approachable by their constituents, whereas sometimes the male members try to avoid the voters from the UP. The common picture is that as soon as male members are elected to the office, they forget the interests of the general public and even sometimes these male members cannot be reached through cell phone, as the following utterance of Fatima indicates:

“When you need a male member you will know that he is far away from the UP office because that male member went to the port for doing some business there. At that time the people may need him more than anything but there is no way to get that male member for the benefit of the general villagers. Even sometimes people cannot get them through cell phones as they switch-off it. On the other hand, you will get women members available for all times when the villagers need them” (Woman Member, Khadimpara UP, 28 September 2013).

The inner essence of the above text is that instead of male members, women members are relatively available for the people, although they may not be always available at the UP office. People can approach them at any time by cell phone for any kind of service or information, but on the other hand, the male members value the voters less and they are less available in the UP.

During one interview a woman member from the Gunabati UP, Chouddagram Upazila said the following: “I do not know about land related problem so I never attend such meetings” (Woman Member, Gunabati UP, 9 September 2013).

The women members did not seem to be boasting about what they know rather they have integrity to express their ignorance. However, in the case of the

male members, very few of them will disclose their ignorance of any particular issue. On the other hand, women members will state the real facts without hesitation, which has been vividly depicted at demonstrable level of sincerity by a women member from the Gunabati UP.

Women members were found to be sincere and loyal to their legal compulsion; on the other hand, the male members have different perspectives. Most of the time their main concern is securing personal gain, not public interest. Again women's commitment and sincerity can be found in the utterance of the women Chairperson of the Manikdaha UP:

“As a woman Chairperson I always try to provide man and woman equal jobs and I strictly follow legal procedures and thus I tried to distribute works among male and female members equally” (Chairperson, Manikdaha UP, 31 October 2013).

Another indicator of women's sincerity and integrity was explored here, the idea that women members were working in their entire jurisdictional area although their first preference should lie with their own ward. However, instead of implementing projects in their ward, they expanded their work to other areas based on the public demand. During the researcher's interview with Fatima Akhter Parul, Woman Member, Khadimpara UP, Sylhet Sader, Sylhet District, she stated the following:

“We have to work more or less in 3 wards because we are accountable to inhabitants of all 3 wards, so sometimes we could never do any project in my own area. You should know that I have been working in UP from 2005 but I could not construct any road in my home. I know if I build this road, people from other areas would vehemently criticize me” (Woman Member, Khadimpara UP, 28 September 2013).

Fatima has been serving the UP for 2 terms, but within her whole tenure in office, she did not implement any project in her area. This demonstrates the

glaring example of maintaining the sincerity and ethical behavior of the women members. Instead of using her political prerogatives, she chose the right path and valued the organizational norms because she did not resort to her self-interest, abusing her public office. Rather, she complied with the norm of the public's or common interest.

7.1.2.4 Women Members Are Preferred to the Villagers than the Male Members

It was found from the field sources that women leaders are more preferable to their constituents. According to the researcher's analysis, this is because of their different style of behaviour with the people. When villagers go to the male members, the males do not pay heed or attend to their interests, demands or causes attentively, and they sometimes even misbehave with them. On the other hand, female members try to listen to their problems minutely and the women members maintain very informal behavior with their constituents, so they have become popular to the males and females both, but in most cases the female members seek more benefits for them. Such preferences of the voters in favour of the female members are aptly reflected in the following statement made by Fatima Akhter Parul, Woman Member, Khadimpara UP, Sylhet district:

“In my observation I think people go to male and female members both but in my opinion village women come huge numbers to female members because if male members could not give anything to the people they scolded them but to my opinion as a women member when we could not give anything to them we try to console them saying that next time we would provide something to you but we never misbehave with them”
(Woman Member, Khadimpara UP, 28 September 2013).

From the following text, it is understood that Sufia was very popular with the villagers. From the case study it was learnt that she was involved in a cooperative organization for a prolonged period and she had obtained the love and respect of the community members. She used to help people by providing some

services, such as helping villagers get birth registration certificates; helping the beneficiaries of old age pensions, maternity allowances, and allowances for destitute women in withdrawing money from the bank; informing villagers of the immunization to bring their children to the health centre, etc. Playing the role of panel Chairman in the UP in the absence of the existing Chairman also helped her to be popular as a community leader. And of all these roles provided her with a space or platform for interacting with a huge number of villagers and ultimately helped convince the poor men and women to come to Sufia in order to fulfill all of their needs, aspirations, and interests, which is clearly reflected in the following quotation from her (Sufia Begum, Women Member from the Kalirbazar UP):

“As a woman member in UP, I observe that women generally do not come to me rather general villagers come to me for solving their myriad problems and general villagers requested me to bring more and more developmental projects.... In general male villagers come to me for seeking different kinds of assistance offered by the UP to me. Most of the time women villagers come to me for asking old age pension, 40 days work, VGD card, widow allowance, VGF card etc. and request me to submit their application to the UP Chairman in order to get those aforesaid benefits” (Woman Member, Kalirbazar UP, 27 August 2013).

From the above quotations it is mention-worthy that women leaders behave modestly with their constituents and thus more men and women seek help and assistance from them. Many researchers, especially Astin and Leland (1991), see men and women exercising very different styles of leadership, and they found that “males use a hard style of leadership that stresses hierarchy, dominance, and order. Women, on the other hand, exercise leadership characterized by a soft style of cooperation, influence, and empowerment”. In another research on women it was found that women that hold political office reveal a tendency to be slightly more liberal than men (Thomas, 1987; Welch, 1985). Due to following a modest and soft approach, general villagers in fact would like to seek assistance from the female members and approach them with their problems.

7.1.3 Summary

The following section summarizes how women leaders are promoting governance in the UP and how women leaders are contributing to rural society in a positive direction.

7.1.3.1 Summary of Governance by Women Leaders

From the above textual narratives we can conclude some broad points about the contributions of the female members to UP governance. In establishing or promoting governance by their presence in the UP, the women members are making a real difference in the rural society. In fact, women are changing rural governance in Bangladesh. They are striving for ensuring pro-poor and better governance in almost all aspects at the village level amidst severe constraint by the socio-political milieu and reinforced by the structural and cultural impediments imposed and textured by the patriarchal value system. These women have engaged themselves to a greater extent in transformative politics for the greater interest of the poor people of the rural society. The following is a summary of their contribution to local governance.

1. Promote Transparency and Accountability: By sharing all of the relevant information with the community people, women have ensured transparency and accountability in rural society. When they initiate a project, they discuss it with the village elderly and respectable rural elites and they seek advice and consultancy from experts. They also maintain good linkages with the rural elites and those that matter for the society. Apart from that, when the beneficiaries of the old age pension scheme, widow allowance, maternal allowances and other service receivers go to the bank to get their allowances, the women member needs to remain present there at the nationalized scheduled bank because they need to attest to and certify the necessary documents. Thus these women are helping with the transparency and accountability in UP activities.

2. Establishing Social Justice: Previously, when women were victims of violence from their husband or any other person, there was no chance to observe the victim as there were no woman members at that time. Now when a woman becomes a victim of physical assault by her husband, the woman member can see it and accordingly the charge can be framed by the salish council with evidential proof presented by the women leaders. This has brought about a positive change in the rural

salish conducted by the UP. When poor women seek a remedy regarding any family feud or violence against them, these women members help them get legal support from relevant sources, which were non-existent while women members were not in the UP. Women members thus help rural women achieve social justice and a better life.

3. Reducing corrupt practices in the UP: Previously male members and the Chairman undertook some projects, but they sometimes did not implement those projects properly and they adopted unfair means and practiced defalcation in such a manner that the Chairman and male members could “drain out” a certain portion in connivance with a few male members by doing some paper work. However, with women members now playing a role in the UP, this has become every difficult to do so now because they have a wider network and linkage with UNO, MP and others. Thus, by maintaining a constant linkage with the socio-political elites such practices have become nearly impossible. It was evident that in the distribution of all of these safety net services, women choose the applicant based on the grounded reality rather than taking money from them. They are not only choosing the desired candidates but they have increased the number of services provided to the applicants, bargaining with the male members, whereas previously some male members provided services based on a cash nexus.

4. Improved Pro-poor Services to the Villagers: From their textual narratives it was evident that women leaders are providing better services in many ways. At present the Bangladesh government is providing various safety net programs for diverse sections of poor people in order to address the problems of poverty, income inequality, mal-nutrition, maternal mortality and famine. Many of those safety net programs are implemented by the UP, among which are the distribution of VGD cards, VGF cards, old age pension, a 40-day work schedule, disabled people's allowances, widow allowance cards, test relief, allowance for pregnant mothers etc. In distributing the assigned safety net program to the UP, women members are playing formidable roles in the selection of applicants based on judgments. Instead of taking bribes like the male members, the WLs are choosing the right people and they have been able to enhance the coverage through their negotiations with their male counterparts. In the rural society the villagers maintain very friendly relationships

with the women members, the WLs always help villagers get their son's or daughter's birth registration certificates easily, and they also help get death registration and succession certificates. On the other hand, in some cases the male members provide services on a cash basis but the women members never claim anything; rather, they are providing quick services to the community people without any harassment or monetary involvement.

7.1.3.2 Summary of Positive Contribution by Women Leaders

Based on the grassroots voices and ground reality it is strongly evident that the women leaders are now changing the rural governance in Bangladesh. They are bringing changes in the quality of governance through improving the quality of the development projects undertaken by the women leaders, providing a participative leadership at the grassroots level, extending better community services to the rural poor; demonstrating their inbuilt sincerity and honesty by performing their role properly, and finally by being more preferable and acceptable to the people. In performing all of those above responsibilities, the major factors that have ensured their quality governance at the grassroots level are their inherent integrity, patience, positive attitude, polite behavior, convincing capacity, cooperativeness, participatory and consultative leadership style, and firm commitment towards the welfare and wellbeing of the society, etc. The most significance aspect of women leaders' performance was that these women leaders were able to bring about such qualitative changes in local governance while accomplishing their regular household and reproductive role and the challenges posed by the primordial patriarchal social structure.

CHAPTER 8

RESULTS AND FINDINGS OF ALL CHAPTERS

8.1 Introduction

From the case studies, the phenomenology, and the empirical evidence from the available literature, this section aims at providing a summary of all the previous chapters incorporating the significant issues discussed in the relevant chapters.

8.1.1 Findings of the Structure and Systems That Allow Women to Play Roles as Leaders

In order to help women leaders flourish, positive impetus is required from socio-cultural, economic, political and legal structures, and processes and systems that allow them to enter public space. The socio-cultural structures and systems that have promoted the cause of women's leadership are liberal norms, values, beliefs, attitudes; education; democratic governance; the role of ITCs and the revolution in science and technology; women's status, position and acceptance in the society; the role of women's organizations and networks; international women's organizations and movements, and institutional and organizational factors. These systems have helped women address these issues in a positive way in the society, which in turn has helped to increase women's leadership in Bangladesh. Collective actions, mass mobilization, different political movements in the society, and civil society movements have also helped women to raise their voices, demands, needs, concerns and problems, as through the process of collectivization and socio-political movements women can mobilize support and strength in favour of their cause and interests and this will help women come into leadership roles. In Bangladesh, the revolution and movement of NGOs have played a formidable role in building huge social capital and economic emancipation for women, which has contributed immensely to the cause of women's leadership at the grassroots level. Some legal factors, such as suitable constitutional provisions in favour of women, WID policies and enabling legislation, affirmative

action and programs promoting the cause and interests of women have helped influence the development of women's leadership in the country.

8.1.2 Findings of the Case Studies

In line with the research questions and objectives set for the study, the major findings obtained from the case studies are described below briefly.

8.1.2.1 It was observed from the case study section that the women leaders entered into political space by using their family network and dynastic political legacy sometimes as surrogates for their husbands or fathers. Their NGO involvement helped them to unleash their potential to grow as leaders. Women's prolonged association and work experience with NGOs helped them to achieve social mobility, conscientization, sufficient practical knowledge, courage and mental strength, etc., which in turn might have helped them form their attitude and behavior, beliefs and thinking patterns to develop their personality and achieve some managerial capacity. The combined effects of all those above factors might have result in and contributed to their assuming a leadership role in the community. Obtaining family support and their socio-economic background provided them with a supportive base for playing an effective role as leader. The interaction and linkage with political parties and MPs as well helped them play a leadership role.

8.1.2.2 The major challenges behind developing women's leadership were identified as patriarchy; the structural bottleneck created by a mismatch between a representation style and their legal entitlement; lack of support from the UP Chairmen, male members, and an unfavorable attitude from the local administration and MP in terms of paying attention to the cause of women's interests; massive corruption promoted by unholy alliances through patron-client linkages; and above all the omnipowerful draconian autocratic authority structure of the Chairmen position—all of those have caused inhibiting factors in terms of the women's participation in the UP. In some cases the women members lacked the required knowledge and interest, also causing problems for taking part in the overall affairs of the UP. Due to the discriminatory behavior from the UP male Chairmen and members, women members' have become secondary and they are being deprived of their due rights and shares in the UP.

8.1.2.3 Most of the women Chairpersons tried to cope with the male domination created by the male members boldly and courageously. The coping strategy adopted by the women Chairpersons and members were the following: using knowledge gained through rules and regulations; following honesty, integrity, transparency, accountability in all of their actions; garnering public support; bearing/fostering a resilient mentality with confidence, using strong arguments, commitment, patience, strong and indomitable will power, uncompromising attitude for sticking to their own value judgment, etc. Having experienced those coping strategies of the women leaders, the male Chairmen and members, despite their absolute majority, were ultimately bound to comply with the value judgment fostered by the women leaders for ensuring gender equality in the UP.

8.1.2.4 Women members have ensured better governance in the UP through their sincerity, honesty, and integrity, which has helped them to provide various community services, enhancing the scope of pro-poor services and benefits, promoting transparency, accountability, reducing corruption, and increasing community participation using participatory, consultative, and cooperative governance. Through the salish, women are upholding their voices and choices at the community level, which has helped the women members to play a formidable role in safeguarding the interests of the life-related matters of the women in the community, and thus women are contributing in terms of establishing rule of law and social justice, which are the basic twin objectives of ensuring good governance in the rural society.

8.1.2.5 Some women leaders have emerged as supra-social workers, fostering a strong community mind through providing extensive community services and bringing about transformative change and development at the grassroots level. Some of the women were found to be promoting the cause and interests of women's issues at the UP level and thus they are striving to ensure deprived women's rights and equality in the UP among the serious male domination. In some cases it was found that people are giving value and showing due respect to the women leaders due to their honest leadership image. Given the suitable environment and enabling legislation, women can prove their worthiness through upholding the position of the

chair and playing their roles and responsibilities properly, and in some cases they can even produce better performance than their male counterparts.

8.1.3 Findings on the Perceptions of Women Leaders

How women leaders internalized their perception of their participation and other issues related to the women leaders is portrayed beneath.

8.1.3.1 The women's perceptions of their participation in the affairs of the UP were quite interesting in this study. They perceived their perceptions about participation in the UP as involving themselves in major activities performed by all elected representatives there. Through taking part in local development projects these women members have ensured their roles in one of the most important areas of decision-making process because the lion's share of the resources in the UP are disbursed for undertaking development projects and most decisions revolve around it at the rural level. This is how they have become a part of UP governance, through which they have ensured their visible and vibrant presence in sharing, influencing, and controlling resources in order to bring about a qualitative change and transformation of poor people's life at the local level. The perception of the participation of the women leaders about salish also represents another important area through which they have been able to ensure their voices and choices for the rural community, which was hitherto fully occupied by the males for a very long time. Moreover, by viewing the distribution of social safety net programs such as VGD, VGF, old age pension/allowance, maternal allowance, 40-day work, allowance for destitute women, etc. to the community people, they decisively perceived their participation in the right direction as well because by becoming involved in such activities the women leaders have brought transformative change to the women's lives through such interventions at the community level in the best possible way. All of these above perceptions by the women leaders have helped them to instill a sense in the hearts of the rural people that women leaders have appeared as truly "change agent(s)" for the community.

8.1.3.2 Judging from the ground reality it was found that sometimes husbands or other male members of the family are helping the women members play the role of elected representatives on behalf of them. Sometimes the male members

were also found to be taking help and assistance from their elderly relatives, representing those guardians and thus they are playing proxy role in the UP. In order to assume some power and prestige in the rural society, they have become UP members, but they have less interest in the overall development affairs of the UP. There is no denying the fact that, out of a huge number of women leaders in the UP, a few of them were elected by the instigation of their husband, and many of these women have played a proxy role, unlike many empowered women in the UP. It was also found that most of the women leaders in the UP were the product of the NGO revolution in Bangladesh. Not only this study, but also many others studies support this view. Nevertheless, the positive phenomenon lies with the fact that although they play proxy roles of their husband or any other male counterpart during their initial stage, being repetitively deprived by the male members, being neglected by other women colleagues, and last having attended various trainings and seminars, these women do not remain a proxy for a prolonged period and shortly they are transformed into active partners in the UP development. Moreover, in a highly patriarchal society, it is not unlikely to remain a proxy by a few women leaders in Bangladesh. However, as soon as their consciousness level increases, they remain no longer a proxy leader. Drawing reference from the case study section, it was found that the women members themselves are managing the infrastructural projects independently, meaning that they are estimating the projects location, buying required materials, hiring manpower and engaging themselves in project supervision and monitoring properly, which do not conform to women's proxy role in UP governance.

8.1.4 Findings of Major Challenges of Women Leaders in the UP

The women leaders have decisively identified three major challenges towards ensuring their participation in UP governance, which are described briefly below.

8.1.4.1 It was observed that male members are yet to ready to share any of the benefits or shares with the female members, although legally the government has made provisions to give thirty percent of the project responsibilities to the women members in the UP. The male members think that women members have come thereto create problems for them, especially in terms of taking away their shares. It appears that in the UP the women members have emerged as a threat to the male members as

they have been well accepted by the general villagers from their better performance and good behaviour. Hence the male members are afraid of such an image of the female members. In a male-dominated society, a man never wants to accept equal rights or share with women. Women's subjugated rights are accepted by them but they never accept equal rights for them. The major cause of such a mental make-up lies with the concept of patriarchy and paternalistic social systems, which has been continuing for a long time without having any change in their form, nature, structure, or its practices.

8.1.4.2 The women members have become the worst victim of corruption in the UP because women are deemed to be relatively less corrupt, and when they experience the corruption of the Chairmen and male members in the UP, they find it impossible to coexist with malpractice promoted and sustained by the male functionaries. In a true sense, corruption has plagued the potentiality for the smooth functioning of the local governance of the UP, which is directly affecting the participation of women leaders in it. The whole society is engulfed with corruption, a draconian enemy for the efficacious development of Bangladesh. The ground reality revealed the whole gamut of how corrupt practices are perpetuated in the scene of local governance through a conglomerate of patron-client relationships among the UP Chairman, local administration, contractors/suppliers, local political parties, and concerned MPs. However, the most striking phenomenon here was that, given the structural challenges imposed by those established mechanisms, coupled with cultural bottlenecks for misgovernance, the women leaders were striving to their utmost to bring about a desirable tomorrow for Bangladesh.

8.1.4.3 Reservation system no doubt paves the way for positive discrimination in favour of women's causes and interests. In a highly hierarchical, patrimonial social structure, women's political participation should be properly guided, patronized and sponsored with the axiom of some sort of quota system. In a nascent democracy, the reservation system is quite the sinequanon for bolstering the cause of women's development given the fact that fifty percent of the population is women. There are valid reasons why women leaders have identified the affirmative action provided by the policy framework of the government as a "problem" instead of viewing it as an "opportunity," because the Chairmen and male members are obsessed

with patriarchal values and are constantly imposing insurmountable barriers on them, labeling them as “reserved seat members.” Being extremely prejudiced with the patriarchal social structure, coupled with other cultural barriers imposed by religious ideology, kingship, factionalism and the patron-clientele syndrome that has governed the rural society, all of the male-elected functionaries are depriving of women and denying them their due rights in almost all spheres of UP governance, which has led the women members to identify the reservation system as a “problem.” Furthermore, the reservation system in the UP is designed in such a way that women members have found themselves marginalized there. Holding a membership for a jurisdiction 3 times wider than that of men, they are enjoying only one-third of the facilities in the UP, which is tantamount to making a mockery of the rights of women in Bangladesh. The mismatch between the legal frame and their entitlements to rights compared to their representation style has been causing detrimental effects on the perpetual drudgery of the suffering and pain for the women leaders in the UP.

8.1.5 Findings of the Coping Strategies Adopted by Women Leaders

The women leaders were very successful in managing the threats and challenges posed by the Chairmen and male members in the UP by resorting to some very effective coping strategies, which are summarized below.

8.1.5.1 Traditionally it was believed by the society that public spheres are not for women but only for males. When women got their first entry into the UP through provision of nominations at that time, these women were simply ornamental and titular. However, when the government provided them with a 33% reservation quota with direct election, there was no problem. As soon as they came to the UP, being elected by the adult franchise and when they began asking for their rights in the UP, the problem began, which was never thought of by the male members. However, when they found that the government had also made a provision for women members, they started creating problems for them. From the field data it was clearly found how the Chairman, in tandem with the male members, imposed an embargo on the women members. The Chairman conducted meetings without informing the women members, and the Chairman never gave any responsibility to the women members. The women’s rights were totally neglected, even after the government’s provision was

declared. Then some bold women sought a remedy from the local (Upazila) administration and the MP, and after that some women began to get a few project assignments and gradually other women began getting their rights and shares, but still the Chairman and male members could not accept them in their innermost mind and still thought that these women members were of no use and they were just treated like auxiliary elements in the UP.

8.1.5.2 When women members began challenging the male domination, sometimes they faced violence by the male members. Nevertheless, now the male members have understood the reality, that these women members are the reality of today's Bangladesh, so there is no way but to accept them by all means, by their rights, the sharing of responsibilities, and everything in the UP. The fact is that through ceaseless fighting and continued struggle for their existence in the UP, the women members have declared their visible and robust presence in the UP, which has helped them ensuring their rights.

8.1.5.3 In almost all of the UPs in Bangladesh, conflicting situations between the male and female members prevail. Mainly such conflicts occur regarding project assignments and the distribution of various benefits to the villagers from the UP. Last, fighting with the male hegemony, these women have now successfully encountered male domination, and by adopting various coping strategies these women have become more and more empowered at the grassroots, local-government level. Evidence shows that in Bangladesh myriad donor-funded projects are aimed at strengthening women's condition in the UP, providing immense accompanying support through imparting various types of training to the women leaders, which has helped raise their awareness and conscientization about women's role, their inclusion and accountability.

8.1.6 Findings on How Women Leaders are Promoting Governance

Finally, some broad points can be stated about the contributions of the female members to UP governance. In establishing or promoting governance by their presence in the UP, the women members are making a real difference in the rural society. They are striving to ensure pro-poor and better governance in almost all aspects at the village level amidst severe constraint by the socio-political milieu

reinforced by the patriarchal value system. These women have engaged in transformative politics for the greater interests of the poor people of the rural society. The following is a summary of their contribution to local governance.

8.1.6.1 Establishing Social Justice: In the past when women were victims of violence from their husbands or other persons, there was no chance to check the casualty of the victims as there were no women members at that time. Now, when a woman becomes a victim of physical assault by her husband and others, the woman member can see it and accordingly a charge can be framed by the salish council with evidential proof presented by the women leaders. This has brought about a positive change in the rural salish conducted by the UP. When poor women come to seek a remedy regarding any family feud or violence against women, these women members help them get legal support from the relevant sources, which were non-existent while women members were not in the UP. Women members thus help rural women obtain social justice and a better life.

8.1.6.2 Promote Transparency and Accountability: By sharing all of the relevant information with the community people, the women leaders have ensured transparency and accountability in rural society. When they initiate a project, they discuss it with the village elderly and respectable rural elites and they seek advice and consultancy from the expert villagers. At the same time they also maintain good linkages with the rural elites and those that matter for the society. Apart from that, when the beneficiaries of the old age pension scheme, widow's allowance, maternal allowances, and other service receivers go to the bank to get their allowances, the women members need to remain present there because they need to attest to and certify the necessary documents. Thus these women are helping transparency and accountability in the UP activities.

8.1.6.3 Reducing Corrupt Practices in the UP: Previously the male members and Chairman undertook some projects but they sometimes did not implement them properly and they adopted unfair means and practiced defalcation in such a manner that the Chairman and male members were able to abuse certain portions in connivance with a few male members by doing some paper work; however, with the women members' presence in the UP it has become very difficult to do so now because they have a wider network and linkage with the UNO, MP and other

elites. It was evident that in the distribution of all these safety net services, the women chose the beneficiaries based on the grounded reality rather than taking money from him or her. Women members are not only choosing the desired candidates but they have increased the number of service receivers, bargaining with the male members and Chairmen, whereas previously some male members provided services based on a cash nexus.

8.1.6.4 Improved Pro-poor Services for the Community: Women members are deemed pledge-bound to provide better services to the community people. It was evident that they are promoting rural governance by providing better services in many ways. At present the Bangladesh government is providing various safety net programs for diversified sections of poor people to address the problem of poverty, income inequality, malnutrition, and maternal mortality and famine. Many of those safety net programs, which include distribution of VGD cards, VGF cards, old age pension, 40-day works, disabled people's allowances, widows' allowance cards, test relief and allowance for pregnant mothers, etc., are implemented by the UP. In distributing the assigned safety net programs to the UP, the women members are playing formidable roles in the selection of applicants based on judgments. Through effective bargaining they were able to enhance the coverage of those services for the women of rural society. In the rural society the villagers maintain very friendly relationships with the women members and these women members always help them get their son's or daughter's birth registration certificates easily, and they also help them obtain death registration and succession certificates.

8.1.6.5 How women are positively performing in the UP: Based on the grassroots voices and the ground reality it has been strongly evident that the women leaders are now changing the rural governance in Bangladesh. They are bringing positive changes in the quality of governance through improving the quality of the development projects undertaken by women leaders, providing participative leadership at the grassroots level, extending better community services to the rural poor, demonstrating their integrity by performing their jurisdictional role properly, and finally by being more preferable and acceptable to the community people. In performing all of those above responsibilities, the major factors that helped bring about quality governance at the grassroots level were their inherent and innate sincerity;

patience; positive attitude; polite behavior with convincing capacity; cooperative and consultative leadership style; strong and firm commitment towards the welfare and wellbeing of the society, etc. The topmost significance credited to the women leaders' performance was that these women leaders were able to bring such qualitative changes to local governance while accomplishing their regular household and reproductive role amidst challenges posed by the patriarchal social structure.

8.1.7 Synthesized Summary

The following is the synthesized abridged summary of the whole research study:

Women leadership in a country grows through various socio-cultural, political, economic and legal processes, structures, and systemic arrangements that allow them to play a role in the leadership process. Women can gain access and strength through a liberal social value system, democratic governance, positive implications of education and ICTs, different socio-political movements, the role of women's organizations and networking, favourable legislation (constitutional provisions, WID policy, affirmative action and programs, etc.), which provide positive impetus for developing women's leadership. Through the NGO network huge numbers of women have achieved economic emancipation and conscientization by involving them in innumerable income-generating activities and developing enormous social capital at the grassroots level, which have buttressed the cause of promoting women's leadership in Bangladesh.

Based on the empirical evidence from the present study and other studies as well it was found that in the UP some of the women leaders were products of legacy and dynastic family politics and some of them emerged as community leaders using the social capital gained through prolonged NGO involvement. Their family support gave them a supportive base for assuming their leadership role at the grassroots level. Evidence showed that most of the women leaders were moderately educated and were married. The findings revealed that the women Chairpersons had a better socio-economic stand whereas the members belonged to the middle and lower economic strata. The findings revealed that the women leaders were extremely concerned about women's causes and interests. Being possessed some qualities, some of the women

leaders emerged as supra-social workers with a strong community mind that helped them to render various community and social services in their UP jurisdiction.

During the Bangladesh period, although the women leaders started their journey in 1976, until 1997 they simply played a titular role in the UP, which continued up to 2002. Passing through titularism and tokenism, drawing strength and support from the legal frame, the women members' real struggle started in 2002. From 1997 up to 2014, the women leaders treaded a long way while enduring and digesting many odds, obstacles and challenges. In fact the whole path they came across was full of thorns and thunderstorms. Through constant fighting with their debates, arguments and counter-arguments with their male counterparts, these women leaders were able to secure some of their rights and privileges in the UP, which paved the way for their role on a limited scale. Facilitated by innumerable donor-driven interventions for capacity building, their struggle got further momentum which gradually enabled them to assume and participate in more and more development undertakings and social services in the UP with a strong sense of empowerment, rights, and entitlements. The major challenges regarding the spontaneous and effective participation of the women leaders in the UP were male domination, corruption, and legal provisions for the reserved seats members and above all, the autocratic power structure of the UP Chairmen, which plagued the scope of participation by the women leaders. Following some appropriate strategies the women leaders were able to overcome the deprivations, grievances, negligence, and maltreatments imposed upon them through patriarchal values, attitudes, and practices. Having ensured their limited rights in the UP, some of the women leaders were successful in promoting better governance through ensuring transparency, accountability, and enhanced community participation and expanding the scope of pro-poor services and benefits at the community level. Thus involving themselves in transformative politics, these women leaders were able to change rural governance, instilling culture of integrity, honesty, sincerity, commitment, and above all, practicing a participatory and consultative management style in their day-to-day affairs in the UP.

8.1.8 Suggestions and Recommendations for Policy Interventions

In order to overcome the challenges of the participation of the women leaders in the Union Parishad recommendations are presented in 2 broad thematic areas: suggestions for women at large and suggestion for existing women leaders. Given the fact that the following policies are adopted in Bangladesh they can definitely help address the problem of patriarchy and corruption in Bangladesh.

a) Suggestion for Women at Large: This suggestion refers to the general women that would like to come into political leadership:

8.1.8.1 More Affirmative Actions Needed:

In Bangladesh society women's role is primary confined to traditional activities such as home keeping, cooking, child bearing and reproductive roles, etc. Although in recent days an increased number of women are coming out of the four walls of family life and have begun to play a leadership role in public life, the women leaders still suffer from these socio-cultural problems. In a country like Bangladesh, women's position and status in the society are conditioned by various socio-cultural impositions such as patriarchy, purdah, religious superstitions, etc., so the role of education, science and technology can be expanded which in turn can contribute to modifying the cultural norms and practices embedded in the social milieu. Education is the sinequanon needed to tackle many of the social ills that developing countries are encountering. In fact, education is certainly one of the formidable factors that contribute to the transformation of politics and government, especially at their higher levels, from the male preserve into institutions where men and women can make themselves heard equally well. Hence, it is necessary to modify traditional restrictive attitudes and to enable males to prepare women to take on new roles, but the modification of attitudinal behaviours will largely depend on the role of education (Newland, 1975: 33). It was found that in countries where women have access to educational opportunities, they are more likely to participate in politics. Basic education is an especially important resource because it bestows political knowledge that may be essential for the participation of women in the political realm (Verba et al., 1997). Therefore, in order to make educational facilities more affirmative action should be extended for the cause of women's development in Bangladesh, which can help more women enter public space.

8.1.8.2 Policy Intervention for Socio-cultural Value Changes for overall Societal Uplifting and Transformation

It was evident from a cross-national survey that what people think about women and women's place matters for women's ability to attain political power (Norris and Inglehart, 2001; Paxton and Kunovich, 2003). To develop political awareness and consciousness women should be involved in social, economic, and political activities. The participation of women in higher decision-making bodies may also help them deal with women's issues more successfully (Siddiqui, 1995, pp. 271-272). In fact, the problems of women's participation are more socio-structural than organizational. There is wide-spread illiteracy, confinement to household work, an old tradition of subordinate roles, religious and cultural factors, and lack of training and motivational facilities (Ahmed, & Quader, 1993). Orthodox and dogmatic cultural beliefs create psycho-somatic problems for women escape their domestic life, whereas liberal cultural norms and value systems facilitate women's political participation and representation, and although cultural beliefs may seem slow to change (and are probably rare), change can be enacted when individuals challenge stereotypes and biases when they see them. Beliefs grounded in religion are no exception. Therefore, progressive and liberal thinking should be promoted through democratic governance as these all help with the positive direction for developing women's leadership.

8.1.8.3 Policy recommendations for political parties

Parties play a critical gate-keeping role in political systems and such parties are critical mediators between women and political power (Caul, 1999; Kunovich, 2003; Kunovich, & Paxton, 2005; Sanbonmatsu, 2002) because political parties make decisions about which candidates to field and how much support to give them. It was found that in order to be elected to parliament, "the political parties have the responsibility of trusting in women, encouraging them, and putting them forward in constituencies where they can be certain of electoral success" (Inter-Parliamentary Union, 2000, p. 97). That is why political parties should help women enter the leadership process. It was found that attitude formation towards political activities among females should be developed from childhood. Political parties and women's organizations can play important roles towards this end (Siddiqui, 1995, p. 271). All

liberal political parties should introduce some quota for women to be elected in political position. Therefore women's organizations and networks can lobby for introducing such quotas in the domain of political parties in Bangladesh.

8.1.8.4 Policy interventions Into Women's Organizations

The role of women's organizations is very important for developing women's leadership at the grassroots level. Everywhere collective force is an effective tool for overcoming many of the socio-cultural problems of women leaders. Being a part of a collective body and drawing strength from group activities, women can develop mutual and symbiotic relationships among the women members. By involving UP women leaders in the local body of the existing women's organizations in Bangladesh, women leaders can be linked with the national network that can help women leaders at the local level be brought into the political process and thus solve many of their problems using the women's networks in the country. In Bangladesh women's organizations are playing important role in favour of the interests of women. Now huge numbers of women are playing roles in the UP through the reservation system, so the women leaders in the UP may be integrated with the existing women's networks in Bangladesh. In Bangladesh most of the efforts/movements for women's development are urban based and national women's activists/organizations have failed to maintain constant interaction or linkage with these locally-elected women's leaders. Through such networks UP women leaders would be able to vent their problems at the national level. On the basis of their needs and proper diagnosis of the existing weakness or problems of women leaders in the UP, national women's activists/organizations should help create enabling legislation and policy measures for local women leaders. Hence, it is important to develop a network between national women's activists/organizations and local-level women leaders, which can help local leaders solve their problems and build women's leadership as well. Therefore in a bid to integrate the UP women leaders with national-level women's organizations, an apex body of a "UP women leaders' forum" can be formed with a view to upholding the issues and voices of the UP women leaders in Bangladesh. The creation of such a women's leader forum will help them address many of the knotty problems they are encountering in the UP, which will help them to strengthen their role in the UP.

b) Policy Intervention for Strengthening the Role of Existing Women

Leaders of the UP : These suggestions refer to the existing women leaders that were working in the UP:

8.1.8.5 Policy Intervention for Institutional and Legal Reform at the UP

The formidable challenges that the women leaders are facing in the UP are some of the perennial challenges of Bangladesh society as well. Therefore, direct remedies to overcome those problems lie with the broader structure of the national governance in particular and international governance in general. Even in the developed countries, male domination or patriarchy and corruption prevail and no society perhaps is beyond the purview of these twin problems. However, there is no doubt that some solutions can be devised to tackle those problems in the UP also. The whole of the UP is structured in such a way that the Chairman has become omnipotent and his role is ubiquitous. In the whole structure of 13 members' Parishad (council) there were only 3 women leaders, whereas the rest were 10 men. In such a structure male domination and corruption can be a quite natural phenomenon and through patron-client mechanisms the local government has appeared as a breeding ground of corruption. Unless and until we can break the chain of the alliance through which corruption mediates their respective self-interests in local government, curtailing the authority structure of the Chairman through restructuring the existing structure of the UP, the problems of male domination and corruption will continue to be intractable. Moreover, to overcome the problem of male domination changes in the value system can be an alternative but it will take hundreds of years to bring about these changes in the existing primordial value system, and sometimes it is deemed quite an impossible task even. In such a context, restructuring the UP might be better suited to tackling both the problems of corruption and patriarchy. Therefore, to address both the problems of corruption and male domination the following suggestions and policy recommendations are made.

8.1.8.5.1 Structural Rearrangement Needed in the UP:

In a bid to manage the autocratic rule of the Chairman and to develop a democratic structure in the UP, like the Upazila system in Bangladesh, one Vice-Chairman position can be created and devised in such a way so that the Vice-Chairman can share substantive power, readjusting the power and authority

structure with the Chairman. Therefore, a legal system or provision can be made to fill this Vice-Chairman position by a woman leader through the direct adult franchise.

8.1.8.5.2 Uniform Jurisdiction and Entitlement are needed for both male and female members:

The reservation system in the UP should be devised in such a way that there should be no discrepancy or inequality in the representation style and the entitlements between men and women members. According to the existing reservation procedure of Bangladesh, however, women members are elected from three wards and male members are elected from one ward, which creates a mismatch between their representation and entitlements in the UP. Having represented 3 times higher than that of the male representatives, women are enjoying only one-third of their entitlement in the UP, which is not justified on the grounds of substantive rationality. Therefore, women leaders should be entitled 3 times higher benefits in the entire enshrined affairs of the UP in accordance with their representation style. Moreover, for ensuring their better role and participation in the UP a legal frame should allow the women leaders to play their roles without any hindrance, so all of their rights, roles and functions should be clearly mentioned in the UP rules and regulations. According to the existing system, instead of being equal partners of development, women have been marginalized and excluded from the process of democratic participation in the Union Parishad. In order to remove the discrepancies and bring equality to the representation system between male and female members it would be better to increase the numbers of wards to twelve where both male and female members should be elected from one ward only. Among these twelve wards four should be reserved for women members. If the one-third reservation is practiced, in order to integrate more women leaders and removing disparity at the local level, the reserved wards for women members should be changed every five years.

8.1.8.5.3 Reservation Quota Should be Upgraded:

To manage male domination and corrupt practices the reservation quota should be thoroughly reorganized in the UP. Therefore, it is necessary to raise the existing reservation quota from one third to fifty percent like the provision of West Bengal, India, where women leaders have brought about formidable changes in rural governance having ensured their 50% reservation in all 3

tiers of local government there, such as with Gram Panchayat at the village level, Panchayat Samity at the block level, and Zila Parishad at the District level⁷⁴. The same reservation system can be adopted in the Union Parishad in Bangladesh. Such a reservation system can also help to address both problems of male domination and corruption in the UP.

8.1.8.5.4 Women's Role Should be Expanded in UP Activities:

Drawing evidence from the global scenario it was found that all over the world, women leaders are sensitive and sympathetic to women's issues, interests, and concerns. Therefore, the women leaders in the UP should be involved in those areas where they can contribute their worth to bringing positive changes in the rural governance. In such a case women's involvement and entitlement of shares should be clearly mentioned in the legal framework. For example, 60% of all of the safety net programs channeled at the UP level should be allocated to the women leaders.

8.1.8.5.5 An Inclusive Reservation System is Needed:

Unlike at the national level, women's role in local government is more important, as the local government is the closest and most acceptable level of government to women because local governments traditionally provide services utilized by individual households, such as electricity, waste disposal, public transport, water, schools, health clinics, and other social services. The decisions of local governments therefore have a direct impact on the private lives of women, because they are traditionally responsible for providing for and caring for the family and the home in most countries (IULA, 1998). Therefore, "women must be fully part of the local democratic system and have full access to the decision-making structure because until the interests of women are represented at the local level, the system is not fully democratic" (IULA, 1998). That is why, more space and opportunity should be created for the women leaders in the UP so that they can make a demonstrative impact in the life style of women. Evidence shows that given the limited scope with a moderately congenial environment in the UP, some women

⁷⁴Gram Pachayat is equivalent to the Union Parishad, Panchayat Samity is equivalent to Upazila Parishad and Zila Parishad is equivalent to district in the Bangladesh context.

leaders emerged as supra-social workers and contributed significantly to promoting transparency, accountability, community participation and expanding the scope of various pro-poor services and benefits at the UP level and thus helped with the positive transformation of the entire rural governance. In addition to their contribution to local governance, it was learnt from evidence-based literature on a global scale that women are fundamentally different than men; they have a different socialization and different perspectives and world views, so new avenues for enlarging women's participation in political space will definitely be a salutary step for uplifting the overall conditions of rural women in Bangladesh, who are in fact suffering from poverty, malnutrition, maternal mortality, and above all myriad social ills and stigmas imposed on them through patriarchy and many superstitious beliefs. Based on such a ground reality of the rural scene of Bangladesh, in a bid to enlarge women's participation in political space the reservation quota should also be expanded to the Chairmen position. To enlarge the scope of women leaders, one-third of the total seats of the Chairmen should be reserved for the women Chairmen in all the Union Parishads in Bangladesh. For having more new women leaders in the UP it would be better to change both the reserved seats for women members and the Chairmen every five years.

8.1.8.5.6 Rigorous Training Should be Imparted to the WLs:

In a few cases it was found that women leaders suffer from knowledge gaps, which can be mitigated through imparting various trainings for them. The problems of the women leaders of the UP can be overcome substantively through imparting various trainings. The more effective training can be given to the women leaders, and in this way they will be able to overcome their problems by enhancing their capacity and knowledge. In order to equip them and to retain their motivation, women leaders should be imparted rigorous and frequent training. The course contents should include all of the latest rules and regulations, acts, ordinances, government office orders, circulars and other legal provisions regarding the local government along with knowledge of the background of national and global development issues/concerns so that the women leaders can understand the development problems and needs of the community. The training programs can be designed in light of the felt need of women leaders. In a bid to remove

misunderstanding and to develop mutual understanding and cooperative attitudes among male and female members such training programs can be arranged both separately and jointly for male and female members of the UP.

8.1.8.5.7 Family and Community Support Should be Extended:

It was found from the in-depth case studies that most of the women leaders were married and they assumed their leadership role through a supportive role played by their family members. In the Union Parishad women are rendering their services for the community at the cost of their family life. In a traditional society like Bangladesh, it is unusual for the local level women to work outside the home, ignoring their family roles and responsibilities. Hence, family members should extend their all-out support so that WLs can play an effective role in the Union Parishad. Therefore, to translate such family responsibilities and support into an institutional mechanism the concept of a “child care home” can be introduced at the community level for taking care of the children of the WLs. These child care homes should be equipped with expert governesses in order to provide the necessary support for keeping and managing those children with proper nutrition and recreation facilities at that centre so that their mother or women leaders can play an effective role during meeting dates and important events of the UP. Creating provisions for such child care homes at the community level will be a salutary attempt in helping with women’s leadership at the grassroots level.

8.1.8.5.8 “Women Only UP” Can be Introduced as a Test Case:

Another system can also be tried to enlarge the participation of women leaders in Bangladesh. Based on the experience of West Bengal, it was found that West Bengal introduced an all-woman (or women only) Gram Panchayat in Kultrici in Paschim Medinipur district where the women leaders made a positive contribution to the rural society. Utilizing the same experience to create more space for women leaders, a provision can be made to run the whole UP exclusively by the women leaders in Bangladesh. Such a concept of an “all women Union Parishad” can be tried in Bangladesh as a test case through making provision of at least one “all-women Union Parishad” in one or 2 underdeveloped districts to look into the performance of the women leaders in those UPs.

8.1.8.5.9 Suggested Interventions for Job Conditions, Remuneration, and Work Environments in the NGOs:

In Bangladesh, it was observed that a lion's share of women representatives in the Union Parishad have emerged using social capital through NGO networks and women leaders with an NGO background were found to be more assertive, emphatic, and vociferous in establishing their rights in the UPs. In fact, women have gained remarkable economic strength, confidence, and socio-cultural and political consciousness by involving themselves in various development activities, training, and IGAs through the micro credit programs of the NGOs in Bangladesh. Therefore, in developing women's leadership at the grassroots level it is essential to ensure a suitable work environment, job conditions, and remuneration or compensation packages of NGOs so that more employment of women can be promoted in the NGO sector, which can help remove socio-economic and cultural ills and contribute to fortifying women's role in society and in the state.

8.1.8.5.10 Developing Positive Attitudes, Team Spirit, and Participatory Management by all UP Representatives:

It was found both from the present study and other studies as well that there is evidence that women's higher educational attainment does not matter in terms of their representation in national political bodies (Kenworthy and Malami, 1999; Matland, 1998; Moore and Shackman, 1996; Norris, 1985; Paxton, 1997; Paxton and Kunovich, 2003). Empirical evidence shows that some of the women leaders that have a very low education are doing excellently and they have emerged as supra-social workers with their community mind. Therefore, the pivotal factor is an enabling environment through which women leaders can involve themselves in the affairs of the local development process. Efforts should be taken to create a team spirit among all the functionaries of the UP. Therefore, the UP Chairman, male members, and the secretary should extend their cooperation by maintaining good behaviour, favourable attitudes, and a positive outlook to women members, and assist them in carrying out their duties and responsibilities properly so that the women members are encouraged to contribute significantly in the sphere of UP affairs. Moreover, local administration should also play a supportive role for the cause of women leaders in the UP.

8.1.9 Final Conclusion

The basic premise of the study was that there were challenges regarding the participation of women leaders in the UP, and by adopting various coping strategies the women have contributed to the governance in UP affairs through their limited participation. Based on such a backdrop, the purpose of the study was to delve into the research questions: i) Do women leaders help promote governance in the UP of Bangladesh and if so how?; ii) How have women leaders perceived and defined their roles and coped with the realities in the UP? The study aimed at fulfilling the following objectives: i) to unravel the leadership process of the women leaders in the UP; ii) to uncover the perceptions, dynamics, realities, and challenges of the participation of the women leaders in the UP of Bangladesh; iii) to explore the coping strategies of women leaders in the UP.

This study was fully based on qualitative methods to address the research questions and objectives properly in order to tap the lived experiences and multiple realities faced by the women leaders in the UP. In order to uncover the challenges and coping strategies adopted by the WLs, phenomenology was used, which was supported by the case studies, FGDs, content analysis, and observation methods. In order to make the study credible and authentic, primary data from 19 UPs covering different socio-cultural zones of Bangladesh were collected. The whole discussion was recorded and afterwards transcribed into English from Bengali version. Following the content analysis method, the secondary data were collected from the research reports, books, Ph.D. dissertations, journal articles, and so on, adopting a heuristic search from the NIDA library and online both.

In answering the research objectives relating to the leadership process of the women leaders in the UP, from evidence-based findings, it was found that in the UP some of the women leaders were the product of legacy and dynastic family politics and some of them emerged as community leaders using social capital gained through prolonged NGO involvement. Their family support, socio-economic status, linkage with political parties and other networks gave them a supportive base for assuming their leadership role at the grassroots level. Interestingly the empirical evidence showed that the education of the women leaders had little significance regarding their participation and performance, while having a low level of education some women

leaders emerged as supra-social workers with a strong community mind, that helped them render various community and social services in the UP jurisdiction.

Exploring the perception, reality, and dynamics of participation of the women leaders it was learnt that these women rightly perceived their perception about participation. They perceived their participation as undertaking development projects, performing salish, and providing pro-poor services and benefits to the rural people. These were, in fact, the most important areas for taking participation in the entire decision-making process in the UP. Regarding the challenges of participation, it was found that the major challenges regarding the effective participation of the women leaders in the UP were male domination vis-à-vis patriarchy, unfettered corruption, legal provision for the reserved seats members, and above all, the autocratic power structure of the UP Chairmen; all of these factors plagued the scope of participation by the women leaders.

In answering the questions regarding the coping strategies adopted by the women leaders, it can be explained that treading a prolonged, thorny, stormy and thunderous journey from 1997 by enduring many odds and hurdles, struggling with constant fighting with their bold debates, arguments and counter-arguments with their male counterparts, these women leaders were successfully able to secure some of their rights and privileges in the UP, which has paved the way for them to play their role on a limited scale. Facilitated by innumerable donor-driven interventions for capacity building, their struggle received further momentum that gradually enabled and capacitated them to assume and participate in more and more development undertakings and social services in the UP with a strong sense of empowerment, rights, and entitlements. Following some appropriate strategies, the women leaders were able to overcome the deprivations, grievances, negligence and maltreatment imposed on them through patriarchal values, attitudes, and practices. It was found that most of the women leaders tried to cope with the male domination boldly and courageously. The coping strategies adopted by the women leaders were using their knowledge gained through rules and regulations; following honesty, integrity, transparency, accountability in all their actions; garnering public support; bearing/fostering a resilient mentality with confidence, strength and good arguments, commitment, patience, and strong and indomitable will power; an uncompromising

attitude for sticking to their own value judgments, etc. Having experienced those coping strategies of the women leaders, the male Chairmen and members, despite their absolute majority and dominating attitudes, they were ultimately convinced to comply with the value judgment fostered by the women leaders for ensuring gender equality in the UP.

To answer the research question as to whether the women leaders promote governance in the UP and how, the straight-forward answer would obviously be affirmative in the sense that some women leaders, having ensured their limited rights in the UP, were successful in promoting better governance through ensuring transparency, accountability, and enhanced community participation and expanding the scope of pro-poor services and benefits at the community level. Thus, involving themselves in transformative politics, these women leaders were able to change rural governance, instilling a culture of integrity, honesty, sincerity, commitment, and above all, practicing a participatory and consultative management style in their day-to-day affairs of the UP.

8.1.10 Future Research Agenda

Based on the experience of the present study, the following research issues can be some of the potential areas to be considered for future research in the case of the UP of Bangladesh.

1) To assess with the existing training needs of women leaders for further capacity building: It was observed that in some cases, the women leaders are performing excellently whereas in some cases some women members do not have sufficient knowledge of the rules and regulations concerning the governance of the UP. Therefore, a needs assessment for women leaders can be undertaken to identify their gaps in knowledge and to assess their present need for training in order to equip them with state of the art knowledge regarding UP governance. Based on such assessed needs, capacity-building interventions can be undertaken.

2) To assess the level and dynamics of capacity-building strategies of WLs in the UP: In the UP some women have immensely developed their skills in different areas of UP governance. As a result, study can be undertaken to delve into their capacity-building strategies in order to learn how and what methods to follow to

develop their skills. This knowledge can be utilized to develop the capacity of other relatively unskilled women leaders in the UP.

3) To record successful cases of women leaders: In the UP some women leaders are exhibiting startling/excellent performance. So a research on those successful cases can be undertaken through which some future interventions can be designed for developing women leaders in the UP.

4) To assess the performance of women and men Chairmen in the UP of Bangladesh: Out of 4498 UPs in Bangladesh there are a few (24) women Chairpersons. However, there is lack of knowledge concerning whether there is any difference in the performance level between men and women chairpersons in the UP.

5) Analyze the factors for a better or lower level of performance of UP women leaders in Bangladesh: A quantitative study can be undertaken to look into the factors responsible for a better or lower level of performance in the UP.

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Appendix-1

Selection of Research Participants for Case Studies

Division	District	Upazila	Union Parishad	Number of Women Members	Number of Women Chairpersons
Chittagong	Comilla	Comilla Sadar	North Durgapur	1	
			Amratali	1	
			Kalir Bazar	1	
		Chouddagram	Alkora	1	
Dhaka	Faridpur	Faridpur Sadar	Machhaar	-	1
		Vanga	Manikdaha	-	1
		Boalmari	Chandpur	-	1
Sylhet	Sylhet	Sylhet Sadar	Khadimpara	1	-
Khulna	Barisal	Wazirpur	Jalla	-	1
Rajshahi	Gaibandha	Palashbari	Betkapa UP	-	1
5 Divisions	5 District	8 Upazilas	10 UPs	5	5

Source: Data collected from the field by the researcher himself, 2013

Appendix -2

Short Check List for Data Collection

UNHEARD VOICES AND GRIM REALITIES OF THE CHALLENGES, COPING STRATEGIES, AND GOVERNANCE OF WOMEN LEADERS: THE CASE OF THE UNION PARISHAD IN BANGLADESH

Date:

1. Geographical Information

- ☐ Name of the District :
- ☐ Name of the Upazila :
- ☐ Name of the UP :
- ☐ Ward No :
- ☐ Name of the Village :

2. Demographic Factors

- ☐ Name of the Respondent:
- ☐ Age:
- ☐ Marital Status :
 - ☐ Single
 - ☐ Married
 - ☐ Widow
 - ☐ Separated
 - ☐ Other

3. Economic Factors:

- ☐ Monthly Income:
- ☐ Source of Income:
 - ☐ Main Source:
 - ☐ Other sources:
- ☐ Area of the land owned:
- ☐ Assets Owned (Other than land):

4. Social Factors:

Family Background

- ☐ Level of Education of the respondent:
 - ☐ Literate
 - ☐ Up to Class V
 - ☐ Class VI-IX
 - ☐ S.S.C.
 - ☐ H.S.C.
 - ☐ Graduate
 - ☐ Above

- ☐ Father's Education: Occupation:
- ☐ Husband's Education: Occupation:
- ☐ Family size:
- ☐ Sons:
 - ☐ Daughters:
 - ☐ Total Family Members:
- ☐ Nature of Family:
- ☐ Single
 - ☐ Joint
- ☐ Family Head:
- ☐ Husband
 - ☐ Father
 - ☐ Father in Law
 - ☐ Herself

Family Network:

- ☐ Did anyone in your family serve in the UP in past?
- ☐ Yes
 - ☐ No
- ☐ Who were they?
- ☐ Father
 - ☐ Grandfather
 - ☐ Uncle
 - ☐ Maternal Uncle
 - ☐ Father in law
 - ☐ Others
- ☐ How many times and in what position did they serve?
- ☐ Time:
 - ☐ Position:
- ☐ Did/do you have any relatives in the Zila Parishad or Upazila Parishad or Parliament?
- ☐ Yes
 - ☐ No
- ☐ Did/do anyone in your family act as Matbars/Sardar?
- ☐ Yes
 - ☐ No

- ☐ What are your brother's/sister's/uncle's/maternal uncle's education and occupation?

Numbers of Brothers	Education	Occupation
1.		
2.		
3.		
4.		
5.		
Numbers of Sisters	Education	Occupation
1.		
2.		
3.		
4.		
5.		
Numbers of Uncles	Education	Occupation
1.		
2.		
3.		
4.		
5.		
Numbers of Maternal Uncles	Education	Occupation
1.		
2.		
3.		
4.		
5.		

- ☐ What is your religious affiliation?
- ☐ Muslim
 - ☐ Hindu
 - ☐ Buddhist
 - ☐ Christian
 - ☐ Others
- ☐ Members of different standing committees(with names):
- ☐ Linkage with socio-cultural Institution/Organization:
- ☐ Yes
 - ☐ No
- ☐ Name of the socio-cultural institution/organizations:
- ☐ Linkage with UNO/Block Level Officers:
- ☐ Yes
 - ☐ No

5. Political Factors

- ☐ Do you belong to any political party?
- ☐ Yes
☐ No
☐ If Yes, Name the party:
- ☐ How long? From :
- ☐ School life
☐ College life
☐ Join politics after coming to UP
- ☐ Is anyone in your family is actively involved in politics?
- ☐ Yes
☐ No
☐ If yes name of the party:
- ☐ Linkage with MP:
- ☐ Yes
☐ No
- ☐ Have you ever been in the UP before?
- ☐ Yes
☐ No
☐ If yes, how many times you serve in UP?

6. Other Factors

- ☐ Level of knowledge of the UP:
- ☐ Primary
☐ Medium
☐ Good
☐ Excellent
- ☐ Did you receive any training?
- ☐ Yes
☐ No
- ☐ If yes, name of the training, year and institution:

Sl. No.	Name of the training	Institution	Year
1.			
2.			
3.			
4.			
5.			
6.			
7.			

7. Participation of Women Leaders (WLs) in the Affairs of the UP:

- ☐ Resource Management
- ☐ Project Formulation
- ☐ Project Implementation
- ☐ Monitoring of the Project
- ☐ Consultation with local people
- ☐ Negotiation with NGOs
- ☐ Upazila Meeting (UDCM)
- ☐ UP meeting

8. Coping Strategies of WLs in the UP

- ☐ How were the WLs were able to overcome male domination?
- ☐ Whether they have experienced sex discrimination and how they have overcome this situation?
- ☐ Whether they have experience sex harassment from the male counter parts and how they overcome this situation?
- ☐ What were their painful and pleasurable experiences in the UP and GP?

9. Governance in the UP

- ☐ **How WLs ensured accountability?**
 - ☐ Resource management/Budget making
 - ☐ Proving services and benefits
 - ☐ Role played in meetings
- ☐ **How were WLs ensured of transparency?**
 - ☐ Attendance/Discussion in meetings
 - ☐ Access to required information
 - ☐ Dissemination and sharing of development information in the meeting
 - ☐ Presentation of programs and work schedule in the meeting
 - ☐ Discussion on budgeting and resource management
 - ☐ Display of notice board to inform villagers
 - ☐ Sharing of Schemes/Project and its cost.
- ☐ **How were the WLs helped to reduce corruption?**
 - ☐ Dissemination and sharing of development information to the villagers
 - ☐ Proper implementation of the schemes
- ☐ **Project Involvement**
 - ☐ How many projects have you implemented?
 - ☐ How did you get these projects?
 - ☐ Who helped you get these projects?
 - ☐ What was the cost you spent for getting these projects?
- ☐ **Capacity Building of the UP Women Members**
 - ☐ Areas of capacity development/skill development in the UP

Appendix-3

Selection of Research Participants for FGDs and PRAs

Division	District	Upazila	Union Parishad	Method Employed	
Chittagong	Comilla	Comilla Sadar	Amratali	FGD	PRA
			Kalir Bazar	-	PRA
Dhaka	Faridpur	Faridpur Sadar	Machhar	FGD	-
Khulna	Barisal	Agoljara	Goila	FGD	-
3 Divs.	3 Dists.	3 UPZs	4 UPs	3 FGDs	2 PRAs

Source: Data collected from the field by the researcher himself, 2013

Appendix-4

Selection of Research Participants and Settings for both Phenomenology and Case Study

Division	District	Upazila	Union Parishad	WM	MM	WC	MC	Others
Chittagong	Chittagong	Mirsarai	Wahedpur	3	2			
	Comilla	Comilla Sadar	Bijoypur Modham	2				
			North Durgapur	2				
			South Durgapur	3	1			
			Amratali	3	3			
			Kalir Bazar	1				1 CL
		Chouddagram	Alkora	1				
			Suvapur	1				
			Chiowra	3				
			Gunabati	1				
Dhaka	Faridpur	Faridpur Sadar	Machhar	-		1		
		Vanga	Manikdaha	1		1		1GV
		Boalmari	Chandpur	1		1		
Sylhet	Sylhet	Sylhet Sadar	Tuker Bazar	-			1	
			Khadimpara	2				
Khulna	Barisal	Wazirpur	Jalla	1		1		
Rajshahi	Bogra	Sherpur	Mirjapur	-	2			
			Garidaha	2				
	Gaibandha	Palashbari	Betkapa UP	2		1		
Total: 5 Div.	7 Districts	10 Upazilas	19 UPs	29	8	5	1	

Source: Data collected from the field by the researcher himself, 2013

Note:

1. WM= Women Member
2. MM= Male Members
3. WC= Woman Chairperson
4. MC= Male Chairman
5. CL= Cooperative Leader
6. GV= General Villager

Appendix-5

Selection of Research Participants for All Methods

Division	District	Upazila	Union Parishad	Number of Women Members	Number of Women Chairpersons
Chittagong	Chittagong	Mirsarai	Wahedpur	3	
	Comilla	ComillaSadar	BijoypurModham	2	
			North Durgapur	3	
			South Durgapur	3	
			Amratali	3	
			Kalir Bazar	1	
		Chouddagram	Alkora	2	
			Suvapur	3	
			Chiwra	3	
			Gunabati	3	
			JannathDighi	1	
Dhaka	Faridpur	FaridpurSadar	Machaar	3	1
		Vanga	Manikdaha	3	1
		Boalmari	Chandpur	3	1
Sylhet	Sylhet	SylhetSadar	Jalalabad	3	
			Tuker Bazar	3	
			Khadimpara	3	
			Khadimnagar	3	
Khulna	Barisal	Agoljara	Bakal	3	
			Ratnapur	3	
			Rajihar	3	
			Goila	3	
		Wazirpur	Jalla	1	1
Rajshahi	Bogra	Sherpur	Mirjapur	3	
			Garidaha	3	
	Gaibandha	Palashbari	Betkapa UP	3	1
			Pabnapur	3	1
5 Div.	7 Dist.	11 Uzp.	27 UPs	73	6

Source: Data collected from the field by the researcher himself, 2013

Appendix- 6

BIOGRAPHY

NAME	Md. Mizanur Rahman
ACADEMIC BACKGROUND	<p>Bachelor in Social Sciences (Public Administration) University of Dhaka, Bangladesh</p> <p>Master in Social Sciences ((Public Administration) University of Dhaka, Bangladesh</p> <p>Master in Public Policy and Governance North South University, Dhaka, Bangladesh</p>
PRESENT POSITION	<p>Joint Director Bangladesh Academy for Rural Development (BARD) Kotbari, Comilla Bangladesh</p>
WORK EXPERIENCE	<p>Mr. Rahman has more than 18 years of experience in social research, training, and action research in broader areas of community development, gender issues, decentralization, rural administration and local government, governance and development, etc. The mandatory functions of the BARD are to conduct evaluation, exploratory and operational research, policy analysis, impart various training programs to the officials of different government and non-government organizations, representatives of local government institutions, cooperators and development practitioners, and others concerned with rural development. Mizan's papers have been published in renowned international and national journals; namely, the <i>Thai Journal of Public Administration (NIDA)</i>, the <i>Afro-Asian Journal of Rural Development (AARDO)</i>, the <i>Bangladesh Journal of Public Administration</i>, the <i>Bangladesh Institute International and Strategic Studies(BIISS) Journal</i>, the <i>Journal of Rural Development (NIRD, India)</i>, the <i>Journal of Rural Development (BARD)</i>, the <i>Bangladesh Journal of Public Administration</i>, the <i>Journal of Rural Development and Administration (Pakistan)</i>, etc.</p>
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