

Empowerment of Women Representatives in Rural Local Government Institutions of Bangladesh

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Abstract

The overall development of a country depends upon the maximum deployment of her people including both men and women. Without the active participation and incorporation of women's standpoint at all levels of decision-making, the goals of equality, development and peace cannot be achieved. In fact, there is no specific and distinct responsibilities for men and women representatives mentioned in any act, ordinances or resolution of LGIs (Local Government Institutions). But women representatives have the right to perform the same activities like their male counterparts. Women representatives can play important as well as challenging roles for women's empowerment, their participation in decision making process and manifestation of women leadership etc. So it is important to know the pattern of women representatives' participation in the activities of LGIs. The main objective of this research is to identify to what extent they (women) are able to enhance empowerment through their role performances in LGIs. For accomplishing the purpose of this research some important indicators have been used here to understand the empowerment situation of the women representatives. The indicators in the context are- awareness about different committees of LGI, membership in different committees, role performances in meetings, roles in overall development of women etc. The paper follows qualitative approach in nature mainly, but quantitative in some special tabulation. Data have been collected from both primary and secondary sources of related issues. Semi-structured questionnaire surveys have been applied for gathering information from women representative of Rural LGIs. Although there exists time and fund constrains, data have been collected covering majority areas of rural LGIs from Barisal Zila. Women representatives' participation in meeting is the first step for them to be active in LG development activities. But in many times they can't because of various reasons such as, not receiving notices in due time, distances and lack of proper transport facilities etc. So it's time to further investigate the nature extent of role performances and women

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representatives of LGIs. This study may facilitate to understand the women empowerment in LGIs identifying problems as well as suggesting possible solutions in a defined manner.

Key words: Local Governance, Local Government Representatives, Women participation, Women's Empowerment, Local Government Institutions (LGIs)

Introduction

A strong and effective local government is one of the elemental preconditions for ensuring good governance. It is generally agreed by all conscious people that an empowered local government is the strong foundation of the success of any democratic country. Strengthening local government body is the cherished goal of the people of Bangladesh. The local representatives of a local body based on democratic ideas can promote the greater socio-economic emancipation of the people of the country. Women in Bangladesh live in a social system where socialization process plays an influential role to drive them into a substandard and a subordinate position in the society. Throughout the history of political participation, women have always been involved in politics but their participation has been ignored. It is evident that the success of a local government depends on equal people's participation both men and women.

Local government in Bangladesh is one of the formal legal representative bodies at the grass root level where the women of the country can raise their voice. It is the oldest political institution in the country since the Urban Municipalities and Rural Union Parishad were created over hundred years ago. The Union Parishad system has been the most consistent in its existence as elected institutions of governance through regular elections. Each Union Parishad elects thirteen elected representatives, one chair and twelve members including three women in reserved seats. The provision of the three seats reserved for women to overlap the constituencies of three general seats has raised a serious structural issue that has adversely affected women's role and functions. As we know in Bangladesh, women comprise nearly half of the total population but the status of women is much lower than that of men in every field of life. Women are here identified with domestic life while politics is viewed as a male dominated public activity that is typically masculine in nature. In a male-centered socialization process, everything is biased towards gender; here women face difficulties to express free will in decision making. Women are dominated by the 'Patriarchal system'¹ which contains social, economic and political elements. Gender

¹ Patriarchy is a social system in which males are the primary authority figures central to social organization, occupying roles of political leadership, moral

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

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

Lack of institutional training and political awareness: women seldom know about their rights and privileges. Special efforts are needed to promote women leaders from the grassroots level to higher political offices by imparting institutional training and guidance. That way, women will come out from their ignorance of their political, legal and constitutional rights. However, in Bangladesh, democratic local institutions like the Union Parishad still remain weak due to political inconsistency and corruption. Bangladesh faces problems of corruption, lack of clear representation of citizen's interests by their elected representative, a highly centralized government and a promising local government movement that is still learning to exercise rights and privileges. When the local government institutions will be able to plan, manage and generate additional resources, then their capacity to deliver services will improve and their relationships with general people will be enhanced. An effective and efficient pro people local government will definitely be able to reinforce the importance of government transparency and ultimately improve the quality of life for the average citizens.

The study deals with the role performances of the women representatives in Local Government Institutions (LGIS) and how their role performances enhanced their empowerment position and the women of the locality at large. However, to what extent they are able to enhance empowerment through their role performances in LGIs need to be investigated and accordingly discussed in this research.

Rationale of the study and problem statement

The women of Bangladesh have been generally excluded from politics. Women have been also excluded from areas of decision making. Their

authority, and control of property, and where fathers hold authority over women and children. It implies the institutions of male rule and privilege, and entails female subordination. (Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia).

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potential remains largely unrecognized and their contributions are often overlooked. In a traditional society of Bangladesh, women have been assigned secondary roles. Men monopolize political participation, which is an important area of contribution for the development of the society. On the other hand, unequal participation of women and men in the government planning acts as a barrier to ensure good governance in Bangladesh. Women's participation in local governance has been recently ensured through constitutional reform. In recent times, there has been a common realization that a strong and effective local government is one of the essential preconditions for ensuring good governance.

There have been some major attempts to reform local government under the different governments in different times. The objectives of all were to introduce participatory and accountable local governance through decentralization of functions and powers to locally elected institutions. Governments have also recognized the relevance and importance of the role of decentralized local institutions in planning and implementing need-based development projects for poverty alleviation and reduction of socio economic inequality. However, the objectives were not realized and the government failed to keep their commitment towards grassroots democracy to develop power to the people at lower levels to manage their own affairs. Consequently, the primary goal of poverty reduction, economic equity and gender balance has remained unfulfilled. The Constitution of Bangladesh guarantees equality of men and women in all spheres of governance. There is no legal barrier to women contesting or voting for any elective office, including that of the head of the state. Although the Constitution grants equal rights to all citizens in all spheres of life, yet there have been very few women in local government politics.

In 1997, for the first time in Bangladesh, the direct participation through election for women representatives was provided at the grass root level, the Union Parishad level. In local governance this is itself a remarkable initiative for providing adequate representation to women in local level politics. According to the Local Government Ordinance, elected women Union Parishad members will act as Chairpersons in at least three of 12 standing Committees of the Union Parishad. But in reality it is found that in many of the Union Parishads the Standing Committees have not yet been formed. Moreover, where they are formed, the women members have no responsibilities despite their inclusion in the committee. Though the female Chairpersons and Members have gained enough confidence in their ability to discharge administrative duties, the discriminatory attitude of their male counterparts has been the main stumbling block. As mentioned earlier, increasingly more women are contesting for elections both at the national and the local levels and are getting elected but they have still not yet been fully represented.

Review of Literature

The term woman is used to indicate biological sex distinctions, cultural gender role distinctions, or both (Wikimedia, 2005). Bangladesh is one of the first developing countries to establish a Ministry of Women's Affairs in 1978, three years after the First World Conference on Women in Mexico. The government has already prepared a National Policy for Advancement of Women and made some noteworthy progress in implementing the National Action Plan, prepared in response to the Beijing Platform for Action (KHAN & ARA, 2006). In spite of these achievements, the majority of women in Bangladesh have yet to be empowered to participate actively in the social, cultural, economic and political life of the country. The policies and programs of the Government, NGOs, and other institutions do not sufficiently address the need for women's empowerment (ADB, 2001).

Generally empowerment means of awareness and capacity building leading to greater participation, to greater decision making power and control and to transformative action (Moin, 2011). Political empowerment means access to political power and the decision making process. The philosophy of liberal feminism as argued by Ritzer (2000) expresses that women may claim equality with men, arguing that gender inequality is a result of patriarchal and sexist patterning of division of labor through re-patterning of key institutions- law, work, family, education and media (Naz & Ibrahim & Ahmed, 2012)

Mahtab (2015) figured out two broad sets of factors responsible for women's poor representation in political office in any country and gave emphasis on the socio-economic and cultural factors as the root causes for women's under representation in political decision making. The factors include patriarchal traditions, norms and attitudes, poverty, lack of access to resources, discrimination in the workplace, lack of access to political party lists etc (Mahtab, 2015). There is a culture that imposes on women a role different from the one that is reserved for men (Ahmed & Nabi, 2001). This conservative attitudes and cultural expectations from women are barriers to their political representation (Kabir & Haque, 2014). Patriarchal attitudes discourage women to participate in local government institutions. This patriarchal attitude does not permit the male members of the society to accept women leadership at any cost (Islam & Islam, 2012). In the traditional society of Bangladesh, women have to face some basic socio-cultural problems, which emerge from lack of education, consciousness and cultural awareness (Rahman & Roy, 2004). Socio-cultural, religious and economic factors hinder the political participation of women. Besides societies all over the world are dominated by an ideology of 'a woman's place'. According to this ideology, women should only play the role of 'working mother', which is

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generally low-paid and apolitical. And religious factors are a dominant obstacle to the way of women's political participation. Exclusion of women from religious institutions and religious leadership may have a negative impact on women's status in society and limit their opportunities in politics and public life (Kassa, 2014) .

The empirical studies about the local government and women's political participation are few (Nathan, 1998). The most cited is "*Women representative at the union level as change agent of development*" by (Qadir & Islam, 1987). It covers 66 Union Parishads and opinions were sought from 66 chairmen, 191 women members and 129 local people. The study of the findings has revealed that nominated women came from the rural elite group and they have a political family background. According to Mishra (1984:88), "participation means collective and continuous efforts by the people themselves in setting goals, pooling resources together and taking actions which aims at improving their living conditions". According to Human Development Report, "participation means that people are closely involved in the economic, social, cultural and political process that affects their lives" (1993:1). However, women's participation in local government system remained very minimal.

In the book '*Local Government in Bangladesh*' by Kamal Siddiqui, much important information was found about the evolution of the local government in Bangladesh (Siddiqui, 1984). The changes made to these institutions in the past in respect of its structure, functions and duties are discussed very well. The issue of inadequate finance, lack of budget provision and personnel(s) in the Union Parishad are mentioned and suggestions given for more active role for the women to play as local government is the most important tier for decentralizing political empowerment.

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

Empowerment of women is now a global issue. Although this term is usually used for improving women's condition, in real sense it may be applied to any disadvantaged group of a society for bringing them to the same level of advanced section (Moin, 2011). The term 'empowerment'

has become popular since mid'80s around the world and the decade of 90s has witnessed the rise of women's empowerment perspective. Empowerment refers to the expansion in people's ability to make strategic life choices where this ability was previously denied to them. Here choice is presented in terms of three interrelated dimensions that include resources (preconditions), agency (process) and achievements (outcomes). In addition to this, empowerment raises a number of concepts with the term such as power, domination, control, access, confidence, assertiveness, decision-making and agency etc. Power is used as a reference point to understand 'empowerment' (Moin, 2011). In empowerment, power is seen more in terms increasing the issue of choice, voice, control and autonomy. Based on this related conceptual analysis, this paper is an attempt to explore the status of women's participation in Rural Local Government Institutions and how their participation in local government lead to empowerment in local government in Bangladesh particularly the Union Parishad and will identify the factors that hinder women's participation. At the same time this paper has suggested some remedial measures to uplift this situation.

Methodology

This study is an effort to analyze the participation of women representatives at the grassroots level and it depends on two main sources: empirical (primary) and secondary sources data. Primary data has been gathered from several Union Parishad of Barisal districts. Under 10 Upazilas' of Barisal District, there are 86 Union Parishad. Secondary data information has been gathered from local and foreign author's books and articles from print and electronic media. A total of fourty Unions (four from each upazila) were selected randomly from Ten Upazila. Since the Upazila have an unequal number of Union Parishads the sample unions and the number of the women members were selected accordingly. All data have been collected directly from each selected Union Parishad. Semi-structured and open ended questionnaires were made for survey.

In this study, "gender issue" in Local Government Institution is an independent variable and the "role performances and empowerment of women's representatives" as the dependent variables. This research focuses on the role performances of the women representatives in local government the sample on which the model was tested has been drawn exclusively from among the 40 Union Parishad of 10 Upazila's of Barisal Districts. Each selected Union is considered here as a sample case. The population of the Union and the size of the Union are not the same. Data on all variables for all of the Union Parishad are sometimes not the same.

As the major objectives of this study are to understand the role of women representatives in local governance, it will also allow one to

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understand the long term effects on development in political empowerment of women in local level politics in Bangladesh. It is difficult to find out women's participation role in local government as the research is being done by compact way, but through this process it was able to find the trend of the women towards politics Local Government Institutions.

In the light of aforesaid components some indicators are used here to understand the empowerment situation of the women representatives in this study. Some of the important indicators in this context are- awareness about different committees of LGI, membership in different committees, role performances in meetings, roles in overall development of women.

Findings of the Study

Awareness about standing committees of LGIs

According to Local Government Ordinances of 1977 and 1983 (GOB, 1998), all the activities of LGIs are accomplished according to the Ordinance or Act within the specific territory through the meetings of standing committees or by the name of the officials of LGIs. Standing committees play a key role in executing and implementing different activities for the proper maintenance of institutional functions. However, information is presented in table 1.

Table 1: Degree of awareness of the women representatives about the Standing Committees of LGIs

Awareness	Number of Respondents (WR)	Percentage (100%)
Not at all	5	13
Moderately aware	12	30
Fully aware	23	57
Total	40	100

Source: Field survey. (Note: The percentages are rounded up)

The table shows that more than half of the total respondents, i.e. 23 (57%) are fully aware of the standing committees. They opined that they had adequate knowledge about the name and functions of the committees. 30 % women representatives were found to be moderately aware of the standing committees whereas 5 (13%) did not have any clear idea about this. The respondents having moderate idea reported that they knew only about those committees in which they had the memberships. On the other hand, the respondents without having awareness cleared that although they participated in some meetings of different committees, they did not know the details about those committees.

Membership of the women representatives in different standing committees of LGIs

Before talking about the respondents' participation in standing committees of LGIs, it is important to give a brief account of these committees. To execute the overall functions of Union Parishads, there is a provision to constitute specific subject related standing committees (Sultana, 1998). There are twelve standing committees in Union Parishads. According to article 21 of Local Government (Union Parishad) Act (Amendment) 1993, the standing committees' are- finance and establishment, education, health and family planning, audit and accounts, agriculture and agro-related development, social welfare, cottage industry and co-operative, women and children affairs, fishery and husbandry, tree plantation, union maintenance program, mass education.

Apart from these, National government has the authority to order the Ups to constitute any additional standing committees. Accordingly nine additional standing committees are operating in Union Parishads (Ahmed & Kabir, 2000). These are: violence on women resistance, black marketing resistance, forestation, water supply and sanitation, hatt and bazaar (market) maintenance, union tender committee, natural disaster maintenance, VGD project implementation and social development.

According to Government rule, each elected woman will be a member of at least three standing committees and each of them will be the chairperson of at least one standing committee. Through these membership women representatives can integrate themselves in the mainstreaming of development activities of LGIs. The women representatives were asked about their membership of standing committees of LGIs.

Table 2: Respondents' membership in different standing committees in Rural LGIs

Committees	No. of Respondents	Percentages (%)
None	00	00
Education	28	70
Finance	2	5
Health and family planning	8	20
Violence on women resistance	21	52.5
Black marketing resistance	3	7.5
Hat/bazaar/temple	3	7.5

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maintenance		
Mass education	3	7.5
Drug control	2	5
Social welfare	8	20
Relief distribution	9	22.5
Tree plantation	3	7.5

Source: Field survey from women representatives

(Note: Respondents were allowed in more than one category)

The table shows that most of the respondents (70%) were the members of education committees (school committees). They reported that they had to monitor the functional and infrastructure maintenance of primary education, distribution of books and scholarship provided by the government and taking necessary steps to observe national days etc. In violence on women resistance committees, 52.5% respondents who usually took the initiatives for helping oppressed women and gave them advice for availing legal aids and took the victims to the proper authorities for ensuring justice. They also said that they participated in the shalish related to violence against women. The table also depicts the involvement of the respondents in the committee of relief distribution and health and family planning. They supervised the health situation, created consciousness among the people, monitored immunization program etc. The respondents had the membership in other committees like finance, drug control, mass education, social welfare, tree plantation etc. It was also found that a few respondents were given memberships in more than one committee at a time. Although the women representatives of Union Parishads have the memberships in different committees, they are almost absent in the committees related to finance/ financial functions, establishment, audit and accounts, agricultural development.

Women representatives' attendance in meetings of LGIs

The meetings of LGIs are two types; monthly (general) meeting and special (emergency) meeting. General meetings are usually held at least once in a month on a fixed date. In order to hold the meeting, presence of at least half of the total member presence is necessary. Women representatives' participation in meeting is the first step for them to be active in Local Government development activities. To prove working capability and accountability to the people, women representatives are needed to attend these meetings.

Table 3: Women representatives' attendance in meeting of LGIs

Types of Participation	No of Respondents	Percentage (%)
Regular	23	57.5

Irregular	17	42.5
Never participated	0	0
Total	40	100

Source: Field survey from women representatives

The table demonstrates that 57.5 % women representatives of rural areas attended the meetings of LGIs regularly. They reported that they attended every general meeting which date is fixed earlier. In the case of special meetings, after receiving notices they always tried to attend the meetings. On the other hand only 42.5% opined that they could not attend the meeting regularly because of various reasons such as not receiving notices in due time, distance and lack of proper transport facilities etc. it was also found that in many times, their husbands attended the meeting on behalf of them as they (husband) had acquaintance with the members of LGIs. From the table, it is also clear that women representatives are interested in joining different meetings. By attending meetings, they wanted to gather knowledge and experiences about the activities and responsibilities of LGIs and also tried to identify and resolve the problems of their respective localities.

Women Representative's Involvement in Food Assistance Projects Implementation Committees of LGIs

The LGIs are associated with a great responsibility of the implementation of various food-assisted projects within its jurisdiction. The most popular schemes undertaken by the Union Parishads are VGD activities, VGD projects, RMP (Regular Maintenance Projects) for generating employment and income for disadvantaged women.

Table 4: Women Representative's Involvement in Food Assisted Projects of LGIs

Name of the Project Committee	No of Respondents	Percentage (%)
None	3	7.5
VGD	31	77.5
VGF	31	77.5
PIC(FWP)	17	42.5
PIC(TR)	17	42.5
RMP	7	17.5

Source: Field survey (Note: Respondents were allowed in more than one category)

The table shows that the maximum involvements of the women representatives of Union Parishads were found in VGD and VGF activities where the number of respondents in each category was 77.5%.

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Again, 42.5% respondents were involved in PIC of Food for Work Program (FWP) and 42.5% respondents in the project of TR (Test Relief), which is also implemented through PIC work program. In the food-assisted program of RMP (Regular Maintenance Project), 17.5% respondents were involved. It is important to note that according to Local Government manual, in each Project Implementation Committee of FWP and TR, at least one woman member of Union Parishad should be included. Through participating in these projects women representatives can play a role for the betterment of the poor and disadvantages women of their respective localities.

Roles performed in the meetings of LGIs

Here a question may arise what role women could perform in the meetings. Although the constitutional provision of Bangladesh declares women's equal rights for participation in all development as well as political activities along with the men, but in reality, it is generally observed that women have little access to decision making process ranging from households level to national level. It may also be expected that the respondents had undergone the election process which required them to be vocal and persuasive as well as felt the need to utilize this opportunity by playing active role in the meeting. Here some indicators are taken into account for the better understanding of the issue.

Table 5: Roles performed by the women representatives in the meetings of LGIs

Roles	No. of Respondents	Measurement	
		Yes	No
Raise problems of the locality	40 (100)	36 (90%)	4 (10%)
Participating in decision making process for planning and implementing development projects	40 (100)	9 (22.5%)	31 (77.5%)
Pursue in undertaking development projects	40 (100)	23 (57.5%)	17 (42.5%)
Raise different problems regarding women development issues	40 (100)	16 (40%)	24 (60%)
Ability to protest	40 (100)	24 (60%)	16 (40%)

Source: Field Study. (Note: Respondents were allowed in more than one category)

The table implies that in rural areas 90% women representatives could raise different problems of their localities in the meetings. They reported that by visiting their areas and communicating with people, they prepared the list of the problems and requirements of the localities. In the case of pursuing in undertaking development projects, 57.5% opined that they usually tried to do so. Although participation in discussion in different meetings helps to identify local problems, it was found that a large number of women representatives (77.5%) could not participate in discussion on planning and implementation. Only 40% respondents could raise the problems of women development issues in the meetings. It becomes clear from the table that women representatives are somehow able to take part in discussions and raise various issues in the meetings of LGIs. But most of them opined that the male members of the institutions seldom accept their opinions. So it can be said that their participation in decision-making process is obviously lower than their participation in discussion.

Roles performed by the women representatives in Health Services and Family Planning

It is highly expected that women have many scopes to perform some roles in community development. As a part of this, they can participate in the development of health and family planning services. Opinions were sought from the respondents about their role performances in health services and family planning in their localities.

Table 6: Roles performed by the women representatives in Health Services and Family Planning

Roles	No. of Respondents	Percentage (%)
Only awareness development in health services and family planning	26	65
Both awareness development and motivate adopting health services and family planning	6	15
Cannot perform any role in health services and family planning	8	20
Total	40	100

Source: Field Study from women representatives

The table reveals that 65% respondents could play only the role of developing awareness among the community people in health services and family planning. They reported that by communicating with the people they spelled out the facilities and usefulness of health and family

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planning services in view of creating consciousness. About 15 % respondents could play the role of awareness building and motivating the people, especially women in adopting health and family services. It was also found that 20% respondents could not perform any role in this regard. Women expressed their views that as the women representatives had the accessibility and acceptance to the women of their respective localities; they used to meet with women and motivated them to adopt family planning devices, use pure drinking water and sanitary latrine.

Roles performed by the women representatives on Violence against Women

Women are considered as the vulnerable members in our society. Still they are oppressed and they often become victims of violence. Women members of LGIs are the representatives of the women of the society. So it is expected that they should come forward to protest against violence against women.

Table 7: Roles performed by the women representatives on Violence against Women

Roles	No. of Respondents	Percentage (%)
Only awareness development against violence on women	8	20
Both awareness development and resistance against violence on women	28	70
Cannot perform any role at all	4	10
Total	40	100

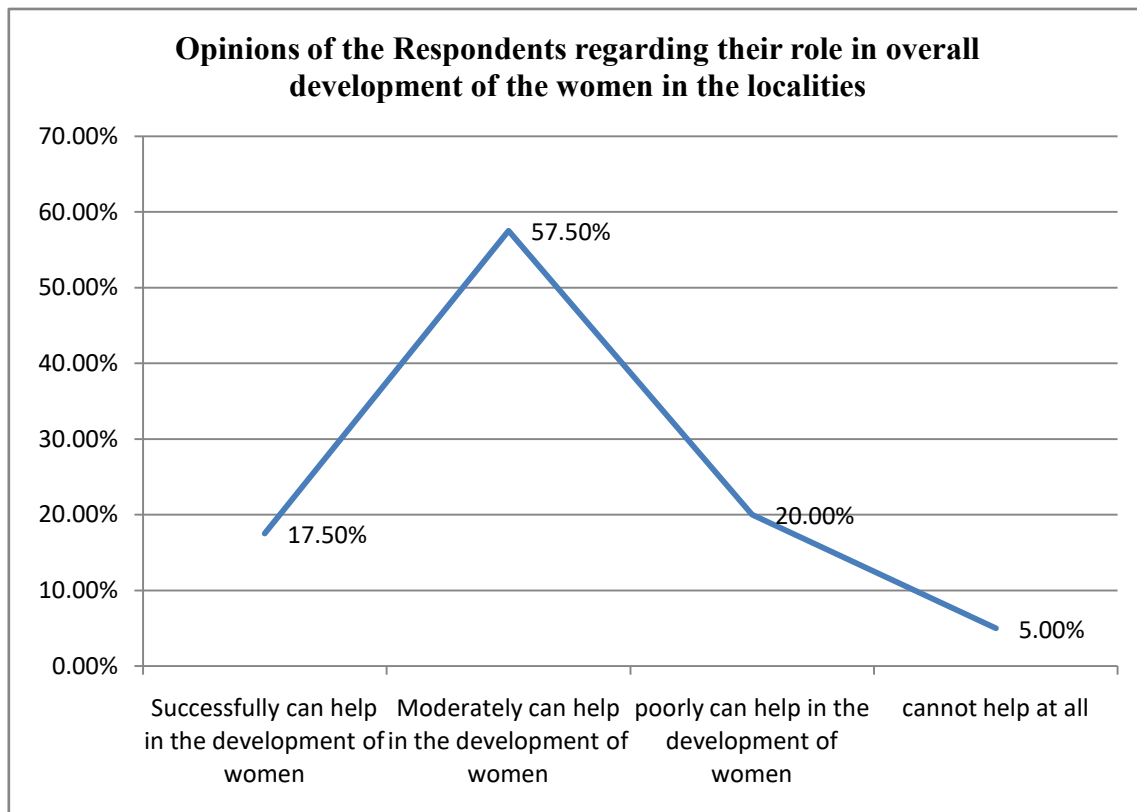
Source: Field Study from women representatives

The table demonstrates that a good number of respondents (70%) could do as per their capability in regard to violence against women by creating awareness and resistance. They reported that they usually participated in *shalish* related to violence on women. If any woman becomes the victim of violence, they were taken to the proper authority on court by the respondents for legal aid. About 20% respondents were found contributing to the awareness development against violence on women.

Women representatives' opinion regarding their role in overall women development of their localities

Participation of women representatives of rural LGIs in development activities plays an important role to improve the condition of the people, especially women. Some tasks may be identified for women members, associated with women related activities such as VGD, VGF, FWP, development of women and children affairs, education, family planning and health services. However, attempt has been made to understand how far the respondents are able to play their roles in overall development of women.

Figure 1: Opinions of the respondents regarding their role in overall development of the women in the localities.



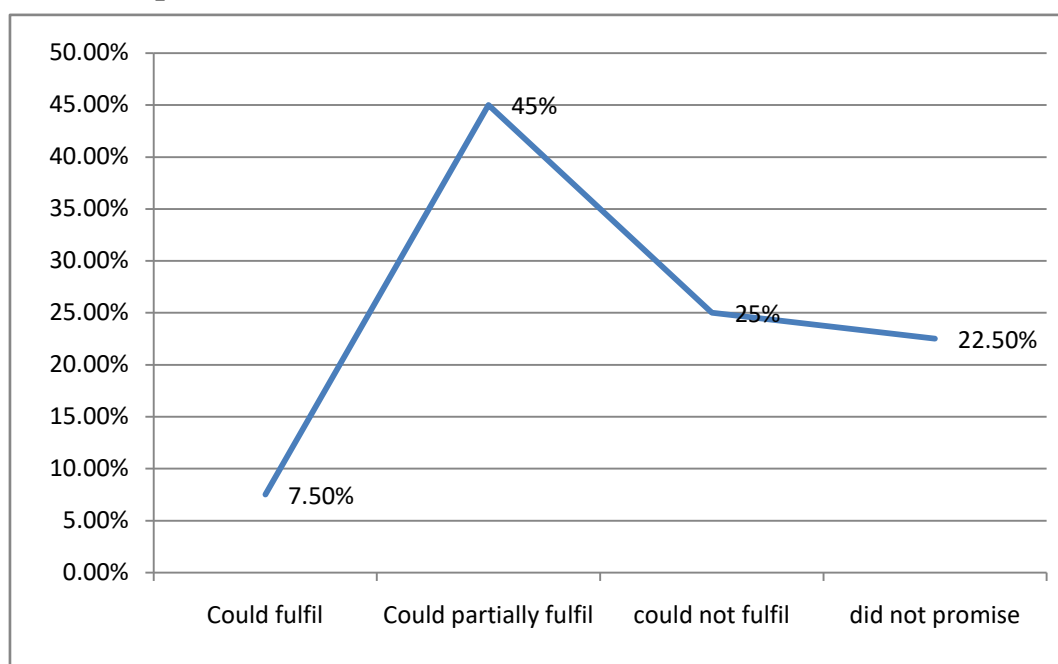
Source: Field survey from women representatives

The table demonstrates that about 23 respondents (38.46%) women representatives opined that they could moderately contribute to the development of women. Other 8 respondents (20%) expressed their views that they could poorly contribute to this field. It appears that a good number of rural local government representatives thought that they could contribute to women's development to some extent whenever they got the opportunity. The main reason for this was the lack of government projects and work opportunities regarding women's development.

Opinions of the women representatives about their election promises

At the time of conducting election campaign, women representatives usually made some promises to the voters. The general voters expected that they (women representatives) would present the problems of their localities to the proper authority through participating in LGIs. So voters usually put forth their expectations to the women candidates. To get support, the respondents made some promises and assured that after becoming elected they would try to fulfill those promises according to their ability. The women representatives were asked to what extent they could keep their words after being elected as representatives of LGIs.

Figure 2: Opinions of the women representatives about the fulfillment of the election premises



Source: Field survey

The table shows that only 3 respondents (7.5%) women representatives could fulfil their election promises properly. About 45% respondents expressed that they could partially keep their promises. According to them, they could manage to provide allowances to the widow and aged persons, distribute VGD and VGF cards, setting tube-wells and so on. But they could not meet up the demands according to the local requirements. 25% respondents opined that they could not fulfil their election promises at all.

However, some reasons were also found for not fulfilling or partial fulfillment of the promises. The majority of the women representatives thought that they could not fulfil their election promises because of the males' control and dominance on the resources. They expressed that woman members did not get the share of many development projects and other activities in proportionate to their male counterparts. They complained that majority male members of the LGIs did not evaluate the capability of women members. It's a common seen that the male members expressed their views that government did not mention special work for women in local government manual. Women members were poorly integrated to the development projects. They opined that women were minority in LGIs, so they could not ensure their due rights to control the resources. The women representatives who could not fulfil their election promises reported that they had to face so many unfavorable situations for not fulfilling their words. This may creates a kind of negative impression among the voters.

Recommendations and Conclusion

As women representatives are considered the part of LGIs, they have to perform manifold responsibilities. In that sense, training makes women members efficient and conscious about their duties, responsibilities and also women's rights. Training is considered as one of the major prerequisite for capacity building of the members of LGIs (Ahmed and Jahan, 2002:21). To ensure a meaningful participation of the elected women members, some recommendations may be taken into consideration. It has already been mentioned that women are generally supposed to be confined within the household domain. Their entrance into the public domain largely depended on their family supports. If women get the support and assistance from their respective families, they can gain the courage to confront the barriers. Patriarchal dominance can be reduced by sensitization of the males. It will not be very effective to just enhance the awareness and capacity of the women until and unless their male counterparts are also brought under complimentary initiatives. For participation in political activities mobility of the candidate is necessary. Mobility helps women participants to increase the identity in the localities. It is possible when women are involved in outdoor activities. Female as well as mass education should be expanded and accelerated to develop consciousness, social awareness and positive attitude towards women's right and their participation in public sphere. Political parties of our country should be active and committed especially in rural areas to motivate the women to participate in political activities. It is necessary so that women can strongly take part in politics from the grass root level standing on the platform of the political parties. Television, radio and newspaper should help policy-makers and administrators realize the importance of gender inequality and also work to stimulate women to reorganize their roles and affirm themselves as the equal partners of men in all sectors. Government instructions regarding local government activities and the responsibilities of male and female members should be more clarified than the present and these should be accurately implemented to integrate women members in the overall activities of LGIs.

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